



New York Digital Inclusion Fund Coalition Planning Grant Final Report

Supporting Digital Inclusion Coalitions in New York State

In partnership with Schmidt Futures, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) is proud to present the New York Digital Inclusion Fund Coalition Planning Grant Final Report to Schmidt Futures. NDIA manages the New York Digital Inclusion Fund, supported by Schmidt Futures, a philanthropic initiative founded by Eric and Wendy Schmidt. The Fund supports the research, design, and formation of new and existing digital inclusion coalitions and innovative partnership models that address digital inclusion barriers with solutions across New York State.

Schmidt Futures awarded up to \$30,000 each to 10 grantees, creating the Digital Inclusion Coalition Planning Cohort, which expanded the work of existing digital inclusion coalitions and funded planning to establish new coalitions. NDIA provided Coalition Planning grantees guidance and support as they carried out their digital inclusion work. The NDIA team also offered program management guidance in planning for the development or expansion of their digital inclusion coalitions, which included training, technical assistance, quarterly meetings, mid-project one-on-one meetings, and six webinars from January 1 to August 31, 2022. This report consists of a summary of the impact of the funding and represents the overall grant insights, the grantee insights, and access to all submitted final grantee reports.

Background

The New York Digital Inclusion Fund (NYDIF) launched in September 2021 with two new grant opportunities for New York-based digital inclusion work, supporting innovative partnership models accelerating digital inclusion across New York state. The Coalition Planning grants supported the formation of new coalitions and strengthened the capacity of existing coalitions.

NDIA developed the proposal funding application process to support efforts to advance digital inclusion across New York state. Activities included developing the Request for Proposal (RFP); creating the scoring rubric and formal scoring procedure; identifying and securing a national Advisory Board consisting of experts from across the country to review and recommend proposals for funding; leading marketing and promotion of the funding opportunity to NDIA's network and partners, including NDIA's listserv, email blasts, and dedicated project web page at

digitalinclusion.org. NDIA also hosted informational learning sessions with prospective applicants, led the Advisory Board onboarding session, and supported reviewers and all aspects of the proposal management process (e.g., reviewing and ranking proposals). NDIA also offered support to prospective grantees as they developed their proposals.

Based on feedback from the Advisory Board, NDIA provided a slate of recommended proposals for funding to Schmidt Futures for their final awards. In addition, NDIA announced the NYDIF Coalition Planning Grantee cohort to the community via a [blog post](#) on digitalinclusion.org.

NDIA-led program support for the Digital Inclusion Coalition Planning Grantee Cohort:

- Hosted an onboarding and kick-off session for new grantees (1/20/2022)
- Hosted a “Coalition and Planning Framework” webinar (2/24/2022)
- Held 1:1 introduction/onboarding meetings with each coalition (10) (February-March 2022)
- Hosted mid-point check-in meeting (6/9/2022)
- Held 1:1 mid-project meetings with each coalition (10) (June-July 2022)
- Collected and aggregated final reports (September 2022)
- Held 1:1 grant close-out meetings with each coalition (10) (August-September 2022)
- Hosted [End of Grant Webinar](#) (9/8/2022)

NDIA Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook

Another component of Schmidt Futures’ investment was an update of the NDIA Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook. This new Guidebook provides an in-depth look at successful models and recurring themes across coalitions, accompanied by best practices, lessons learned, and specific recommendations from the field. Some of the key themes covered in the guidebook include:

- how coalitions form and are structured
- keys to successful coalition operations
- ways coalitions adapt over time to maintain effectiveness and sustainability

With input and recommendations from the established Coalition Working Group comprised of over 100 Digital Inclusion Coalition practitioners, NDIA updated its Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook. This monumental effort includes feedback and accumulated experience of 55 digital inclusion coalitions across the US, pulling from NDIA’s network of affiliates and partners. Future focus groups will inform and guide updated content reflective of emerging trends, innovative models, and practitioner-based experience.

- NDIA published a [blog post](#) on the launch of the updated Coalition Guidebook with a companion webinar outlining the new resources and best practices gleaned from the national focus group (e.g., Coalition Working Group) representatives of existing place-based digital inclusion coalitions. New York digital inclusion coalitions participated in this effort.
- Since its publication in February 2022, the guidebook has had over 2,000 downloads. Again, this is a testimony to the need for guidance and support to establish digital inclusion coalitions in New York and around the country.
- NDIA featured the Coalition Guidebook at the “Coalition and Planning Framework” webinar for NYDIF Coalition Planning grantees in February 2022.
- NDIA is hosting a community-wide webinar on the Coalition Guidebook tools and best practices in January 2023.

Digital Inclusion Coalition Planning Grantee Cohort

Coalition planning grantees represented seven of the ten economic development regions across New York state: Capital District, Central New York, Finger Lakes, Long Island, New York City, North Country, and Western New York. NDIA received 20 proposals for this opportunity, and after review by an independent Advisory Board representing digital equity experts across the country, the following ten proposals were funded (their original proposals are linked):

- [Age-Friendly Neighborhoods Digital Inclusion Coalition \(New York Academy of Medicine\)](#) - \$30,000 (new coalition)
- [CapReg Digital Equity Coalition \(United Way of the Greater Capital Region\)](#) - \$30,000 (new coalition)
- [Central New York Digital Inclusion Coalition \(InterFaith Works\)](#) - \$30,000
- [Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition \(Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition\)](#) - \$26,678
- [Long Island Digital Inclusion Coalition \(Stony Brook Foundation\)](#) - \$30,000 (new coalition)
- [North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition \(Adirondack Health Institute, Inc.\)](#) - \$30,000
- [Queens Digital inclusion Coalition \(Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation\)](#) - \$30,000 (new coalition)
- [Sunset Park Digital Inclusion Group \(Brooklyn Public Library\)](#) - \$30,000 (new coalition)
- [The Bronx Digital Equity Coalition \(The Bronx Community Foundation\)](#) - \$30,000
- [Western New York Digital Inclusion Coalition \(Healthy Community Alliance\)](#) - \$29,670

Five of the ten grants awarded represented existing coalitions, and five formed new digital inclusion coalitions. Initially conceived as a six-month grant, Schmidt Futures extended the grant by two months to conclude on August 31, 2022.

NDIA Resources & Support

All grantees participated in seven 1.5-hour webinars and virtual meetings hosted by NDIA: (1) Onboarding Kick-Off; (2) Coalition and Planning Framework; (3 & 4) Digital Navigators Parts I and II; (5) Data Collection and Analysis; (6) Asset Mapping, and (7) End-of-Grant Session. Community Tech New York also provided training on the effective use of the New York State Digital Equity Dashboard (5/19/2022). In addition, NDIA coordinated with Schmidt Futures to develop the content of the Onboarding Kick-Off and Coalition and Planning Framework sessions.

NDIA staff met three times individually with each grantee, introduced them to other valuable community members, and shared additional resources with each grantee as needed and when they became available.

Additional resources for Coalition Planning grantees included:

- Inclusion in the NDIA Coalitions Working Group, meeting monthly, comprised 55 coalitions across the country and 117 members. They learned ways to reach out and engage with organizations and institutions providing digital inclusion programs and formed personal connections with other digital equity coalitions.
- NDIA introduction to the work of Community Tech New York, where they learned how to access the New York State Digital Equity Dashboard to help with their asset mapping efforts.
- NDIA Introduction to the New York State Digital Inclusion Group, a statewide digital equity coalition for New York state. Many Coalition Planning grantees attended their inaugural meeting and continue participating in statewide efforts.
- Access to NDIA's Asset Mapping tools and training on how best to incorporate asset mapping into their planning process.
- Access to NDIA's Coalition Framework template to guide them through formalizing the structure of their coalitions.
- Introduction to NDIA's updated Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook and small group session.
- Offered bi-weekly open office hours to support grantees as needed.

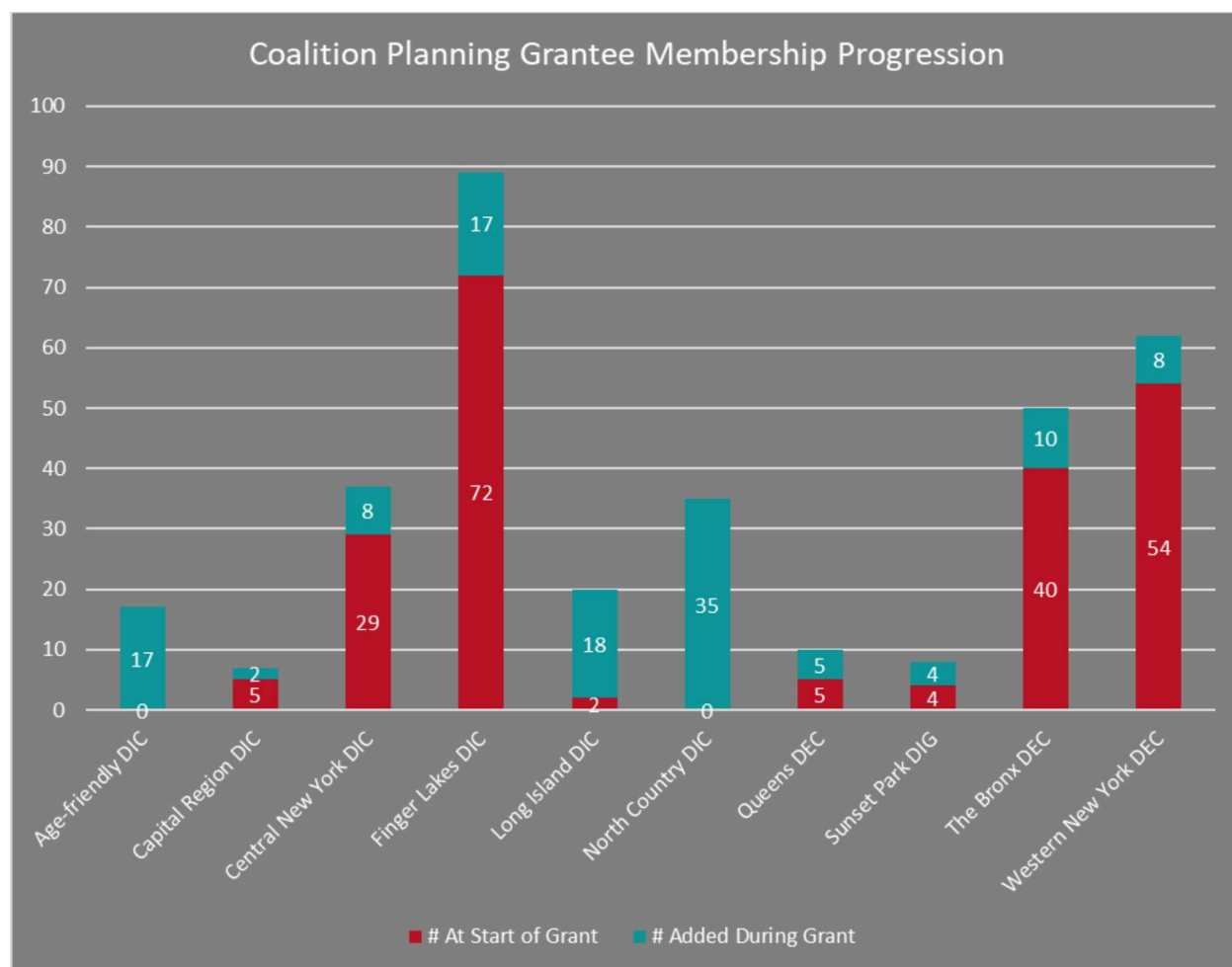
During the mid-point check-in meeting, grantees shared their project status through [slide decks](#), demonstrating their creativity and individuality.

Finally, grantees presented [slide decks](#) using the same format, sharing their accomplishments and a brief synopsis of their coalition's strategic plan covering the next six to 12 months.

Grantee Outputs & Outcomes

Before being awarded the Coalition Planning grants, all grantees provided digital inclusion services in their communities. While five were formal coalitions, five worked with other digital inclusion practitioners to meet the digital equity needs in their regions. These activities included digital skills training, connecting community members with appropriate devices, and working with them to connect them with home broadband through the EBB (now Affordable Connectivity Program).

The following chart of the ten grantee coalitions shows the number of member organizations, broken down by existing organizations at the start of the grant (January 1, 2022), the number of organizations during the grant period, and finally, the total number of member organizations at the end of their grant period (August 31, 2022).



In addition to increasing the number of member organizations in their coalitions, grantees held community-wide coalition meetings to coordinate digital equity strategies in their communities. Seven grantees held 52 meetings during the grant period. Two grantees shared that they spent most of the grant period developing their coalition structure, creating a charter, and conducting asset mapping in their communities. They then shared this with the members of their coalition. The pace of organizational growth and membership development varied by region among newly formed coalitions, with Age-Friendly DIC and Long Island DIC experiencing the most significant membership growth and Capital Region DIC, Queens DEC, and Sunset Park more heavily focused on strengthening their foundation and structure for long-term sustainability. Please note that Queens DEC and Sunset Park DIG doubled in size during the six-month grant period.

Grantees submitted their Six to 12 Month Plans and included the following activities:

- Development of a refined vision and mission for their digital equity work and the scope of activities of their coalition
- Development and selection of a leadership team, steering committee, and working groups, including the development of roles and responsibilities, composition and structure, and decision-making process
- Development of branding materials to aid their continued outreach and recruitment efforts to build coalition membership.
- Development of a regular meeting cadence
- Launch of a community-wide survey
- Hosting community conversations through increased participation at community events (health fairs, libraries, etc.)
- Asset mapping
- Connections with other digital equity coalitions in other areas
- Increased diversity of their member organizations
- Institution of a formal membership process for joining the coalition
- Development of a digital navigator program
- Development of a digital inclusion policy framework
- Development of or further refinement of their digital equity strategy
- Establishment of financial stability goals

Coalition Planning grantees also continued participating in NDIA's Coalition Working Group, where they will continue co-developing best practices for digital equity coalitions across the country. In addition, several are connected to NYDIF Innovation grantees and are thought

partners in strategizing how best to meet the digital equity needs in New York state (access to appropriate devices, technology skills training, and low or no-cost home internet service).

Press, Media & Social Media Coverage

- The Capital Region Digital Equity Coalition hosted a press conference in partnership with Albany Housing Authority and Albany Public Library:
<https://www.timesunion.com/business/article/Former-Google-CEO-s-charity-betting-on-connecting-17165840.php>
- Syracuse Northeast Community Center thanked the Central New York Digital Inclusion Coalition (CNYDIC) for their support in directing ARPA funding:
https://twitter.com/SNCCSYR/status/1562098183559340033?s=20&t=-S-cf_ci2k3yi5Tm7ffJqQ
- North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition earned promotion for their Digital Inclusion Coalition Survey:
<https://www.edcwc.org/about-us/newsroom/north-country-digital-inclusion-coalition-survey/>
- Queens Digital Equity Coalition hosted a Nonprofit Roundtable Discussion on Digital Equity and Inclusion:
<https://www.rockawave.com/articles/nonprofits-community-members-address-digital-divide-in-rockaway/>
- The Bronx Digital Equity Coalition announced the launch of The Bronx Gigabit Center:
<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20220609005339/en/NYC-Office-of-Technology-Innovation-LinkNYC-The-Bronx-Digital-Equity-Coalition-The-Knowledge-House-Andrew-Freedman-Home-The-Bronx-Community-Foundation-and-Bronx-Borough-President-To-Launch-The-Bronx-Gigabit-Center>
- The Bronx Digital Equity Coalition pilot initiative made news as it grew into The Bronx Gigabit Center:
<https://motthavenherald.com/2022/07/05/gigabit-center-aims-to-shrink-bronxs-digital-divide/>
- Western New York Digital Inclusion Coalition promoted the “I want my ACP” campaign: <https://twitter.com/wnydigitaleqty>.

Grantee Final Reports

Below is a summary of each Digital Inclusion Coalition Planning grantee’s accomplishments as reflected in their final reports. In addition to the summary, we have linked their final reports, which include their Final Narrative Reports, six-to-12-Month Plans, and their Member Organization Lists, Meeting Lists, Media Coverage, and Budget Reports.

[Age-Friendly Neighborhoods Digital Inclusion Coalition](#): As a new digital inclusion coalition, the AFNDIC increased their original four New York City-based partners to 17 members. They then introduced them to “digital Inclusion,” using the updated Digital Equity Coalition Guidebook as a foundation. In June 2022, they held a virtual panel discussion, “Ensuring Equity in Telemedicine for Older Adults,” attended by 50 people with an additional 104 views on YouTube. In addition, members discussed ideas for establishing a steering committee and identified elected officials with whom the coalition should build relationships. They will continue to meet on the 3rd Thursday monthly. They will continue to expand their membership, seek more ways to establish relationships with elected officials, formalize their leadership structure, and explore sustainable funding.

[CapReg Digital Equity Coalition](#): During the grant period, the newly formed CRDEC identified the initial five partners to be included in meetings, selected a “backbone” organization to help drive the work, hired facilitator Hillary Kolos to help guide strategy and meetings, hosted three coalition sessions, added partners, created a logo, and drafted a regional survey as the first community-wide effort to be undertaken by the coalition. The bulk of the work during this grant period has been reflective and strategic—meetings have focused on identifying the geographic scope of the coalition, potential partners to add, and asset mapping. CRDEC decided early on that their first step was to understand better how individuals and community-based organizations experience digital inequities, leading to the development and launch of a survey in August 2022. They also added two community-based partners and worked to better understand the vocabulary around digital inclusion, creating a shared language to use. The following six to 12 months will include the distribution, collection, and analysis of their survey data and finalizing their mission, vision, charter, and long-term sustainability plans.

[Central NY Digital Inclusion Coalition](#): The CNYDIC formed a steering committee to oversee the grant and hired a coordinator to take over the day-to-day functions of the coalition. The coordinator runs the coalition meetings and communicates with members and the community in the five counties of their region—Onondaga, Madison, Cortland, Oswego, and Cayuga. CNYDIC began working with a web design company to redesign the coalition's website, with an expected completion date in fall 2022. CNYDIC increased its membership by eight to bring the number of unique organizations to 45. They held four community-wide meetings to discuss a digital navigator program, the NYS Digital Equity Portal, and nonprofit incorporation. They decided to postpone this until the coalition has more sustained capacity. CNYDIC began planning for a summit on digital equity to take place in spring 2023.

[Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition](#): The FLDIC added 15 new members to bring the total membership of their robust coalition to 188. The coalition discovered, via a survey of all 188 members, that few organizations have formally incorporated digital equity into their strategic plans. Deemed a critical strategy for ensuring digital equity sustainability, FLDIC secured interest from two organizations and is working with three more to confirm their commitment to adding digital equity into their organizations’ strategic plans. Most notably, the FLDIC created new relationships and advocated on behalf of their member organizations to support a Finger Lakes Region Digital Inclusion Plan, modeled off of the FLDIC three-year plan.

[Long Island Digital Inclusion Coalition](#): The newly formed LIDIC created a coalition of 20 entities and has developed a mission, vision, and general objectives for their coalition. They met eight times as a coalition, launched a website campaign to market the coalition, and connected with similar coalitions and groups across New York to learn about and support efforts related to digital inclusion. LIDIC also shared that they fostered robust information and resource-sharing opportunities during their meetings, resulting in collaborations and benefiting the community by maximizing available resources. Also, LIDIC has gained a greater awareness of community needs related to digital resources. While they had been aware of digital inclusion efforts across their community, the coalition is discussing how they can support and collaborate on these efforts more concertedly.

[North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition](#): The grantee leveraged their North Country Telehealth Partnership to engage over 30 regional partner organizations representing multiple sectors, including technology, healthcare, mental health providers, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and telecommunications organizations, to participate in this newly formed coalition. The coalition has hosted monthly meetings since February 2022, focusing on a discussion around identified digital inequities and how these inequities create barriers for community members in accessing telehealth services. In addition, the coalition developed and deployed two surveys focused on access to telehealth services and digital inclusion barriers, which have garnered over 260 responses. These surveys have given insight into digital inequities across the region. In addition, they have generated conversations around opportunities to advance digital inclusion programming in the North Country region of New York State. The coalition also raised awareness in the region by hosting a presentation on the coalition during Adirondack Health Institute's monthly Telehealth Learning Collaborative meeting.

[Queens Digital Equity Coalition](#): As a newly formed coalition, the QDEC identified local and borough-wide stakeholders who could become digital equity champions. They developed a non-intrusive community outreach campaign featured at every community event the Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation (RDRC) participated in or hosted during the grant period. The QDEC collected paper and electronic questionnaires about community digital capacity and hosted intergenerational events with RDRC youth, known as Tech Buddies, to teach seniors how to use technology safely via cell phones and tablets. In addition, they hosted a Community Based Organization Convening, that included over 25 organizations. The conference's purpose was to understand the organizational capacity to administer programs and services via digital platforms and the digital capacity of their consumers/clients/participants. As a result of these efforts, QDEC was appointed as a committee member to host a borough-wide Tech Fair in early January 2023 that will amplify their work and reach a broader number of Queens residents.

[Sunset Park Digital Inclusion Group](#): The SPDIG drew on the grant and funding from ARPA to hire a community engagement and research consultant to conduct a landscape analysis and needs assessment of the Sunset Park community. This grant laid the foundation for more effective outreach and service coordination among SPDIG members. As a result, the group grew from four core members to eight during the engagement period. Significant impacts from this

planning grant include the following: A more extensive and more cohesive membership body, with regular meetings to discuss a wide range of services and community needs; a deeper understanding of how digital access needs are distributed geographically and demographically in the community; a body of research that can directly inform a variety of existing programs and initiatives among SPDIG members, including multilingual education programs, health support programs, government application support services, and hotspot and device lending services; and a concrete list of shared objectives and action items to pursue over the next year or more.

[The Bronx Digital Equity Coalition](#): BxDEC's first objective was to form a task force to solidify and implement a leadership structure. The task force created a steering committee with roles and responsibilities, terms, and time commitment needed to serve. The coalition met in the first quarter of 2022 to develop clear goals for the coalition and a commitment to action. Second, the coalition expanded and diversified its membership with ten new members representing the community. Third, the BxDEC and the community and corporate partners helped launch The Gigabit Center in The Bronx to provide free internet/Wi-Fi, access to devices, and free digital programming. Finally, the BxDEC has established a mission of bringing together organizations from the borough to address digital inequities collectively and advocate for innovative, sustained, and community-generated solutions. With these structures for leadership, decision-making, and goals in place, the BxDEC will be in a better position to make connections across communities and institutions that address digital gaps in the Bronx.

[Western New York Digital Equity Coalition](#): WNYDEC built their coalition up to a total of 90 individuals representing 62 organizations from a pre-grant base of 54 organizations. This increase in membership fostered new relationships across the eight counties covered by the coalition and cross-sector partnerships among those from the same geography. In August, they hosted their first in-person convening since forming in September 2020. WNYDEC also reported that they were able to make significant progress on two specific projects. The first is a digital stories initiative where they collect stories of digital exclusion and digital successes that they hope to geocode and connect to the NYS Digital Equity Portal hosted at Cornell University. The second is a survey of IT support professionals to learn more about the digital skills they spend the most time on. Their programs will then address this through stronger reinforcement during digital skills training.

Summary: Grantee Impacts & Insights

All grantees expressed that without the NYDIF funding, their successes would not be at the current level. They reported increased capacity in working toward the goals they set in their six-to-12-month plans and will continue their outreach and engagement efforts in building a more substantial base of members.

All grantees stressed that while they were more equipped to meet the administrative demands of continuing coalition work, they were concerned about sustainability. Most coalitions do not have regular funding or a strong backbone organization to lean on for support.

One primary obstacle most of the grantees shared was a highly centralized coordination model that resulted in a single person being overextended and unable to advance the work as quickly as anticipated. During one-on-one meetings with NDIA staff, grantees received tools and examples of how coalitions across the country addressed this.

While most organizations grew their membership, the number of organizations actively participating in the work is still carried by a small group of individuals. Therefore, NDIA encouraged them to create a leadership team structure with working groups that created a space for broader involvement. Additionally, NDIA guided them in using collaborative planning tools and strategies during their meetings.

New York now has more place-based digital equity coalitions than any other state. Coalitions increase community engagement in digital equity plans. At a minimum, all grantees identified and educated 124 organizations that can influence and provide digital inclusion programming to New York's state digital equity plan. NDIA will give additional recommendations and lessons learned in the upcoming Digital Inclusion Coalition Leadership Brief.