



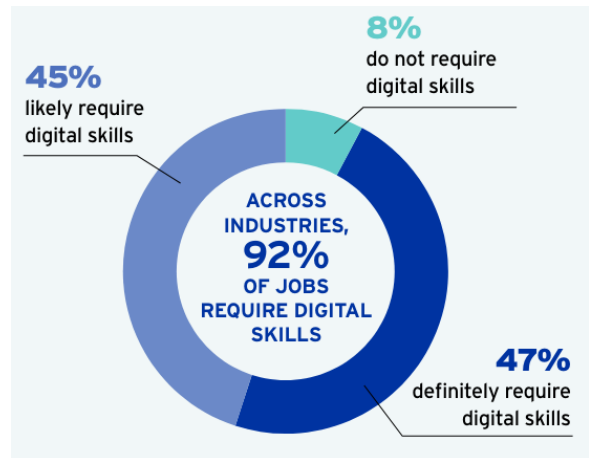
Digital Skills

What are digital skills and why are they important to adult education?

“Digital literacy”, in P.L 117-58, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (which included the Digital Equity Act), is defined as the “skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information.”

Recent reports have found there is overwhelming demand for digital literacy skills in the job market (as noted in the graph to the right).

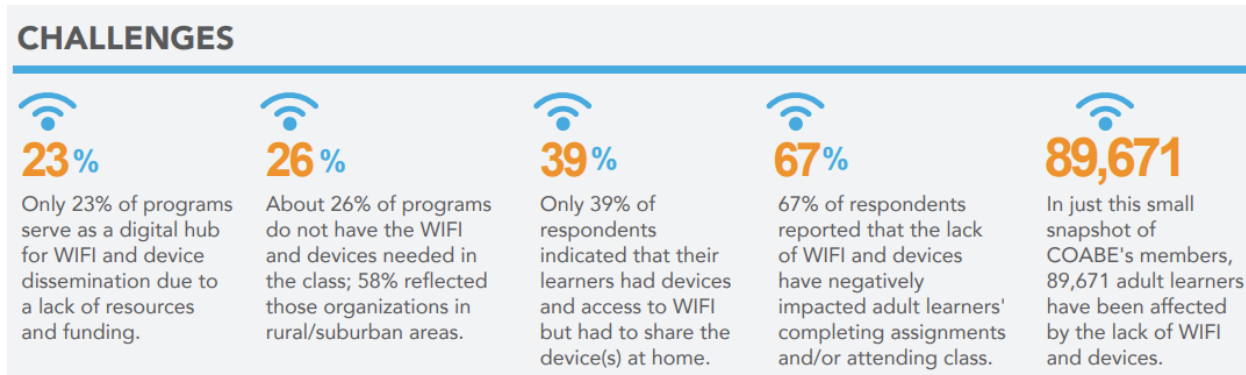
COABE advocates for digital equity to support adult learners and prepare them for an evolving workforce. To respond to the need for learners to gain digital and information literacy skills, adult education programs need greater access to broadband to provide those skills.



Digital Equity in Adult Education

How does digital equity affect adult learners?

COABE conducted an online survey of its adult education members in 2023 to understand their digital equity challenges in the classroom. There were responses from 558 programs, representing at least 462,000 adult learners annually.



Source: Educate & Elevate

The results indicated that adult learners in programs across the U.S. have been affected by lack of reliable access to WIFI and devices, leaving them without the tools to be connected and gain the skills that can lead to sustainable wages in a digital economy.

Digital Equity Programs:

What federal digital equity programs should you be aware of?

The [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (otherwise known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law), which was enacted in 2021, included the following provisions:

- **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP):** Launched in December 2021, this program offered eligible low-income households discounts on their monthly internet bills and the one-time purchase of connected devices. When the program expired in June 2024, more than 23 million households had accessed the ACP. There are ongoing bipartisan efforts to try to restore funding for the ACP, which COABE is strongly supporting. You can join these efforts [here](#).
- **Digital Equity Act:** COABE was very active in the process of passing the Digital Equity Act and has continued to encourage the field to advocate at the state level to access these funds as they become available. This \$2.75 billion initiative to promote digital equity and inclusion consists of these three grant programs:
 - **State Planning Program:** A \$60M formula grant program for states, territories, and tribal governments to develop digital equity plans. In [April 2024](#), the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) accepted the digital equity plans for all 50 states.
 - **State Capacity Program:** A \$1.44 billion formula grant program for states, territories, and tribal governments to implement their digital equity plans and support digital equity projects. Awards are expected to be issued by NTIA on a rolling basis by August 2024.
 - **Competitive Program:** Coming soon, this is a \$1.25 billion competitive grant program that will fund entities that include workforce development programs, community anchor institutions, and local education agencies, for five years to implement projects such as digital inclusion, digital equity training programs, and activities to encourage broadband adoption to increase employment opportunities.

Next Steps

What can you do now?

With funding to be released in the coming weeks for the State Capacity Grant and more information coming soon on the availability of the Competitive Grant program, now is the time to:

- Study up (via links in this document and other sources) to learn more about the funding opportunities.
- Assess the digital equity needs of your students and your current programs.
- Work with partners across the adult education field to advocate with your state to ensure that adult education programs are eligible for upcoming grant opportunities and can access funding to support learners.
- Be ready to apply as funding becomes available.

In sum, don't let adult education programs be shut out of these funding pipelines!

Click [HERE](#) to see the **Broadband Equity and Deployment (BEAD) Program and the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program action plans and proposals in YOUR state.** Click [HERE](#) to see **information regarding funding allocations, grant program highlights, local and federal contact information, and other grants and funding awarded within YOUR state.**