UTAH BROADBAND CENTER
CONNECTING UTAH

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES DIGITAL ACCESS PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 in 4 adults in Utah has a disability. Disability is often associated with compounding social factors such as lower education, income, and food insecurity. Digital equity can have a significant role in mitigating these factors, yet disabled people use computers and the internet ~15% less than non-disabled people[1] and digital content is frequently inaccessible to people with disabilities.

VISION	Utahans with disabilities will have barrier-free access at home and in the community to high-speed internet, assistive technology, and accessible content.

	Accessible Digital Content	**Accessible Technical Support & Training**	**Assistive Technology**	**Cost of Internet Access**
KEY BARRIERS	Websites, forms, and other digital content frequently do not follow Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, making basic Internet activities difficult or impossible.	Training programs and technical support often do not foreground the accessibility needs of people with disabilities.	Accessible hardware and software can be expensive, limiting personal access. Most community computer resources do not provide assistive technology access.	Disability is highly correlated with income, making low cost internet essential. Access to low cost internet programs may be limited by inaccessible documents and communication.

COVERED POPULATIONS	Disability intersects with all Utah communities, and disability rates are generally higher within the Covered Populations identified by NTIA.

[1] Pew Research Center

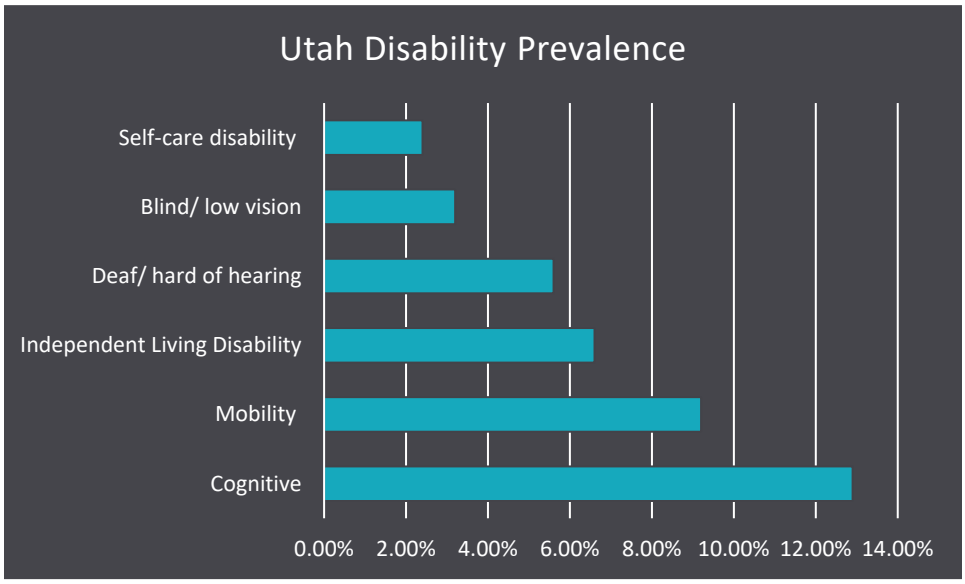
GOALS	Ensure disability experiences and needs are considered in digital equity research, programming, and training.	Ensure that Utahans with disabilities can access training and tools related to their specific needs.	Ensure that community and government digital equity programs provide accessible programming and communication.
KEY STRATEGIES	Integrate GRAIDs (Guidelines, Recommendations, Adaptations, Including Disability) framework in digital equity programs	Provide assistive technology training and resources to digital navigators, technology centers, etc.	Establish accessible document training programs and create accessibility toolkits for non-profits, government agencies, etc.

1 COMMUNITY OR ORGANIZATION PROFILE

1.1 GENERAL COMMUNITY OR ORGANIZATION PROFILE

1 in 4 adults (approx. 573,000) in Utah has a disability (per CDC/ Disability & Health Data System).[2] This percentage is slightly lower than the U.S. rate of 27.1%.[3]

The categories of disability,[4] based on the American Community Survey, are: Cognitive (12.9%), Mobility (9.2%), Independent Living (6.6%), Deaf/ hard of hearing (5.6%), Blind/ low-vision (3.2%), Self-care (2.4%). Each of these disability categories can impact an individual's ability to access and utilize digital tools and resources.



[2] Disability statistics can vary widely depending on data sets and collection methods. For instance, The Digital Equity Act Population Viewer cites Utah's disability population a 9.6%. The CDC's Disability & Health Data System draws from both Census/ ACS data and multiple health surveys, such as the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

[3] Utah Public Health Indicator Based Information System

[4] Disability status is self-reported (per the American Community Survey), based on a positive response to one or more of the following questions:

- Are you blind or do you have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?
- Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
- Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
- Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?
- Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have any difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?
- Are you deaf or do you have serious difficulty hearing?

1.2 COVERED POPULATION PROFILE

Disability intersects with all Utah communities, and disability rates are generally higher within the Covered Populations identified by NTIA.

Rural Communities: Four local health districts have a disability prevalence that is higher than the state average:

- Southeast Utah (32.2 %)
- San Juan County (28%)
- Tooele County (29.6%)
- Weber-Morgan (29.1%)

Of the Utah small areas that have a disability prevalence higher than the state average, 45% are in rural areas. These rural areas of higher disability prevalence frequently intersect with underserved broadband areas.

Racial/ ethnic minority groups: Disability prevalence is higher for Utahans who are Native American (37.7%), Hispanic (28.5%), or Black (27.3%).



Covered households: Disability is highly correlated with income. Within Utah, 44.6% of individuals making under $25,000 have a disability as compared to only 15.3% of people who make over $75,000.

Aging individuals: Disability is also correlated with age; for adults in Utah over 65, 39.6% of females and 41.3% of males have a disability.

Incarcerated individuals: Nationally, 38% of incarcerated individuals have a disability. (Bureau of Justice Statistics)

Veterans: Nationally, 29.6 of veterans have a disability (ADA National Network)

Language barrier/ literacy: Nationally, 46% of adults with below basic prose literacy have a disability. (Department of Education).

New Americans: Disability data for refugees and immigrants is limited and may not fully reflect lived experience. Some data suggests that 5.6% of New Americans have a disability (Urban Institute); this lower number may be because of limited data collection or because U.S. immigration laws may discriminate against people with disabilities.

2 DIGITAL ACCESS VISION AND GOAL(S)

2.1 VISION

Utahans with disabilities will have barrier-free access at home and in the community to high-speed internet, assistive technology, and accessible content.

2.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This vision will be achieved through the following goals:

- Ensure disability experiences and needs are considered in digital equity research, programming, and training
- Ensure that Utahans with disabilities can access training and tools related to their specific needs.
- Ensure that community and government digital equity programs provide accessible programming and communication.

3 CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL ACCESS

3.1 DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS

Utah's communities host a variety of government and non-profit programs to support people with disabilities. Some of these programs currently provide computer training, while others have established community connections that could be leveraged to provide increased digital access (see Appendix A) Of particular note because of statewide scope are the disability-specific programs within Department of Workforces Services and Health and Human Services. WebAim and the Utah Assistive Technology Program, both housed at Utah State University's Institute for Disability Research, Policy, and Practice, offer excellent resources for accessibility training and assistive technology. WebAim, in particular, is a national leader in web accessibility. Regional independent living centers (see Appendix B), provide a range of resources including access to assistive technology and workforce training.

3.1.1 Useful Device Assets

Access to Assistive Technology (both hardware and software) is essential for Utahans with disabilities to achieve digital equity. Several

Program Name	Description
Utah Assistive Technology Program: https://www.usu.edu/uatp/	Provides demonstrations, loans, and financing for assistive technology. Individuals with disabilities of all ages and backgrounds
Partnering Organizations and/or Programs	
Institute for Disability Research, Policy and Practice	

Program Name	Description
Utah Center for Assistive Technology *https://jobs.utah.gov/usor/vr/services/ucat.html*	Device loans, adaptation and instruction. Free evaluation for anyone in the state.
Partnering Organizations and/or Programs	
Department of Workforce Services/ Vocational Rehab	

Program Name	Description
Various Community Programs, e.g., Utah Independent Living Center, Ability 1st, Disability Law Center	Multiple community organizations offer Assistive Technology Programs, providing access points for UATP, UCAT, etc.

3.1.2 Skill-Building Tool Assets

State government programs, largely facilitated through Department of Workforce Services and Health and Human Services, provide a range of services including computer skills development. Independent living programs and disability-focused non-profits (see Appendix A) throughout the state offer skills courses, which can include computer skills development.

3.2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

According to NTIA's Internet Use survey, people with disabilities are less likely to:

- Use a desktop, laptop, or tablet (<15.6%)
- Use a smartphone (<16.5%)
- Use the Internet (<13.7%).
- Have a mobile data plan (<16.7%) or high-speed internet at home (<15.9)

These lower use rates can be attributed to a range of factors including employment/ income, access to assistive technology, age-related changes in ability, accessible tools and technical support. For example, only 20% of Utah's broadband providers, provide any information about accessibility tools or services; in most cases, provided accessibility information is not comprehensive.

Even if Utahans with disabilities have equal access to services, devices, and training they will still encounter inequities in terms of digital content. The 2023 WebAim Million Report, which "provides a quantified and reliable representation of the current state of the inaccessibility of the most influential pages on the web" concludes that 96% of web pages have detected Web Content Accessibility Guideline (WCAG) errors, with an average of 50 errors per page. While WebAim's reporting shows extensive and persistent accessibility errors, their testing procedures only scratch the surface of accessibility issues disabled users may encounter. For instance, WebAim's assessments do not identify issues such as plain language that may be specifically meaningful for users with cognitive disabilities, nor do they identify captioning or audio description for multimedia content. Content producers throughout the community, especially those who provide essential services, need to be trained in accessibility.

3.2.1 Digital Equity Barriers

Per the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, digital equity include five elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; and 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. Each of these areas introduces key equity barriers for people with disabilities.

Affordable internet service: Utahans with disabilities are twice as likely to live below the poverty level than Utahans without disabilities.[5] One disability organizations surveyed indicated

[5] ADA-PARC

that 90% of their households are at or below the poverty level. Another organization indicated that less than 50% of eligible individuals had Internet or equipment to access Zoom-based programming.

Devices that meet user needs: People with disabilities often require specialized software and hardware to utilize computers and access digital content. Assistive technology can be expensive, and access to these essential resources is often separate from basic device access. People with disabilities have to extend extra effort, travel, and funds to achieve parity. Further, people with disabilities want to belong in the community**.** Digital equity resources for people with disabilities are often linked to disability-specific service providers with limited geographic locations. While these resources are invaluable, people with disabilities deserve to access the tools and training that they need in multiple community locations. Providing assistive technology resources & training to libraries and other community centers could ensure that individuals with disabilities have necessary tools and access in their neighborhood, along with fellow community members.

Digital literacy training: Digital literacy training classes may not meet the needs of people with disabilities, either in terms of accessible delivery or focus on assistive technology. While training is available through state agencies, it may not be as nimble as training available from non-profit and local community organizations. Accessible digital literacy training needs to be available at multiple community locations throughout the state; to support this access, community organizations, libraries, etc. need to receive training in basic assistive technology. Specific areas of digital literacy training identified by disability organizations include internet navigation skills, internet safety and password/ account management, basic computer use (including keyboarding skills), and

Quality technical support: For people with disabilities, quality technical support means accessible technical support. According to the FCC, “To be *accessible*, the main functions of a product or service must be locatable, identifiable and operable by individuals with varying abilities, and all information necessary to operate and use the product or service must have an accessible output or display.” In addition to this basic accessibility, technical support should be responsive to the specific needs of people with disabilities. For instance, people with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (IDD) may require guidance in plain language, additional support time, etc.

Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency: As previously noted, even if people with disabilities have access to affordable internet and accessible devices, they are likely to encounter content and applications that are not accessible. People with disabilities should be able to independently access any content or activities of interest to them. Digital equity programs and resources should meet key accessibility guidelines as established by WCAG, Section 508 and the ADA.

4 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

As noted in Section 1.2, disability intersects with all of NTIA's covered populations. In order to address the intersections of disability with other covered populations and to avoid siloed resources, digital access and inclusion plans should include accessibility considerations. To integrate disability and accessibility into existing programs, the GRAIDs (Guidelines, Recommendations, Adaptations, Including Disability) framework developed by the National Centers on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) provides a useful set of guidelines and tools.

The GRAIDs framework encourages adaptation in five key areas:

- **Built environment**: Access to computer labs, community centers, classrooms, spaces, etc. Proximity to public transportation. Clear sight lines, space for mobility devices, services animals, etc. Sensory friendly.
- **Policy**: Accessibility policies integrated into organizational practices, disability considered as intersectional component of any digital equity practice.
- **Services:** Multiple channels of communication, digital navigator training on assistive technology, etc. Accessible communication options such as TRS/TTY and individual assistance.
- **Instruction:** Instruction specifically for (and inclusive of) assistive technology users, instruction in multiple formats, accessible web conferencing, etc.
- **Equipment and Technology:** Accessible hardware and software, both for in-home use and in community centers.

4.1 RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

In addition to implementation of the GRAIDs framework, several recommended activities developed from community research and focus groups:

- **Digital Navigators trained to support disability needs.** The Digital Navigator model provides an excellent opportunity for people with disabilities to be connected with community resources. Digital navigators should be trained on basic disability needs and assistive technology to better support community members with disabilities. A specific idea from focus group research is an "internet pals" program that connects expert guides with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD); these pals can provide trusted guidance on technical support, internet safety, and account management.
- **Accessible work stations and staff training at libraries and community centers**. People with disabilities should have access to accessible work stations throughout the community, along with supportive guidance in the use of those tools. Centers that offer free public computers should have multiple accessible work stations. Computer center

staff should be fully trained in assistive technology in order to support people with disabilities at spaces and times of need.

- **Accessibility toolkits & training programs.** Accessibility toolkits and training programs can help to ensure that accessibility knowledge is distributed throughout the community and that content-specific barriers are minimized.

4.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Primary implementation strategies include developing partnerships and connections amongst siloed resources so that specific community needs can be met from a variety of access points. A preliminary accessibility toolkit has been created and will be shared with community organizations for feedback and further development.

4.3 ALIGNMENT

The recommended activities align with the following key goals of the Utah State Equity Plan:

Goal 1: Community Coordination and Resource Discoverability. Utah has a broad range of disability-related community and government resources. An individual may require resources from multiples sources, but may have a difficult time connecting with each component. Digital navigators who are educated in accessibility needs and resources can ensure that resources are discovered and implemented as needed.

Goal 2: Training for Digital Independence. Training related to accessibility needs to be provided for both individuals and service providers. Individuals need guidance on assistive technology resources and digital skills, while service providers need to understand how to use assistive technology in order to provide users with point-of-need support. Further, service providers need training in order to create accessible digital content.

Goal 4: Increased Availability of Safe and Reliable Devices. While personal device ownership and use is essential, community members may also want or need to use devices in the community at libraries and other centers. These public devices should provide basic assistive technology in order to facilitate access and belonging.

4.4 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SUPPORT REQUIRED

The developing community of practice can help to connect community resources and link user needs; further, the COP can help to distribute and develop toolkits. Funding will be needed to support disability-focused digital navigators, accessible workstations, and training.

5 PLANNING PROCESS REPORT

The report was prepared by Dr. Melissa Helquist from Salt Lake Community College, with research assistance provided by Khuong Dang. The planning team took several steps to determine the current state of digital access for people with disabilities in Utah:

- **Statistical/ data** research from CDC, NTIA, BRFSS, Cenus/ ACS, etc.
- **Asset mapping** of disability organizations and ISP accessibility resources
- **Surveys** distributed to both individuals and organizations. The surveys will remain open to hopefully generate additional feedback. For future statewide surveys, we recommend including disability questions from the American Community Survey in order to understand disability prevalence and impact.
- **Focus Groups** to learn more about specific disability needs. Two focus groups were conducted; additional focus groups will be beneficial as community-specific resources are implemented.

5.1 COLLABORATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Two focus groups were conducted: one with Spanish-speaking new computer users who are blind or low vision and one with adults with Intellectual Developmental Disability (IDD). While these focus group don't provide a comprehensive view of digital equity and disability in Utah, they did provide insight into key areas of need and innovation. While much of the feedback from focus groups has been integrated into the plan, some additional guidance from each group is described below:

Spanish New Computer Users/ Blind or Low Vision: For new computer users who do not fluently speak English, government programs may not be accessible because of language barriers. While translation is typically available, an individual may first need to navigate English-only websites and forms in order to receive a consultation. Further, some individuals may not have access to government programs because of their immigration status. Integration of accessibility knowledge into community organizations or for digital navigators can help to connect multilingual individuals to connect with government resources. Additionally, this focus group emphasized the importance of belonging. Because of both language and disability, this group expressed feeling disconnected from the community. Accessibility resources that are housed in community programs or at libraries can help people who are multilingual and disabled to develop digital literacy skills along with neighbors and family members.

Adults with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD): This focus group generated a key idea for developing an internet pals program that can provide expert, trusted guidance about internet safety, account management, and technical support. A program like this could be

developed from the digital navigator model, with specific focus on the needs that IDD adults may have. For instance, social scams or compromised accounts may pose particular risks and access to trusted guides can help to navigate complex circumstances and ensure that desired online activities can continue without harm or disruption. Further, technical support and training in plain language are key for this group.

Appendix A: Utah Disability Organizations

The following list of organizations is not comprehensive, but may provide a starting point for digital equity outreach for people with disabilities. No included on this list are assisted living centers

Organization	Disability Focus	Main Location (May not represent service area)
Ability First	Comprehensive	North Provo
Active Re-entry Independent Living Center	Comprehensive	Price, Vernal, Moab, Blanding
Art Access	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Autism Council of Utah	Cognitive	Murray
Best Buddies Utah	Cognitive	West Jordan
Brain Injury Alliance of Utah	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
Chrysalis	Comprehensive	Various
Columbus Foundation Inc	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Disability Law Center of Utah	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Disability Rights Action Committee (DRAC)	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Division of Services for the Blind and Visually impaired	Visual	Salt Lake City
Enable Utah	Comprehensive	Ogden
Epilepsy Association of Utah	Cognitive	Lehi
Governor's Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Interagency Outreach Training Initiative (IOTI)	Comprehensive	Logan
Learning Disabilities Association of Utah	Cognitive	Sandy
Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities	Comprehensive	Springville
NAMI Utah	Comprehensive	West Valley City
National Ability Center	Comprehensive	Park City
Northeastern Services	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Ohana Center for Adults with Special Needs	Cognitive	Woods Cross
Options for Independence	Comprehensive	Logan
Phoenix Services	Cognitive	Clearfield
Recreation and Habilitation Services (RAH)	Cognitive	Provo
Red Rock Center for Independence (RRCI)	Comprehensive	St. George
RISE Services - Price, Logan, St. George, Vernal, Roosevelt	Comprehensive	Various
Roads to Independence	Motor	Ogden

Organization	Disability Focus	Main Location (May not represent service area)
Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Hearing	Taylorsville, St. George
Southern Utah Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program	Hearing	St. George
Southern Utah Down Syndrome Association	Cognitive	Washington
Special Olympics Utah	Cognitive	Draper
Splore	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
TKJ Services	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
TURN Community Services	Cognitive	Various
United Cerebral Palsy Association of Utah	Motor	South Jordan
Utah Association of The Deaf	Hearing	Taylorsville
Utah Center for Assistive Technology (UCAT)	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Utah Council of the Blind	Visual	Salt Lake City
Utah Developmental Disabilities Council	Comprehensive	Murray
Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Utah Down Syndrome Foundation	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
Utah Independent Living Center	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
Utah National Federation of the Blind	Visual	Salt Lake City
Utah Office of Rehabilitation Services	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Utah Office of Substance Use & Mental Health	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
Utah Parent Center	Comprehensive	Murray
Utah State Chapter National Multiple Sclerosis Society	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
Utah State Library Program for the Blind & Disabled	Visual	Salt Lake City
Utah Assistive Technology Program (UATP)	Comprehensive	Logan
Utah Statewide Independent Living Council	Comprehensive	Salt Lake City
United Angels	Cognitive	Orem
Utah Behavior Services	Cognitive	Taylorsville
Valley Behavioral Health	Cognitive	Salt Lake City
Wasatch Behavioral	Cognitive	Provo

Appendix B: Independent Living Programs

Source Utah Independent Living Center: https://uilc.org/en/resources/centers

