

**DE Tribal Consult
October 17, 2023
Moderator: Angela Thi Bennett**

Margaret Gutierrez

[\(00:00:34\)](#):

I'm going to give it a one more minute and let everyone continue to get in the room and then we'll get started. Alright, it looks like we have most of you in so good morning or good afternoon and welcome. My name is Margaret Gutierrez and I'm a citizen and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Oklahoma. I am the Acting Division Chief of the Tribal Broadband Connectivity and Nation to Nation Coordination Division here at NTIA.

I'm here with Angela Thi Bennett, the Digital Equity Director of NTIA's Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth. She oversees the digital equity programs and will facilitate today's consultation.

It's my distinct honor to open this government to government consultation regarding the upcoming Digital Equity program set to launch next year. We've identified four areas in the Dear Tribal Leader Letter distributed last month and we invite you to explore these four areas together with us today.

[\(00:01:42\)](#):

Your guidance, feedback, and comments during this consultation will be critical for the program. Some housekeeping items before we get started, this is the first of two consultations. We will hold another one on Thursday, October 19th. If you need to drop today for any reason, know that you have another opportunity to join us and provide your feedback on Thursday.

Second, I want to remind everyone that this consultation is being recorded. Last, if you prefer to submit your comments in a written format, you can do so by emailing digital.equity@ntia.gov to submit those comments before November 16th. We will drop that email address into the chat now, and we will also share it on a slide at the very end of this consultation, as a reminder. Next slide.

[\(00:02:24\)](#):

Here's a look at our agenda for today. First, we'll open with an invocation. Next, we'll get an overview on digital equity and NTIA's Digital Equity grant programs from program director Angie Bennett. As a reminder, this is a separate program from the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program that many of you are familiar with.

We will then go into the four topics for consultation. This is where we will post questions and ask that you share your perspectives and feedback with us. It is the reason that we are here today.

Then we'll close for today with a reminder to join us for our final consultation session on Thursday, October 19th. With the general information and housekeeping out the way we would like to respectfully move to the invocation. We are honored to commence this consultation with an invocation today, and we are joined by Mr. Gabriel Montoya, who is not only an enrolled member of the Pueblo Powaki, but also a valuable team member on the tribal Broadband Connectivity Grant program.

[\(00:03:20\)](#):

Gabriel Montoya

Good morning. With all due respect, I'd like to request permission to speak with the intention of giving an invocation of today's Digital Equity tribal consultation.

Good morning or afternoon, wherever you may be. This is a great honor to be in front of you and be able to provide a blessing. Great spirit, I call upon you to provide blessings to each and every one of the attendees here. I ask that you bless their villages, you bless their people, and you continue to allow them to grow strong with unity and strength. I also ask for prayer for the Department of Commerce to have open ears to hear the needs of the tribal communities, empower their staff, leadership. To be able to understand those needs and acknowledge the sovereign government to government relationship. Please empower the Department of Commerce to continue to build these programming that will benefit tribes all over the country.

[\(00:04:17\)](#):

Great spirit, I also ask that you provide the tribes the ability and power of speaking today to clearly explain the needs of their communities so others can hear. As we move into the new form of communication, utilizing digital literacy and learning how to communicate without eroding cultural competency and allowing for unique solutions. I ask that you overlook these programs and continue to build them, provide support and fill everybody's hearts with the need to want to help and ensure the success and availability. I ask for the blessings for this event and continue blessings as we go throughout the day. Thank you, Margaret.

[\(00:05:01\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

Thank you Mr. Montoya, we appreciate that. Okay, next slide. Maci, can you start with walking us through how participants can provide comments?

[\(00:05:13\)](#):

Maci Morin

Yes, Margaret. Thank you so much. Just going to go quickly through the few options that you all have to participate in today's tribal consultation. We will give everyone the option to provide verbal comments, known as coming off of mute. So if you'd like to provide a verbal comment, we will ask you to raise your hand using the Zoom module and you can see that here on the screen using your raised hand function. And then we will go to folks one at a time to come on and provide comments. Having your video on is optional but will be available if you choose to do so.

If you are joining us today via phone audio only, in order to raise your hand, you can just press *9 and that will put you in our waiting queue. And then if you would prefer to provide written comments, you can either submit those using the Q&A box at the bottom of your Zoom application. You can just type out whatever you would like to submit or you can send it to via email digital.equity@ntia.gov and we'll be collecting feedback regarding this consultation until November 16th, 2023. So with that I will pass it along to our Digital Equity Director Angela Thi Bennett, and she will start off the consultation.

[\(00:06:50\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

All right. Thank you so much Maci, and thank you Margaret for kicking things off for us. We truly appreciate the support and partnership with the tribal team. And thank you Gate for the beautiful invocation. Welcome and thank you to everyone who has taken the time to join us today for this tribal consultation. And so let's turn to some background information about Digital Equity and our programs. Next slide. Thank you.

So I want to just start off on the definition of digital equity and then before we get into the programs, I want to just kind of unpack what exactly this looks like or what it can look like in the communities that you serve. And so the definition of digital equity is the condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States. So if you think about it, digital equity is our destination. That is the goal. We strive to achieve digital equity in our communities and we want to create those conditions where individuals and communities have what they need in order to thrive. And then when we think about digital inclusion. Digital inclusion is the how. It's the activities that are necessary to help us achieve digital equity. So what does that look like in our communities?

[\(00:08:43\)](#):

So additionally, what it can look like from an economic perspective is, how can access to the internet enable tribal communities to get access to educational, workforce, healthcare needs? How can access to the internet ensure that communities have the digital access that they need to positively tell the stories of their communities? How can digital access help facilitate cross-generational programs to help preserve the culture and be able to capture the storytelling to pass on to future generations?

And if you could go to the next slide. All right and so the Digital Equity Act. And so with the Digital Equity Act program, we have three streams of funding, three programs. So one, with the \$2.75 billion that was allocated to the Digital Equity Act program we have three pots of money, one \$60 million to empower states and tribal communities and territories to develop digital equity plans. The second pot of money is to develop, once we develop the digital equity plans, it's \$1.44 billion to implement those plans and that's the capacity program.

[\(00:10:35\)](#):

And then the third program is the competitive ACT program, and that's the \$1.25 billion in order to, that would be available not only to tribal communities, but to nonprofit organizations that are serving those communities. And so I have this slide because I wanted to lay out the funding opportunities for all five fiscal years. I thought it would be very important to kind of lay that out so you can see how this will flow.

So in the fiscal year 2022, \$60 million was allocated for planning. The statute provides that tribes are allocated not less than 5% of the funds available to develop digital equity plans. And that is also, that same set aside is available in the capacity program. And so looking at this funding across the board, you can see that fiscal year 2022, there's \$240 million that's available, 23 \$300 million and so on. Under

the competitive program, there's a direct 5% that is allocated as set asides for tribal communities to compete for the digital equity program funding that's available.

[\(00:12:05\)](#):

And so I do want to point out, we acknowledge that there were letters of intent that were submitted for the planning grant program last year. And due to the overwhelming amount of interest that we received, there was not sufficient funding. And it was a very difficult decision that we had to make, but to put a pause on the tribal planning grant program until we were ready to launch the capacity program so that we could inject additional funding for those plans. And so if I can go to the next slide please.

Okay. So with the tribal set aside, as we're approaching next year when we will launch the capacity program, we will include the tribal program as a part of that launch, which is why we are having this consultation today. We are very interested in, would appreciate your feedback in helping us in, informing how we design the tribal program. So in this funding cycle for this next NOFO, we will include the 5% of the set aside under the planning grant program along with the three fiscal years of funding for the capacity grant program. And next slide please.

[\(00:13:43\)](#):

Okay. Now how does the DE tribal program and the TBCP program compare? So under the Digital Equity Tribal Program, it is solely focused on the digital equity and digital inclusion activities. And that was established under the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, IJIA, which is completely different and separate from the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, which was established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act. And then of course it did receive some additional funding under the IJIA program. So with the tribal applications, those will be due in 2024 or early 2025 depending on the feedback that we receive here. Whereas the TBCP 2 applications are due January 23rd, 2024. I will note that once we launch the NOFO in '24, we will have subsequent Notice of Funding Opportunities for not only the capacity but set aside, but also the competitive programs and the set aside as well.

[\(00:15:05\)](#):

Unlike our program, the TBCP 2, there will be one opportunity to apply for the TBCP 2 program and again, that application's due January 24th. And I do want to note that although the TBCP 2 program is focused primarily on broadband infrastructure deployment, there is a hundred million dollars available for broadband use and adoption. In other words, digital equity and inclusion needs. And so if you apply for funding under the TBCP 2 program and you're awarded under that funding, it doesn't preclude you from applying for the Digital Equity Tribal Program. However, you cannot apply for the same and duplicate the request.

[\(00:15:59\)](#):

Next slide. Okay. And so now we're here with topics for the consultation. All right, next slide. And so the first question that I have for you, it's in regards to the

applications requirements. And so as we are considering accepting consortium applications, what concerns, I'm sorry, what controls can NTIA implement to ensure that consortium members are being equitably represented and that the lead applicant is working for the benefit of each consortium member in the proposed project? So what should this look like as we're putting in these guidelines for these applications open to responses?

[\(00:16:56\)](#):

Carole Garner

And Angela, there's a few other questions in the same slide that I think, would you like me to show them so that they could be considered all as one or would you like to handle them each separately?

[\(00:17:12\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay, so I see Christina I can handle this. Hi Christina. Well Christina, as I mentioned earlier, and we have also released letters informing the LOI applicants about the status of those planning and apologize, acknowledge the delay in the planning phase that tribes who submitted the LOIs were anticipating. But this is one, this is an opportunity to provide some additional funding, not just for planning but for capacity. Also encourage tribes to apply for the TBCP 2 for planning. If you would like to apply now for TBCP 2 and instead of wait for the tribal program to launch next year, as I mentioned, there's a hundred million dollars set aside, not just for adoption and use, but for digital equity planning purposes. And then also encourage you to engage with your states. States should be collaborating with their tribal nations and even developing their state digital equity plans.

[\(00:18:41\)](#):

Isabel Lopez

Hi Angie, it's Isabel. Do you mind if I jump in briefly?

[\(00:18:44\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Sure.

[\(00:18:45\)](#):

Isabel Lopez

So just a couple of things. Participants, we do see the note that you're not able to see the questions in the chat. So I'm just going to read the question that came through that Angela just answered. And it's what is NTIA going to do about funding tribes given we are two years behind in the planning phase when the US government has a constitutional responsibility to tribes to ensure equity? So that was the question that Angela just went ahead and answered. Then Angela, to help further this discussion and get the meat that you need, it sounds like there's some sub-questions to this. Would you like Carole to present those on the screen or did you want to wait and do those individually?

[\(00:19:29\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Yeah, we can present it. Go ahead Carole. There are some additional questions. I won't say these are just additional application questions. And so besides accepting

applications from consortia, are there other ways NTIA can support less resource tribes to ensure that they have an equitable opportunity to apply for the award?

And so I kind of want to capture, if possible, any responses to those two before we move into the application window and the length of time. And so really concerns, some things that let me just also brainstorm some things that I heard. Making sure with the first question, are there requirements to, I mean we require that there are letters from the tribal organizations committing to be a part of the consortium. So in addition to that, what other things can we require to ensure that applicants are represented and the needs of the applicants are being fulfilled?

[\(00:20:49\)](#):

Carole Garner

And Angela, I do have Lawrence Pena who would like to speak. So I'm going to unmute Lawrence.

[\(00:21:02\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Hello, Lawrence Pena. I just have a couple questions in regards to where the approach of tribes should be. I mean, should a consortium of applications be sought after for making a successful application or, because it doesn't seem like there's a lot of equity that's going to be distributed in terms of allocations to the tribe. A hundred million dollars doesn't go a long way in regards to the TCP grant. So I guess I'm confused on where tribes can benefit in application, I guess application mindset saying hey, maybe working with other tribes or working with other entities would be a better bet.

[\(00:21:56\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Lawrence, thank you. I would actually pose that question to you. What do you think would work best for tribes? Is consortiums, should consortiums be an option? Should tribes be required to have a consortium or should they be in a single application?

[\(00:22:19\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

For me and our tribe, I have to say that in terms of equity, I mean you got to describe, you know, you even got to define equity. What is equitable? Is it every single household gets a nice used refurbished computer? Is it every household gets internet? Is it both?

I just think that when you're talking about these pockets of money, we often as tribes are reluctant to partner or consort with anybody else because we're not sure we're going to get what we wanted out of the program. I mean, that's just the bottom line because there have been tribes that have been a part of consortium who have been ignored, and who needs have not been met. And that's not only in New Mexico, that's nationwide. So I just feel like, if you're basing our applications on a consortium application, I feel like you're putting us at a disadvantage as a tribe because of the fact that we tend not to try to consort because of the fact that we've not been taken care of and there is no equity.

[\(00:23:33\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

No, I appreciate that. So here, let me ask, I've heard that one of the reasons for encouraging consortiums is like, a benefit could be a less resourced tribe. Because let's be honest, it's difficult to manage a federal grant program. And so would it be helpful in a consortium to help with the grants management if you had a larger lead applicant that had the back office capacity to manage a federal grant partnering with a smaller tribe to help provide that support? I think those are kind of the benefits that I've heard from consortiums. But then there's also, to your point, there are disadvantages, right? Some of these unintended consequences of smaller tribes not having their interests protected. So from your perspective, if there was a consortium application just for that purpose of being able to help build the capacity, what controls do you think we should say put in place to ensure the protections of the smaller tribes?

[\(00:24:51\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

In terms of what we're doing here in San Alfonso, we're building that capacity. We're working towards being able to be that lead applicant in the grant administration of any kind of project that we do. I think that for us to look at obligations or something that really needs to happen with the consortium application, it's that tribal buy-in, it's meeting with the tribal members, the consortium as a whole, talking about the issues, talking about things that nobody wants to talk about.

But in terms of what you all can do, I mean there's only so much you guys can do because of the fact that there is a lead applicant and so your obligation is going to be the lead applicant, not the sub-recipients. So I really don't think that there's as much you can do in terms of making sure that we are taken care of and besides auditing. But I mean you can easily, people have had bad experiences with consortiums, especially if they're non-native and that's just the bottom line.

[\(00:26:06\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. So let me ask you, if were, so since you are building your capacity to be able to serve as a lead applicant, what would you do to ensure that the interest of your partner, smaller tribes, are protected and represented?

[\(00:26:32\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Again, I think it's understanding their needs and understanding what they expect out of the partnership. Because a lot of times you have these partnerships because it makes geographical sense, but in a sense it doesn't make any normal sense because you're not partners. So being a partner is understanding what the other person needs, understanding how that other person thinks they can go about what they ultimately want, which is digital equity, which is access to the internet, access to broadband services.

I mean, I have broadband services at my house, but I mean the speeds are never enough for me to even go on video. It's really people and tribes especially need that access, they've been forgotten in the past. And equity is about making sure that everybody has the same thing and everybody has that same starting point. And I

Angela Thi Bennett

would just make sure that if I were a lead applicant, I would make sure that my partners are represented in that regard as well. Okay.

[\(00:27:36\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So let me repeat back what I think I heard from you. So maybe possibly, I'm not saying that this would definitely happen, but this is very helpful. Maybe in a consortium application asking for a demonstration of or evidence of a needs assessment of each of the partners and maybe an MOU, a memorandum of understanding, as to what the roles and responsibilities and benefits would be from each partner.

Lawrence Pena

[\(00:28:09\)](#):

It's definitely stronger than a letter of support.

[\(00:28:12\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Okay.

[\(00:28:15\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Yeah, I think MOUs because they obligate and governments to act in accordance with the MOU are great routes to take in terms of partnerships. But I also think that, like you said, understanding what that other partner needs because your needs may not be the same.

[\(00:28:36\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Got it. Okay. So maybe heavy on or emphasis, I won't say heavy, an emphasis on an application that would demonstrate the needs of each of the partners?

[\(00:28:51\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Yeah, definitely. And achievable goals. I mean that's the thing. You have to be able to report what you've accomplished and if you're not giving the partnership that you have or the consortium that you have equal parts in what is being distributed, that should show up and that should be red flag.

[\(00:29:12\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Got it. That's very helpful, Lawrence. Thank you.

[\(00:29:17\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I'm going to go off mute now. Please

[\(00:29:19\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Feel free to come back on. Feel free to come back on. So I'm going to,

[\(00:29:24\)](#):

Isabel Lopez

And do we have a question from David? The one thing I would like to ask all the participants to do is identify which tribe you're from or representing before you speak. But David Fine's question was, does capacity include building new fiber routes or bringing fiber to the home, for example?

[\(00:29:41\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Under the capacity grant program? No, it does not include funding for infrastructure to the home. Margaret, I would probably defer to you under the TBCP 2, there's broadband funding opportunities for that.

[\(00:30:02\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

Sorry, I think we lost Ang. It looks like you're back. We fall under TBCP two.

[\(00:30:12\)](#):

Did you hear me? Okay? Alright.

[\(00:30:15\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

I think more of a comment rather than a question just for the recording, Christina. Andrew says the states they don't have capacity to reach out in a meaningful way to the 240 plus tribes. We have. Christina, could you please identify in the chat where you are from and ID day application period and resolutions or letters from the tribe? It would like a project start date of October 1st, 2024. Yes, consortiums should be allowed. The small tribes cannot handle a grant like this and the lead applicant needs to be local, not more than a hundred miles from the applicant.

[\(00:30:53\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Thanks Christina. That's helpful. Okay, any other comments, responses to the first question?

[\(00:31:03\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

That's all that we have, Angie.

[\(00:31:05\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. All right. So I guess going on question two to besides accepting applications from consortia, are there other ways that NTIA can help support less resource tribes to apply for an award?

Any types of technical assistance that we can provide. What type of technical assistance would be needed specifically?

Carole Garner

I have Christina Andrew who would like to talk. Christina, go ahead.

[\(00:31:52\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Hi. Yeah, thank you. I'm Christina Andrew. I'm from the Bristol Bay Native Association. We're a tribal consortium of 31 tribes that provide a variety of services to our tribes. And I'm actually a **Chuck Young** tribal citizen from one of the tribes

that BBNA represents. And thank you for hosting this webinar. I appreciate you guys taking the time to get our feedback on it. I know it's not an ideal situation.

I guess I know the other gentleman said that the consortium wouldn't work for his region, and that's understandable. We have had issues with outside entities misrepresenting our tribes and communities, but when we have a local consortium like BBNA that has a 50 year history of working with our tribes, I think having that tribal consortium is a benefit to those tribes that don't have the capacity to be able to apply for things.

[\(00:32:47\)](#):

Our tribes in our region are very used to BBNA being able to take over projects that they just don't have the capacity to handle at the moment. It's something we've been able to do for our tribes. But I think having some sort of, I really appreciated that with the last letter of intent opportunity, the guidance you guys had on what was allowable and being able to fill that in in the letter of intent to make it clear what we were going to be using the funds for. Having some sort of template like that I think would be really beneficial for allowable activities in an application for those tribes that may not know what to do or what they need to be applying for. But then also maybe having some sort of example of a really good digital equity application from the past that has been really successful and inclusive to the communities would be helpful.

[\(00:33:50\)](#):

And then maybe listing some of the benefits. Just having some examples I think would just really help. But then I'd encourage to ensure that there's a local established partnership consortium happening for communities, but making sure it's local. We have AFN, the Alaska Federation of Natives, and they're a great organization, but they serve the whole state. So if they were to apply for a digital equity application to serve all of our communities, it would be really difficult to do that in a meaningful way. We have too many tribes in our state for a state organization to lead an effort like this. So that's my thoughts on the application and making it easier. And then you could also see my comments that were read off earlier for the application.

[\(00:34:51\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Christina, can I also ask you, I know the second question and I know that you serve as the lead applicant for the consortiums. What are some things that you've done that has ensured that each of your partner, each of the members in your consortiums have, are represented?

[\(00:35:14\)](#):

Christina Andrew

So the best thing you can do is travel to each community and host community gatherings. Oh, that's a really good opportunity. Door prizes are a must when you're having a community gathering. Digital equity funding needs to be able to allow for door prizes because that is something across the entire native community I found is something that gets us to come out and engage in things that we're not familiar

with. And digital equity being one of them that our communities are going to be like, "what is digital equity? Why do I even need to show up?". And so having that as an allowable expense would be super helpful because then we could, I don't know, door price off an iPad to encourage digital equity and inclusion and have that gathering to talk to people and have a moment to educate people on what digital equity is and what they want to see happen in their community.

So we do a lot of traveling to the villages to engage them. We do a lot of communication with the tribal administrators that live and work in the village. We also communicate through social media channels with the community that we represent, like each community. Baby. Well, thank you. And I'm very indigenous and I have my daughter at home with me right now, and so hold on, baby, I'm in a meeting. And so that's the big thing. For us, it's just using the common channels that people are using every day to communicate with.

[\(00:36:51\)](#):

I have done a lot of preemptive legwork to create a gigantic listserv for our region, and I create weekly updates to inform our tribal communities what's happening and what their opportunities are. And so that's become very popular in our region as a form of getting information out there and engaging people. But it's really just getting out into the community and making sure you're somebody that the community members know. Having those established relationships and partnerships is super important. If I was somebody from the state traveling out to do this work and my tribes didn't know me, they probably would be a lot less likely to attend these meetings. But if it was me as me and my current role going out there, our communities know who I am and what I stand for, and they're a lot more likely to show up and engage in the process because it's led by somebody local that they know and trust.

[\(00:37:53\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. So Christina, another question for you, and this is probably for Lawrence and anyone else too. You clearly do a lot of engagement with your member tribes to kind of understand their needs. If we were to make a requirement of a needs assessment as part of consortium applications, would that be a difficult lift for consortiums or lead applicants to engage in preparation for the application?

[\(00:38:29\)](#):

Christina Andrew

That's kind of a trick question, and it wouldn't be hard for us because I have very proactive in our digital equity work to the point where we've actually done some needs assessments in some communities as case studies. And we've actually been doing workforce needs assessments with remote work and digital equity in mind, not knowing we were doing digital equity work at the time. We also have broadband and workforce development needs in our comprehensive economic development strategy right now. But I know that that's not the case for every region.

So Bristol Bay region would be, that would be an easy lift for us, but I could see where that needs assessment, and that was a four month feasibility study with a

consulting firm to get that information from three of our 31 tribes and 20 about 20 workforce development professionals engaging in that process. So that was a big lift to do that needs assessment in advance. I would recommend doing a needs assessment as a first step in your digital equity project before you can even start doing any of the work that you start with an assessment as part of the project itself. It is going to be time consuming and if you want it done right, you're going to need to put in that time.

[\(00:40:01\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

This is helpful. And so it's just kind of balancing the extent of the needs assessment of this assessment for purposes of the application. This has been very helpful. And then in regards to resources that NTIA could provide, like you mentioned with the LOIs, sample documents that tribes can use in submitting applications for the awards. That's very helpful feedback. Let me ask a question. I'm sorry, go ahead.

[\(00:40:36\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Maybe including some type of digital equity plan as an example, would be helpful too, because maybe some people don't understand what their options are and if they see somebody else's plan, it would start giving them ideas on what they could possibly do in their region or in their tribe,

[\(00:40:59\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

OK. A variety of samples of things that may be education related or economic, healthcare related. So kind of like a variety of samples? am I hearing?

[\(00:41:11\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, that would be, that's what I would find useful. Others may find other things useful, so yeah.

[\(00:41:21\)](#):

Carole Garner

Okay. Anyone else have any thoughts around this that they would like to share? I have Justine Purser whose hand is raised, allowed to talk.

[\(00:41:37\)](#):

Justyn Purser

Hello? Hello. Hi, I'm Justin Purser from the **Poor Gamble Slalom Tribe**. I only have one question about the definition of less resource tribes. Is there a definition for that that I can look up or is it Yeah, that's all I have. That's the only question I have.

[\(00:42:03\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Justin. I'm asking the questions here now. So Justin, thanks for your question. We don't have a specific definition of less resource. When I think of when we were thinking of less resource, what we had in mind is what tribes that may not have the administration administrative capacity to apply for and manage a federal grant. I mean, we have a lot of forms, right? In addition, as part of our application that

they're required to submit, we're thinking of the smaller tribes economically versus the larger tribes. So that was kind of our thoughts around that.

Justyn Purser

[\(00:42:50\)](#):

Okay, thank you. That helps.

[\(00:42:52\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Do you have any thoughts or reactions to any of those questions?

[\(00:42:58\)](#):

Justyn Purser

No, it's a great discussion. Our tribe is pretty, I would say we're relatively well off to the discussion that you guys are having, so I'm not sure if this grant would apply or this series of grants would apply to us, but it's interesting hearing what's going on around Indian country.

[\(00:43:21\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Well, I mean our grants apply. I'm not sure. I mean when you say do you guys are well off and so have you achieved digital equity on your lands?

[\(00:43:39\)](#):

Justyn Purser

It's difficult because we do have internet, but it's really bad and our IT department kind of struggles a lot, so that's why they kind of, I am part of their department looking for grants that would provide us funding for infrastructure, things like that. I think I do recall hearing earlier that that might not be covered though.

[\(00:44:02\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Infrastructure specifically is not covered, but you don't have to wait until the. So a couple of things. One, you don't have to wait until the infrastructure is built out before you can engage in digital inclusion activities because people have the needs now. And so there's opportunities under this grant for say, community tech hubs. So while you are waiting to get the high speed, reliable, affordable internet built out to each of the homes, what are some opportunities to leverage your community spaces and ensure that there's access there so individuals can participate, in privacy, on telehealth calls? Are there opportunities, I kind of mentioned at the top of the call around intergenerational engagement. How do you encourage elders and youth to work together to preserve and promote their cultural traditions using the digital access?

[\(00:45:09\)](#):

How do you reduce, one of the things that I hear often in traveling around into the tribal communities is that because they're located in such remote areas, there's issues of isolation and how can digital access help address those issues of isolation, which oftentimes result in mental health? And how can digital access help improve that by connecting family members together. And then if you have access on tribal lands, then it keeps families there so they don't have to move. They can participate

in work opportunities remotely on land without having to leave for other opportunities. And so our funding could be used to help develop plans around those different areas. Does that help? Yeah,

[\(00:46:17\)](#):

Justyn Purser

It spurs a few ideas for sure. I'll be sure to keep an eye on this funding opportunity.

[\(00:46:22\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Yeah, so I'll even add when you think of civic participation, I was helping our elders participate on Zoom to participate in public meetings and be able to advocate on behalf of the tribes as well. And then let's not forget emergency response. How do we promote safety if we have access? I live in Cleveland, Ohio, and the young people here share their locations with one another. So a positive aspect of technology has been safety. How do we promote safety so they can make sure that one another is safe no matter where they're at? I will say at the same time, we need to be mindful of tech-enabled abuses, right? That can go the other way. But as we think about the needs of our communities, technology is touching every single thing. And so having those ideations brainstorms around how communities can be improved.

[\(00:47:33\)](#):

Justyn Purser

Okay, thank you. I appreciate it.

[\(00:47:35\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Oh, you're welcome.

[\(00:47:38\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

We have another question from David. David, if you can put in the chat which tribe you're representing. The question is, is there opportunity to extend a limited amount of funding for tribes to do preliminary assessments to inform applications for the larger opportunities?

[\(00:47:52\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So glad you asked David. And so part of the funding that will be released launched in 2024 is for planning. You can apply for planning grant funds to do just that, conduct the needs assessments. We know that in spite of all the challenges, tribes have been doing so much with so little, being able to also conduct an asset inventory so that you can develop those different priorities for your tribes. So absolutely this funding is available for that.

[\(00:48:28\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

There are no other questions in the chat.

[\(00:48:30\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay, thank you. So my next question is when should we open the application? So we are planning to launch our program in the spring, in early 2024. Should we, one thing that I heard from our last tribal consultation last year was that, hey, can you launch the NOFO and then have the application period open up later to give tribes time to prepare? Also heard about subsistence period and being mindful that we're not opening an application when people are not even available due to other commitments to be able to prepare and submit this application. So really would like to hear from you. When should we, we'll launch it in early 2024, the program, but when should we open the application? Really need y'all's thoughts on this. Any suggestions?

Carole Garner

[\(00:49:55\)](#):

I have Justyn again.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(00:49:57\)](#):

Okay. Justyn.

Justyn Purser

[\(00:50:01\)](#):

Hi there. Just our experience. Hello. Oops,

Carole Garner

[\(00:50:06\)](#):

My apologies. Justin, go ahead again.

Justyn Purser

[\(00:50:15\)](#):

Mute. Hello. All right. So just from my experience, grants that are launched typically in spring seem to have more time to work on those, especially if they're new ones that we haven't applied for before. Usually in fall that seems to be grant season right now, just lots of agencies trying to hand out money and trying to get them spent out there. So fall is usually pretty cramped. Spring works better for our tribe just personally.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(00:50:52\)](#):

So if we open the application period in the spring, is that what you're saying? So if we launch it and then also open the application window in the spring, that would be better than waiting until the fall to open. I'm talking about opening the application period.

Justyn Purser

[\(00:51:10\)](#):

Yeah, yeah, for our organization specifically. That's helpful. I don't know about anyone else though.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(00:51:18\)](#):

Okay. So then what length of time do you think is reasonable to have the application window open?

Justyn Purser

[\(00:51:27\)](#):

Well, so I work with a team. Our administration has an actual grants department that we work with, and so we can usually get a grant application done and ready for about in about two months, or sometimes even shorter a month. But I realize that not everyone might not have the capacity that we do.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(00:51:55\)](#):

Okay, thank you for that. Any other feedback? That's

Margaret Gutierrez

[\(00:52:00\)](#):

A comment in the chat from David Wheaten that says, is there a possibility to have two rounds? A biannual would provide the most flexibility.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(00:52:10\)](#):

Ooh, I don't know. Can you come off of mute and expand a little bit further?

Carole Garner

[\(00:52:33\)](#):

Maci, can you unmute David Weedon please?

Carole Garner

[\(00:52:35\)](#):

David is unmuted. Here he comes.

David Weedon

[\(00:52:41\)](#):

Hello everyone. I'm just thinking that different tribes, whether or not you're a casino tribe or have other economic development going on, the tribes that are rely solely on grant funding as a means of supporting their programs. There's a lot of grants in March, November, sometime September, August. So I think, and then we're all at different points with building out our digital equity and planning. So I think because you have so many tribes that identify the need, I think there's some preliminary work to be done to gauge where we're at to develop a robust program or application, rather. Doing some preliminary research and things would be helpful. And building off of my previous question, if there was opportunities to fund small information gathering sessions to influence proposals, then that would be beneficial. That takes time. So, I guess sequentially if there was, I don't know how that would work. If the monies were split into two and you had two rounds identified as a biannual, then I just feel like that would provide flexibility to tribes applying based on where they're presently at.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(00:54:23\)](#):

Yeah, I'm not sure. We could have biannual applications. I will share that in 2024, it will not be the last opportunity to apply for these funds. We will have another launch in '25 and '26, and then we will also have competitive grant programs opportunities as well. Is that helpful at all?

[\(00:54:54\)](#):

David Weedon

Yes. We'll have to deal with however it's unrolled, but I think sometimes waiting a whole year there is a downside to that. Yeah, I understand. I understand it complicates things greatly by having two rounds, so I just wanted to throw it out there for consideration.

[\(00:55:18\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So David, before you jump off to go back on mute, let me ask you, if we were to find a happy medium, right, because I heard you talk about prep time even before the application window opens. If we were to launch it in early '24 and then open the application period a few months later to give folks time to review the NOFO and start to kind of organize prior to the application window opening, is that something that would be helpful?

[\(00:55:58\)](#):

David Weedon

The most advanced notice is possible is always helpful. I guess using multiple channels for getting the information of the announcement out is also helpful. Sending letters directly to the chairman, using various media campaigns and things that nature. Announcing things at some of the different conferences and things like NCAI, USET, those types of platforms, I think is always giving advanced wanting or announcements through those platforms. It is helpful as well just to put it on everyone's radar.

[\(00:56:44\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Do you mind dropping in the chat some of those different platforms you just referenced? And then what would you say, what's your idea of a reasonable time for an application window? So just say we launch in early 2024, we don't open the application window for a few months to give people time to digest process the NOFO. How long should the application window remain open?

[\(00:57:26\)](#):

David Weedon

I would say 45 days to two months would be plenty. Anywhere in that range. I guess

[\(00:57:40\)](#):

David Weedon

Anything under a month would be challenging.

[\(00:57:47\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. What would be ideal? If you had your magic wands? What would be an ideal window considering smaller tribes, larger because we want to ensure that we are achieving equity. So you can't have a digital equity program if we're not being mindful of less resourced entities in applying. What do you think would be a reasonable time period?

[\(00:58:17\)](#):

David Weedon

Two months would be give ample time to put it in queue and then get people to work on it because we only have one grant writer. There are a few directors that

write their own grants and things like that. There's some supplemental support from tribal members that have grant writing skills where they lend a hand where they can, but it takes coordination.

[\(00:58:44\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

And does that allow enough time for tribal resolutions to occur as well or do we need to account for that if that's part of the application?

[\(00:58:54\)](#):

David Weedon

Two months would, and for our chart, anytime we apply for a grant, it has to be supported with a resolution given the directive to apply. So that is something that should be considered.

[\(00:59:10\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. All right. Thank you.

[\(00:59:12\)](#):

David Weedon

Our tribe does meet. The tribal council does meet twice a month typically though.

[\(00:59:18\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Thanks a lot. Any additional comments before I move on to the next question?

Carole Garner

We do have another hand. One minute. Christina Andrew. Again, I'll allow her to talk.

[\(00:59:39\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, thank you. That previous gentleman's comments just made me think. We definitely need at least a two to three month window to be able to get resolutions back from our tribes. Most of our tribal councils only meet once a month and depending on when the NOFO opens, they would need at least a month, preferably two, to be able to get the resolution in front of their councils.

And then we also are in an interesting situation here in Alaska in that basically from June 1st until mid-September, everyone is checked out to do subsistence harvesting. They're out at fish camp, they're out harvesting berries, they're getting moose for their families. Having an opportunity presented in the middle of summer is not ideal for our tribes in Alaska. It's a serious, it does not promote equity at all if you're going to be doing something in the summer.

[\(01:00:58\)](#):

When the letter of intent came out to be due in July '21, that was an extremely stressful situation for our region. Half of the tribal administrators were out harvesting salmon. I was having to call personal cell phones and literally aunts and uncles and cousins and brothers and sisters of the people in charge of the tribe to find out where that person was so that we could get letters submitted on their behalf. And some of them we couldn't even contact because they were all out on

the ocean harvesting and they don't have cell phone service out there. There was no way to get a letter from two of our tribes, which means they missed that. Well, fortunately, the opportunity was canceled so they can reapply in this next opportunity. And I know there's other tribal communities across the nation that have different practices, so being mindful of tribal priorities and subsistence priorities and ceremony priorities and not having a window open in those timeframes would be setting the tone for digital equity, I think.

[\(01:02:05\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So Christina, if I hear you correctly, so when we launched the program in early 2024, would it be your preference that, while the program would be launched in early 2024, to have the application period not open up, the application window not open up until the fall of 2024 to get past the subsistence period so that tribes would have the opportunity to participate?

[\(01:02:36\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah. In our region, putting together an application with tribal participation between June through August is almost impossible. You're not going to have people available. So if you're not going to have applications open until, well, if you're going to have applications open, I would encourage you to do it so that they close like mid-June because that would be doable for our regions to be able to submit an application before we go fishing for the summer and harvesting for the summer.

If you're not going to be able to pull that off to have everything closed for applications, then yeah, I would encourage you to maybe start it in August and have that 90 day window. Because we have a lot of our region goes and harvests moose, also moose and caribou, so that we can feed ourselves, and that closes September 15th. So it's almost impossible to pull people together before September 15th.

[\(01:03:49\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So Christina, you also mentioned that your tribes meet once a month or once every two months. What would be a reasonable length of time for an application window to enable you and the tribes to be able to submit the resolutions and give the application?

[\(01:04:14\)](#):

Christina Andrew

90 days. Because then also they don't meet in the summertime. The tribes, they don't have meetings June, July, sometimes even August, they don't have meetings. Because everyone's out participating in traditional harvest. So we would need a 90 day would be preferred at the minimum.

[\(01:04:38\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Minimum 90 days, so not less than, okay.

[\(01:04:41\)](#):

Christina Andrew Yeah, 30 days would be impossible. That would not happen. Nothing would happen in our region. It would be maybe one or two tribes depending on when the meeting cycles hit, because every tribe meets at a different time of the month. Some meet at the beginning, some meet at the end, and so 30 days would not be adequate for Bristol Bay communities.

[\(01:05:04\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett Okay. This is helpful. Thank you so much, Christina.

[\(01:05:07\)](#):

Christina Andrew And we are very, very adamant in our region and in the state about harvesting our subsistence foods. So my average email for context, my average email per day in the wintertime is 50 to 75 emails a day coming in. In the summer it drops down to 10. That's how little communication is happening in our region. And most of those emails are coming from organizations like NTIA and USDA. So it's not even in region communication. So that's our tribal situation.

[\(01:05:49\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett Okay, thank you. Any other comments? Okay. If we could move to the next slide. Okay. So here's a question. What are the largest barriers to achieving digital equity in your tribe's community? I know we somewhat chatted a little bit, but what are some of the challenges that you're experiencing in your community due to lack of access, digital access?

[\(01:06:38\)](#):

Carole Garner I have Vivian Lopez is ready to talk. Hi, Vivian. Go ahead. Anytime. Vivian, you should be able to talk and we'll hear you.

[\(01:06:59\)](#):

Vivian Lopez Okay. One of the things that we're experiencing here is that the connectivity is really, really spotty and sometimes it drops and sometimes it takes a while for it to connect. So that's one of the issues that we are having here.

[\(01:07:19\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett And Vivian, where are you located?

[\(01:07:22\)](#):

Vivian Lopez I'm with the Yaki tribe. Pasquyaki.

[\(01:07:27\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett Okay. In what state?

[\(01:07:29\)](#):

Vivian Lopez Arizona.

[\(01:07:30\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

You're in Arizona. Okay. Let me ask you, because of the challenges with the service dropping, what is that preventing you from doing? From engaging in?

[\(01:07:45\)](#):

Vivian Lopez

If there are certain emails that we have to put out to the community, sometimes it takes a while for it to get to the community members, and sometimes when it gets to them, it's like really short notice on activities and stuff that we're having around the community. So sometimes, yeah, it's just slow.

[\(01:08:12\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

It's super slow if emails aren't out. And so it's impacting community members from engaging civic engagement. Right.

[\(01:08:22\)](#):

Vivian Lopez

Right.

[\(01:08:23\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. What about access to essential services, being able to help your community get access, be able to access government services. What are some of your challenges with that?

[\(01:08:41\)](#):

Vivian Lopez

I'm not sure the challenges. I'm new to this position here, so I haven't really went to see what kind of challenges we're having. Those are the only things that I am experiencing being here.

[\(01:09:03\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So that's something with the program and our program with the planning grant, Dallas could help support that needs assessment where you could go out and do those assessments. Okay. Anyone else would like to share?

[\(01:09:27\)](#):

Carole Garner

I have Nefititi Jette up next.

[\(01:09:39\)](#):

Nefititi Jette

Good afternoon everybody. It's Nefititi Jette here. Wampanoag Tribe **gay at a corner**. And so being on an island, we are really at a disadvantage. The lack of digital equity prevents our children, So we don't have anything commercial here. We don't have access. It's a 45 minute boat ride and then whatever that commuting time is to their location. So during covid, one of the challenges for instance our kids had is, a lot of them were struggling with school because of the connectivity issues. Either their location, they're too far inland, that there was none. So they had a commute, like the libraries and so forth. And there was limited access, it is a constant thing. Telemedicine appointments were hard to maintain. It just has a ripple effect in

every possible area. So you have elders and so forth that may be isolated prior to that, just know enough to turn on a tablet to be able to maybe to FaceTime. But without that connectivity, without having that access, it further ostracized them and kind of limited their ability to communicate. And makes it hard for when we're having even to engage in governmental functions. So I mean it impacts in every possible way that you could think of that or maybe most people think take for granted because it's readily available, we lack those things.

[\(01:11:17\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So thanks a lot Nefititi. Can you also talk about, I was on a call with someone yesterday actually about one of the, they live on an island. One of their challenges was emergency response there first responders and the challenge of when they go out to the homes and being able to get access to their medical records to be able to deliver care. Can you talk a little bit about some of those challenges that you've experienced on Island?

[\(01:11:50\)](#):

Nefititi Jette

Absolutely. So I have a multitude of medical issues for one. And so a lot of times what happens is, first of all, we can't do 911 here. We have a local number that we call or dispatch number because of the connectivity issues. My call would wind up in Bourne or Hyannis someplace, which is about an hour and so away from where I actually am.

So I had someone here was an issue where I passed out, friends were visiting, they didn't know any better, right? They dialed 911. That was a 20 minute call to finally get routed to an actual dispatch person here on island. And then they get here and the equipment is gone because it happened to be a day where it's extremely windy. Our lines aren't underground, all our lines are taught above line. It makes it very complicated. And so we've learned to make adjustments as we need them, and you learn to try to download things that don't require online access. So, when we have a strong internet, you download as much as you can, as much as your memory or the capacity the device can hold in order to be able to execute. And of course there're going to be things that you miss.

[\(01:13:23\)](#):

The lack of consistency. And so I think it was Justin who said it earlier about what we're calling equity, right? It's not equitable all across the location, geographical location, and all these things come into play. Councilman Weedon online, David had great suggestions about getting this information out in enough time because we have situations here where the wind goes over 25 knots. We lose, I mean, we have generators, but your cable is connected to that. So once that stuff goes, we no longer have access, right? We miss opportunities constantly because of it. And so when you're dealing with short timeframes already complicated access, it becomes crippling.

[\(01:14:21\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. So even with the emergence with crisis communication systems, when crisis happens,

Nefititi Jette

[\(01:14:28\)](#):

Improvements, yes,

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:14:30\)](#):

You are able to do that as well. Thank you so much for sharing.

Nefititi Jette

[\(01:14:34\)](#):

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

Carole Garner

[\(01:14:39\)](#):

I have Christina Andrew. Hi Christina.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:14:46\)](#):

Hi. Hi again. Thank you. I can just reiterate from the previous speaker on the lack of communication issues we have in our communities. I was fortunate enough in the last year to be able to visit several of our communities and that are smaller. I'm based in one of our hub communities in region. So we get the "cutting edge technology" before everybody else, even though it's probably five to 10 years delayed from the continental United States.

Anyways, most of our villages, the landlines don't work half the time and neither do cell phones in the villages. So we are limited, technology wise, as far as cell and phone communication. And then it's even less service for internet providers until we got Starlink. Starlink has been a game changer. However, low earth orbiting satellites concern me. I've seen what HughesNet has done in our region where it comes in, it's promising the moon and stars, eventually it gets oversubscribed and the service lags greatly. And it's not, satellite technology is something that has to be replaced periodically.

[\(01:16:14\)](#):

So I'm not hopeful that that's a long-term solution, but it has increased our connectivity with the villages surrounding Dillingham. But a lot of our communities still don't have Starlink. They still don't have that reliable internet access. We've had issues with government reporting, like all of the CARES Act and ARPA money that the government is asking our tribes to report on. Because of the connectivity issues and the lack of digital literacy, we have been having issues with councils being able to log in to submit reports. We're having timeout issues, everything's getting put to online forms, and we just don't have the infrastructure or the capacity to be able to, in a lot of our communities, to be able to submit simple forms.

When we have our regional native corporation asking for forms to be submitted online for something like an annual meeting, our constituents have to, most people don't have internet devices at home other than a smartphone, so they have to go to the tribal office or the native corporation office. And a lot of them have to have

somebody who is from the office guide them through the form, especially our elders. Anyone that's in my parents' age bracket and older for sure needs to have that support in filling out standardized forms, banking forms, any accessing their online banking. All of that is really difficult for them, to the point where people, because our internet has been so slow, they just don't engage because it's been that bad. I was one of those people at one point where I thought the internet was a fad. I did not think that, fast forward to 2023, Christine Andrew would be advocating for internet in our villages. That's how bad it was.

[\(01:18:18\)](#):

It's not been great. We have issues with telemed as well. People can't log into that. We have cybersecurity issues, people not understanding not to click certain links or what to trust different URLs, which ones you can trust and which ones you shouldn't trust. Understanding different senders, that's all an issue out here.

I'm trying to think of what else I could tell you on digital. Oh, affordability, huge. The local provider, Intel Starlink, some residents were getting charged \$1,200 a month for substandard highly latented. Basically, the service was out for half the month, if not more. And you're paying \$1,200 a month because you're incurring internet overages because you're trying to log in and it's timing out and all of these issues. So you're constantly incurring overages. There is no digital literacy training in region right now. I do know that there are some available, and we could probably use those as templates to develop our own.

[\(01:19:33\)](#):

I haven't seen any technical assistance outside of our IT departments in the organizations that you work for. And those, they're very strict with their boundaries and that we only help those in our organization that are struggling.

We have online platforms within BBNA that we are supposed to be using to access data. Almost nobody uses it because of the digital literacy barrier. Almost nobody uses our website as a place to upload publications to convey that to the public because that's how bad our internet has been. It's just not a meaningful way to engage people. Emails are hard to get through. It is probably emails and texts are probably the most reliable because eventually it will go through to the person, but how long do they have to wait to get that email or that text message is another thing. In Dillingham, our cell phone provider, the 911 number, has been in and out all summer. We haven't had access to 911 only periodically, and we don't have a backup number. We don't have a local number here. Our smaller villages do, but we don't.

[\(01:20:54\)](#):

And we've missed out on a lot of opportunities, both personal and organizational because of the lack of access. If there's an opportunity for individuals, if they don't have the internet, they can't apply for it. So those are all, I guess that's a snapshot of what we're dealing with.

I do have a lot of hope though with our young people. The schools have been really good in getting our young people tuned up to be digitally literate, but that's at least

the 10 years out that we're going to have those guys join the workforce. So it's still an issue with our current workforce.

[\(01:21:35\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So hopefully we can have some intergenerational collaborations with our youth to help the adults.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:21:43\)](#):

That's actually, yeah, I've actually suggested that to one of our partners. They run what they call the Arctic-turn. It's a local internship program where they fund young people to have jobs, part-time jobs and help elders and stuff. And I suggested to them, have your young people teach elders how to use their tablet or their smartphone as part of a work activity.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:22:06\)](#):

Yeah, that would be great.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:22:08\)](#):

I would love to see that.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:22:10\)](#):

Wouldn't that be great? So Christina, can I go back to a couple items that you brought up. With the reporting forms, you mentioned that individuals have to go to the regional corporations in order to get assistance. I mean, one just to get access to the internet to be able to scan and submit these forms. I had a visit to Alaska and I just recall taking two planes to Noatak and that transportation is a significant bear. So when I hear you say that individuals will have to go to the regional corporation's office, that may not be something that's down the street.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:22:48\)](#):

Well, yeah, that's true. So there's regional corporation and then there's village corporations under Ansa. And some villages are large enough where they can house their village corporation in the village. Others are not. And so their village corporation is housed in Anchorage or another community just because the nature of the business. And then same thing with the tribes. Sometimes the tribal office isn't even in the community because the access is so bad that they need, in order to be able to function as a business, they have to be located in another space removed from the village, which doesn't do anybody any justice, in my opinion. And so yeah, individuals do not have space in their homes for computers because our tribal citizens are living in overcrowded housing as well to where they couldn't even set up a space to have their own device at home or have a telecommute space.

[\(01:23:59\)](#):

So having a community space is absolutely necessary. Most of the tribal offices that are located in the villages have a public computer that people can access. Only two

of our villages have a public library. Not all of them can support a public library. So out of 31, 2 have a library that they can go to. Only 25 of those communities have a school that they can access the internet at. And then, of the ones that don't have a school or a library to get internet access, most of those don't have the offices located in the community. So the people that are living there have nowhere to go to fill out forms. They have no one to help them to fill out forms. They have nowhere to scan or print anything that needs to be done for their personal business. So it's a serious concern for access.

[\(01:24:57\)](#):

Yeah, that would mean they would have to either fly to Dillingham or Agni, which is one to two plane rides depending on where they're located. And then it's another plane ride to get to Anchorage, which is the state hub where most of our infrastructure is housed in the state. So to go and fill out a simple form, I don't know, like a college scholarship application, if there's a young person in that village or an adult wanting to go to college, it would be a massive undertaking and required insane amount of coordination to figure out where I can print this out, where can I find a place to log in, who can help me log in? How do I use Microsoft Word or a Google Doc to fill out my necessary paperwork or PDF reader? And all of these things are going to cloud subscription, so everything costs money also, on top of that, Microsoft costs money. Adobe, if you want to have an Adobe program that actually is worth something that you can edit a form or do your business, that costs money. I've maxed out my Google Drive, so now I have to pay for my Google Drive to store things. So these are all barriers in access. We have in our community in Dillingham where it's cheaper, it's \$12 for a gallon of milk.

[\(01:26:30\)](#):

So you're asking someone to pay for milk, you're asking someone to pay, some of our communities pay over \$10 a gallon for gas, and then you're on top of that, you're asking them to give an Adobe subscription or a Google Drive when we are getting paid the same as people in the states, we don't have, our cost of living is extremely high, and our wage gap is extremely high as to being able to afford the cost of living.

[\(01:26:58\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

But even as I hear you talk about, you're right, the cost of even once you get access, being able to utilize some of the services, there is a cost would one of the, I know this is not a question, but we think about the barriers, there's a cost barrier to access these different resources. Would something allowable in the form of subsidies to help support some of these costs so people can have access?

[\(01:27:29\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Oh, absolutely. ACP has been critical for our region. Even though we have low signup rates, the people that are signing up, it's making it, even for me, I wouldn't be able to afford my internet package if it wasn't for ACP. That's just how it goes. Two kids, a mortgage and I'm working full-time and I commercial fish, which extends

my income even greater. Not everybody has that opportunity. I know I'm fortunate in that I have a degree, I'm working in my degree field and even still things like internet are out of sight for me. Certain things I just can't afford to participate in because I have to prioritize home heating oil and paying my mortgage and making sure my kids have groceries. So I could definitely see subsidies or offering things like subscriptions for Adobe,

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:28:33\)](#):

Say, wait, so subscription subsidies is something,

Christina Andrew

[\(01:28:43\)](#):

Subscription subsidies, and even internet cost subsidies would be huge. I appreciate Starlink being a hundred dollars a month. Even that is in our region, we would consider that pretty affordable because we've been used to paying 300, 400 to \$1,200 a month just to access the internet. So we're jumping overjoy for a hundred bucks an hour or however, or a hundred bucks an hour, a hundred bucks a month. But if get, if internet costs could come down even lower, that would be even better. However, I know operating and maintaining a system out here is going to be expensive because you need a power source. And almost everything in our region is powered by diesel fuel. That is how we get our electricity and diesel fuel is at least \$5 a gallon. That's also how we heat our homes. And some communities have to fly that diesel in, they fly their diesel into their community to be able to afford to heat their homes and drive their cars.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:29:54\)](#):

And so one of, I guess a priority what I'm hearing from you because of the high cost of everything is, being able to improve the economic outcomes of the tribal communities as well. Where if you had the access and you could get access to higher paying jobs, but still remain in your community and maintain that community closeness, that could be one of those areas of priorities.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:30:32\)](#):

That's actually a priority of mine. I've been working on a remote work survey for the last year and a half, which has been exploring what our regional organizations can offer for remote work where they feel our constituents at an ability to take on remote work. What sort of infrastructure is in the village, what sort of, yeah, we're rolling into an implementation plan for remote work and what that could look like in regions. But some of our smaller communities, they don't have enough jobs. And so we have the issue of out migration. And then we have communities like Dillingham where my organization, we have 30 jobs open and nobody's applying. My job could be done completely remote. I could telecommute from anywhere in the world, preferably anywhere in Bristol Bay. But to me, that's something I see as a way to keep our communities alive is if we can get this internet in there, it opens up flexible work opportunities that are compatible with our way of life.

[\(01:31:37\)](#):

We've had economic development opportunities come in, but those could threaten to contaminate our food sources and our water sources like commercial mining would destroy our salmon industry. Bristol Bay is home to the largest wild salmon run in the world. That is our primary source of income for many, many people. And so I wouldn't be able to maintain any sort of quality of a great quality of life if I didn't have my commercial fishing income, that's a fact. And so we need to be able to maintain that resource while simultaneously looking at other economic opportunities for our people. Otherwise we're going to keep losing them to other communities like Anchorage or Fairbanks or even moving down to the states.

So I think it's imperative for economic development moving into the future. There have been studies out there that have shown that just getting internet access automatically increases your community or your region's gross domestic production by 10%. You are just 10% more efficient at your work because of reliable access. Could you imagine what that would do for people who have been struggling to connect and have to spend hours and hours uploading one single form?

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:32:58\)](#):

That's right.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:33:00\)](#):

How much more bad a curse word, insert curse word, they would be if they could get their work done efficiently. It would be amazing. I would love it.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:33:14\)](#):

So Christina, you mentioned the salmon industry and I also recall hearing from the community there, their concerns around that. How could digital access help address some of these climate-related challenges that the community is experiencing?

Christina Andrew

[\(01:33:31\)](#):

Well, we'd be able to access more data and more resources to be able to help us find solutions to our unique community needs. So everyone pretty much gets Department of Interior funding through Bureau of Indian Affairs to help fund their tribe. And they could maybe spend two to three days of their life or two to three days of their month engaging and trying to upload forms or interact with the digital systems that they're required to for that funding source when they could be using that precious time to be able to address some climate change issues. Maybe they could be working, instead of spending that time just trying to complete their necessary reporting with internet timeout issues and latency problems. They could be spending that time engaging in subsistence activities. They could be doing different monitoring programs. They could spend that time looking at alternative energy sources, which they have lacked the capacity to be able to do. They'd be able to actually address some of their workforce issues. It would just increase their capacity to be able to address those needs in the community.

[\(01:34:50\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

All right. This is helpful. And I have one more thing that you touched on. You talked about the overcrowded housing, the multiple generations in housing. So even as we think about once we, because we're going to dream, right, once we connect every single household to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet, it sounds like there's still a need for these community tech centers because if you are engaged in remote work and there are multiple generations in a house, you will probably still need that space or even that space to access your telehealth services. Can you talk a little bit about that?

[\(01:35:28\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, that's something that would either a) address, the government needs to address the housing issues, which they should because in treaty law and constitutional law, the United States government has a responsibility to ensure tribes economic, social, and cultural wellbeing, which if they're requiring us to live in westernized houses needing to be required to ensure we have adequate housing. So you have that issue. So people would definitely need a community space. The three communities that were involved in the case studies I did for remote work, all three of them indicated that they needed community space. The workforce needs assessment also did the same when we interviewed major employers in the region that they thought in order to have remote work in the villages that there would need to be a community space. So having some sort of funding to help create that where there was a printer and a scanner for people to use, maybe the buildings supported by renting that space to the workers and then their employer picks up the cost of helping to fund the building. But even still, we would need to have funding to put a building in place because the tribal offices are not big enough to support an additional five to 10 people or more working remotely. They're already at capacity in the office buildings that they have.

[\(01:37:06\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. This has all been extremely helpful. Would you like to add anything else? Does anyone else have anything they'd like to add?

[\(01:37:18\)](#):

Christina Andrew

I feel like I've talked enough.

[\(01:37:20\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

No, this has been great. Christina.

[\(01:37:23\)](#):

Carole Garner

I do have Lawrence Pena with his hand up as well.

[\(01:37:27\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Hey, Lawrence.

[\(01:37:30\)](#):

Carole Garner

And it just went down. Let me see. Lawrence, if you'd like to speak, would you mind raising your hand one more time? There he is. Okay. One minute. Alright, you can speak now.

[\(01:37:42\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Thank you, Christina. You're amazing. Our dealing with is what I think every single tribe is dealing with, but you explained it in a way that I hope will assist this grant program to really achieving what its goal is, which is digital equity. The fact that you brought up, one of the things you brought up that you didn't even delve into was workforce development. Where are we going to get these workers for these programs? Where are we going to start training them? Where are we going to start looking at different aspects of their growth? And so I feel like one of the things that we need to also look at is the fact that we're going to need these workers to deploy the networks to hook up the islands that are not hooked up right now. And the fact that you guys spend so much money on internet is ridiculous to me.

[\(01:38:41\)](#):

I can't fathom that. I really can't. I mean, that's as much as a mortgage. And for my part, I think what also needs to happen is a focus on utilizing existing infrastructure as best we can. And what I mean by that is we have abandoned water lines. We have a conduit that may be in trespass. I think every single tribe probably has conduits and trespass. Utilizing that equipment would save us so much money and it would lead to that digital equity.

I mean the digital equity portion of it is about creating an affordable service for our community members. It's about making sure that our community members are connected and can call 911 and not have to be mistaken for another county or another district, another town. It's about making sure that everybody has that access. And right now, as Christina amply put it, not everybody has that access. At all.

[\(01:39:48\)](#):

And so there's only so much money to go around, I think all of us get that. And it's just a question of how if we do get money, we spend it so that we can further our tribe, so we can further our reservations, so that people will stay in the tribe to work, which is so important because without that, what does a tribe have without its people? So I really hope that we take all this and learn from it, number one, but also listen. I mean, I listened and it's amazing to see how many other tribes are having the same issues we are. It's not a new thing. I mean, this is like the DON electricity, it's a utility. Broadband services and access to it are essential. There's no other word for it. Very essential. So I hope that with these comments and with this direction and with this observations, that our government will be able to uphold that trust responsibility. There is a trust responsibility, whether we like it or not. There's a lot of tribes that don't like it. A lot of tribes who would rather get on without BIA. And it's that oversight that you're asking for that requires that commitment to make sure that we are taken care of and that's what trust responsibility means. I

[\(01:41:31\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Love that. Lawrence, can I just touch on something. You mentioned the importance of engaging with the community to even deploy the network. And so I know we're here talking about the digital equity program, but I would just encourage all of the tribes too, to reach out to their states because in the BEAD program, that's the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program. And that's the funding that is to connect every household to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet. There's a workforce development component of that that states are supposed to have these plans to develop workforce ecosystems, to engage individuals from our communities with apprenticeship and skills training to connect them to jobs, direct it to deploy the network. And so just encourage, I mean, we are in communities that, and you're living in communities that are most impacted and those are the communities that need to be part of the solutions. And not just getting connected, but also being part of the workforce that builds out those connections as well.

Lawrence Pena

[\(01:42:49\)](#):

It's a digital age.

[\(01:42:50\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

That's right.

[\(01:42:52\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

It's time to get with it.

[\(01:42:55\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Can I ask one question before we move on to the next, when we talk about, I touched on it a little bit about privacy, and I think we've had some, I think Christina may have touched on even online privacy. How can digital access help improve the personal safety and the community safety?

[\(01:43:18\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Well, I would hope that some of this digital equity training would involve training. Training our tribal members to understand the warning signs, training our tribal members to not answer that email that says that if you give me a thousand dollars, I'll give you \$10,000 because you're cool and you're my relative. There's a lot of awareness that needs to happen. And the awareness comes through training. It comes through.

I think one of the things that New Mexico does have, it's called seniorites. It's basically a group of kids who are hired to train and to educate elders on how to use the internet properly. I mean, these elders could sell their art. These elders can increase their education. So there are means, there are definitely means to get this done, but it's the funding that requires that attention. And the funding, it's competitive. Let's be honest, you have like 500 tribes that are going to be going for the same money. And so it's up to them to decide whether or not they're going to go to a consortium. It's up to them to decide how they're going to present their plan

so that it really is a digital equity plan. And honestly, without planning money, it's kind of difficult for other tribes. But we're over that. I mean, that's neither here nor there. And I just hope that money and that resource goes somewhere else where it's needed.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:44:55\)](#):

Understood, appreciate. Thank you so much, Lawrence.

Lawrence Pena

[\(01:44:58\)](#):

Thank you.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:44:59\)](#):

Alright, and I think we'll move to the next slide. Oh, we've been talking about this. So we've been talking about the technical assistance that NTIA could provide to tribes to help complete their applications. And so we gave some examples, and I think Christina brought up that she really liked the sample forms, the templates that we had provided before. But what other types, in addition to these webinars, would regional in-person events be helpful? Would us having these virtual drop-in office hours be helpful during this time period? So just really open to your thoughts around this.

[\(01:45:53\)](#):

Margaret Gutierrez

I would just piggyback on that, Angie, and ask if there's any regional events that would be helpful if we piggybacked onto, I know that sometimes tribes all attend one specific event and it's easier to do a day after that event so that everyone's already there and doesn't have to add additional travel. So if there's those types of events, also please let us know that.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(01:46:15\)](#):

Thanks Margaret.

Carole Garner

[\(01:46:17\)](#):

And we have Christina again.

Christina Andrew

[\(01:46:20\)](#):

Hi. Thanks Lawrence for your kind words. I did want to, I'll just circle back to what we were talking about earlier. I dropped in the question that a link to a couple of online resources that Lawrence, you in particular might find useful. And we did do a workforce component of the broadband implementation plan where we were looking at what training people would need to be able to participate as a worker in the installation and maintenance of broadband as well. And if you guys find any of the work that I've done in those links helpful, by all means use it and tweak it for your communities and tribes. I am all for supporting indigenous communities across the nation and the globe. And if you think the work I've done could be helpful in moving you guys forward, I offered a link to the remote work study, which I've been

talking about, and then also an online art marketing series because Lawrence reminded me that we did do that and helping people be able to sell their art online.

[\(01:47:24\)](#):

But going back to the topic at hand, virtual drop-in office hours would not be attended well from our region. I would think that, and especially hearing the connectivity issues others are experiencing, I'm not sure if that would be the right method. I think in person would probably be better, but then having the templates would be good. Webinars with recordings would be great. Making those easily accessible would be my preferred.

I'm not sure what your timeline is for looking at an in-person event. There's all types of things that happen throughout the year. As I mentioned in the past though, basically from the beginning of June until September is not an ideal timeframe for our region. But there's AFN is happening this week that almost everyone in the state attends. You have things like the BIA providers conference that happened in December, and then there's other tribal events that happened throughout the year into May that could possibly be piggybacked off to host a technical assistance trainee.

[\(01:48:35\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Christina, would you mind either emailing or dropping those different events into the chat so that we can be mindful of those as we move forward?

[\(01:48:48\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, I think I have your email.

[\(01:48:50\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

You do!

[\(01:48:51\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Okay. Yeah, I'll send you something in the email form. I do have an ongoing list so far.

[\(01:48:59\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Perfect. Thank you. Anyone else? So let me just ask this question so we can think of timing. So in my head, I'm already thinking of timing with these events. So say for instance, hypothetically, well one, we are launching the NOFO in early 2024. Say we open up the application period later, like a few months later, would it be helpful to have these different rounds of technical assistance during kind of that gap in time and then also kind of continue it once the window opens? Thoughts, reactions?

Oh, can I repeat it? So my question was, if we were to launch the NOFO, the funding opportunity in early 2024 and then open the application window in the fall, would it be helpful to have technical assistance throughout that kind of period prior to the application opening, but yet still continue it once the application window opens?

[\(01:50:46\)](#):

Yes. Okay. Alright. Anyone else? Christina responded yes to that question. Okay. Let me see. Okay, Lawrence, you have a yes too. Okay. Thank you.

All right, let's move to the next slide. Ooh, evaluation and award methodology. Okay. I'm hoping to get quite a bit of responses on this. Really appreciate a robust conversation around this.

What criteria should we consider when we are evaluating applications and determining awards? So some examples are the level of impact. I would ask, how would we measure the level of impact? Is it the number of people served? Is it the proportion of the people served in relation to the population? Should we consider the tribal communities level of need? If so, what sort of data would we require to substantiate that need?

What about the application, the applicant's organizational capabilities to complete the project and whether they have any existing TBCP awards? I think we have to consider that simply because we can't duplicate federal funding.

So open to thoughts and don't be shy to talk even if you've spoken before. It's okay. We're having conversation here. Any thoughts? Comments? Okay. Well if you would like to follow up with responses to that question.

Carole Garner

Yeah, I was just going to say I do have Lawrence and Christina again. I'll start with Lawrence. Okay,

[\(01:53:26\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

There we go. Sorry, I feel like I'm talking too much. One of the things that's okay, I feel we have to look at is what is equitable. Is equitable per tribal member? Is equitable per square area of footage or reservation? Kind of open up a whole can of worms when it comes to deciding who gets what and why. When you look at the most disadvantaged tribes, the most disadvantaged tribes, number one, don't have the 25/3. Number 2, they do not have the infrastructure necessarily even provide 25/3. And they also lack the resources, meaning computers, laptops, phones to not only take advantage of cellular service, but 25/3 service, which is unavailable in those tribes. So when you're looking at the fact that we are disadvantaged to begin with and that we tribe, and I'm talking about all the tribes, I'm hoping I'm not speaking off key, but we all need that help and we all need that assistance to bring us into an age our people can survive, our culture can survive more importantly, and where we can take advantage of everything that has to states, I mean, it's ridiculous that I can't go on video here because I'm afraid I'm going to drop you.

[\(01:55:10\)](#):

That's just, I'm sorry. I love being in person. I hate Zoom. And the fact is that Zoom has become right now state, by the way, Zoom has become a crux, a crux for all of us. Instead of meeting, this is the solution we're going to come up with. Instead, we meet through Zoom where you maybe have four or five people talk. And that's not the view of Indian country. That's not the view of every other attendee at this meeting right now. And so I feel like in person is something that you all should consider because of the fact collaboration amongst peers, collaboration amongst

individuals, collaboration amongst individuals who have that same concern and that concern is, bottom line, how are we going to bring our tribes to the forefront? How are we going to make sure that our enrollees want to even stay in our pueblo and want to persevere and want to continue that tradition?

[\(01:56:31\)](#):

Zoom doesn't do it. I'm a firm, I hate Teams. I hate Zoom. I maybe I work from home. But when you look at what we're doing right now, I have to say that nobody else has spoken in terms of what their needs are. This consultation for me, besides Christina, honestly hasn't shed any light on what other people are dealing with. And I encourage everybody else to speak up. I'm not shy, I never have been, never will be. But sharing my concerns for the little old pueblo of San Alfonso, which has 1200 registered members, I don't think speaks for tribes out there that are way more populous, that are way more behind the times. And that's what we really are. We're all behind the times. We're behind everything. We're at such a point where I feel like it was about time the federal government acted. We're at a point where I feel like why didn't they act over here? Broadband has not been here forever, but broadband's been here for a couple of years and digital equity. Wow, what is equitable?

[\(01:57:55\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Right? So I'll let Christina, then Lawrence, I want to pick back up on your question about equity because I have some additional questions. Christina, go ahead.

[\(01:58:16\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, I appreciate Lawrence's comments about what is equity, because I think that's something that's going to have to be defined on each individual tribal level because everyone's going to have their own requirements. Here in Dillingham we're fortunate to have had connectivity for probably about 10 years now, where it's been not glacial paced, it's decent enough that I can participate in things like this. But you go to Ugashek, another tribe in our region, they're going to have a whole other level of needing to understand the digital world. With that in mind, to go to these questions, how do you evaluate? Are you talking about evaluation in the application or are you talking evaluation of success, of implementation of digital equity?

[\(01:59:10\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Well, it would be evaluation in the application, but part of evaluating that criteria is right, the probability for success and the impact of their success.

[\(01:59:24\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Oh, it's going to be difficult. I know everyone has such a different level of need and capacity. It's going to be hard to figure out who's going to be six. I mean, yeah, want to, to me it's like the funds need to go to somebody that really needs this, which means they're going to look less fundable on an application because they just haven't had that exposure and familiarity with these terms and the possibility for their tribe.

[\(02:00:04\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

How do we balance that? That's product equity? I mean, how do we balance? Because you're right, the tribe that is the most impacted, that has the highest level of need is likely going to be the less resourced one. And then how do we balance that?

[\(02:00:25\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Can I add something that we've dealt with and that we've done as we've all participated in census, we've all said what we have and what we don't have in terms of their questionnaires. And sometimes it comes to data. And data can be manipulated, yes. But also data doesn't lie. In terms of the fact that, I know I answered honestly that I don't have access to broadband services. That was one of the questions that was on the census. So in terms of needs assessment, I don't think you could ask for any more of a needs assessment than the census and the block. And what's their poverty level at, what's their, where are you geographically located? What hinders them from gaining the digital equity that we all talking about today?

[\(02:01:21\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So can I play devil's advocate with you, Lawrence? Right. So we know, in my community that I experience, that we had a very low participation rate. I mean, we were hosting, we were doing collaborations, we were having carvana's, we were doing door hangings. I mean we're doing tons of things to increase participation. Not sure what it's like on tribal lands if you don't have a high participation in the census. Is the census data really reflecting the true needs of the tribes? And then are there other data that could be used? Well,

[\(02:01:59\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I think that you all shared some sources at the last webinar that we had last week with the tribal leaders group. So yes, there are other sources. But in terms of my experience, people who fill out the census want to be heard, people who don't care less. And that's sad because they're not caring about their future, they're not caring about the kids' future. And it's leaving us tribal members, tribal people, us Native Americans in a hole because we're not participating like we should be because we're not expressing our opinions because we're not saying, Hey, I need this.

Can you get me broadband services,

[\(02:02:46\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Specific engagement projects of awareness, right?

[\(02:02:54\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

It's really awareness because when you look at all these factors that are out there, every single one of them comes back to the need, the need that we have. But how do we contemplate that need? How do we quantify it? We can't quantify it unless everybody's participating.

[\(02:03:14\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So then, okay, say all the data is true. How do we balance this, right? So a project's level of impact, is it based upon the number of people that they plan to impact? Because if you're a small tribe, you may not be able to compete with the numbers as a larger tribe. Is it the proportion of people to the population that they plan to impact? What would be equitable for the tribes?

[\(02:03:46\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I would say whatever has the most impact. Listen to my reasoning. You might have a tribe like, I'm not using Navajos as an example, but you might have a tribe that has a whole bunch of members. Yet how much of that tribe is going to participate in that program? I think participation is key. If you ask my opinion, that's what is going to drive that factor. The fact that you want, the fact that people are getting helped, the fact that people are getting the funding and it's not the tribe, it's getting the funding, it's the people.

[\(02:04:30\)](#):

And that's what we got to remember. It's our community members. It's not me as Lawrence Pena getting a segment of whatever funding. It's me providing my members with access, with digital equity, with that buy-in, that trust that we need to have.

Christina said it perfectly. You have to have somebody, I'm a tribal member. You have to have somebody that can speak for the tribe and speak to the tribe. And for those that don't have that, it's going to be a hard sell because you have to have that buy-in, that participation. And for me, participation is key. So if you're not going to have 90% of your members participate in a digital equity program, what are you doing? Why don't you have that 90%? You're not going to ever get a hundred, but why don't you have that 90%? So I would hope that everybody has that plan and has that technical plan to cover that many people because that many people need help.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:05:36\)](#):

Got it. Extremely helpful. Thank you, Lawrence. Thanks Christina. Anyone else?

Christina Andrew

I had some follow up comments to that. Go

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:05:45\)](#):

Go ahead, Christina.

[\(02:05:47\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, how do you measure impact? How do you know it's going to be successful? I really like the idea Lawrence throughout there of what's the percentage of your tribal population that you're going to serve with this grant? How many individuals can you encompass in this program, I think is key. Because it's not, I know our tribal administrators have digital equity. They're doing the work however slow it might be. They are still there using the computer and accessing the internet, so they know

that. So to me, just having a plan completed is not, I wouldn't consider just having a plan completed as a measure of success or the number of programs that you implement as a measure of success because that's not the intent. Creating a program is not the intent. Creating the outcome is the intent of this. And so what's your broad community participation plan?

[\(02:06:45\)](#):

And I'd say based it on percentage of your population, not the numbers. Like the **Chang** tribe has 2,500 people, the **UIC** tribe has 15. That's a huge difference. And we have, Dillingham has a target on our back because we are a larger community, and so everybody thinks we have a bigger capacity and everybody's like Dillingham gets everything. They get everything because we have the capacity to be able to compete in that arena. And that's not fair.

And so I've been on one to cheer on the underdog, but I think you have to look at also the distressed level of a community, the income level, how remote are they? Those are all things that should be in consideration. And then maybe you have higher scoring criteria on the areas of evaluation on the percentage of the population you're going to impact. But then also I think there should be something on how local is this organization that's creating the service to the region, and what is the partnership dynamic like?

[\(02:07:58\)](#):

I think for anything like this, to be successful, you're going to need to have your partners at the table. We have in our region what we call the BBs, and it's the five biggest regional organization that serve Bristol Bay. And if you're going to do something in a meaningful way, you're going to have all five of them at the table and all five of them are going to be pushing the messaging out that this is important. So if you're not showing that demonstrating that level of regional and local partnership and that local stakeholdership, I don't think that application should be considered because it's going to be a lot less meaningful to the community members.

[\(02:08:40\)](#):

And it's kind of hard. I agree with Lawrence, the census records aren't accurate. I know that there's one community, they have a really bad drug problem and nobody that's on drugs answers that census workers knock on the door. They don't. So those people are not counted in any of the records, which really hurts that community. But I do know our BIA records are probably, if you're thinking tribal BIA records are probably going to be your most accurate to knowing how many people you're going to serve. I don't know if that can play a part in this. If the tribe needs to express their tribal citizen status. As a tribal consortium for our tribes, we do not have access to the tribe's census records or their tribal citizenship status for how many people and who's with that tribe. That is strictly something between BIA and the tribe itself and they don't share that data. It's very protected.

So figuring out, I guess, figuring out a way to tap into that number, it doesn't need to be shared. I don't think that, I think we should still respect tribe's privacy in that

way. Figuring await how to compare that information to maybe census record information and what their goals are with the population and getting that information out. There will be, I don't know if you can work that into scoring,

[\(02:10:12\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

But that's how we have to work it into scoring again. So

[\(02:10:20\)](#):

Christina Andrew

I'm thinking things you could score on is like, what's your distress level? That's something I've seen USDA use. So it's an easy thing. You can go and copy that format from them. Same thing with income level and the ruralness, like how you define rural. Those are three things I think you can evaluate on your scoring because the more distressed, the lower income and the more remote you are, the higher chance you are of having that to be on the wrong side of the digital divide. That's just going to be a given. The closer you are to a city, the easier it is for you to access that. The higher income level your community has, the better off you are to be able to get a computer and a smartphone and start engaging in that in a meaningful way. And you have a natural adoption process happening. So those are, I

[\(02:11:14\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Contradict that, Christina, because there's other tribes like my own, that live literally next to a national laboratory. Oh, really? And so our advantage is the fact that we do live next to a national laboratory, and we actually are in one of the most highest income racial communities in the country. Which is, which is horrible.

[\(02:11:44\)](#):

Christina Pena

Yeah, that's true. Every

[\(02:11:45\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Because our tribe isn't, but Los Alamos is. And so when you look at partnerships, I mean, one of our partners is obviously going to be somebody close by and it's going to be somebody that we can count on. But I fear that when we look at digital equity and we look at income, I mean we're how do we define what's poor? How do we define, I mean, I'm sorry, but 150% of poor, the median poor income is not poor. 50% is, I mean, it's ridiculous these numbers that we throw out because they're so consequential in terms of how we get funding, in terms of how we deal with the inequities, which are persistent throughout Indian country. How do we figure out when to partner? I mean, that goes back to the whole point I made with consortiums. Is me partnering with Los Alamos County, which is the richest county in the country, a good thing?

[\(02:12:58\)](#):

I like to think it is, I like to think I'm engaging my neighbor. I like to think that I am asking my neighbor to help me out. But if you look at it the context of income, they should be writing us some income. So when you look at rurality and you look at the fact that services are not provided even to my community, my community is literally

within 10 miles of a 20,000 person community, a 40,000 person community, which is Los Alamos, and 150,000 person community. Yet we don't have service, we don't have broadband, and we don't have that digital equity that we're talking about today.

[\(02:13:53\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Do you have numbers for your tribal citizens income level versus, because you could maybe that would be better. I would say suggest, I could hear you on that. You're next to a very well off community that's living adjacent to your community. But that doesn't necessarily mean that your community's..

[\(02:14:11\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

No. We actually did have an individual income assessment done a year and a half ago. So that's what we used for the first TCP grant and that's what we'll probably use again,

[\(02:14:27\)](#):

Christina Andrew

I'm glad you guys did that. Not very many tribes have the capacity to do that.

[\(02:14:30\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

And we also did a feasibility study, so we know what we need. We know what's available and we know what's out there. And so we did that before E-rate, because one of our plans was to do E-rate, but regulations E-rate, it just didn't make any sense for us. So that's why NTIA is our ticket. We have a grant, we're pulling it. And part of that grant is making sure that people have access.

[\(02:15:01\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Then I guess I just added or just exemplified, NTIA is like, how do we define this? Because in our region, we are totally removed from everybody. The closest big city is 200 and 300 miles away from us. So we are like, we fit the rural definition so well, and our income levels even in our census area, show that. But yeah, that makes it hard. I guess then it comes back to, do you guys have other local partners besides say the county? Or would you have, I guess our dynamics so different in Alaska because we have the tribal side thing and then well, we have the tribal consortium, but taking that away, you also have at the village level, you have a village tribal office. Then you also have a municipality in some communities.

[\(02:16:00\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I wish we were that far advanced, we don't. I don't know. What's sad is that when you look at our neighbors, the way that, how do I say this? The way that the majority of our traditional leaders think is that our neighbors, tribe wise, our competition and that they will go after anything without regard to us. And so honestly, for us, the county is a better option. The county wants to work with us, the county wants to partner, the county listens to our needs, but if we're going to apply with the county, there's no chance, if we're basing it on income, that this will even happen.

[\(02:16:55\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So Lawrence, let me ask you a question. Are you No, no, no question. So when we talk about consortiums and these collaborations and having elite entity, are you saying that it's possible that you would entertain a collaboration, right, with a non-tribal entity that could bring resources to help you all achieve digital equity?

[\(02:17:25\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I think that we're more likely to partner with a non-tribal entity than we are with the tribal entity. And that's just the mentality of what unfortunately our elders, our traditional leaders, our councilmen have. It's, we don't want to share. We think that we as a tribe are at an advantage and we want to take advantage of that. And so when it comes down to it, everybody around us, which is like we have five different tribes around us, and within 10 miles is our competition. They're not our partners, and it never have been.

[\(02:18:12\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

In my dream world, we're all going to be stronger together. That is in my dream world,

Lawrence Pena

That happened Colonization of America.

[\(02:18:24\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So I'm going to go to the next slide. I think this will continue this evaluation and award methodology conversation. I think so go ahead and show all of it. I guess

[\(02:18:37\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Just maybe say, maybe thinking, maybe weighing it more on what the percentage of your tribal population, because in Lawrence's case, he's got a bunch of non-tribal people around him, but that's not the intent of the NOFO. This is to serve the tribe. So if you're tribe, what percentage of your tribal population is being served? And to me, I would think just from my perspective, in Lawrence's case, if he were to apply and he wanted to serve 90% of his tribe and he wanted to use the county to help him serve 90% of his tribe, but nobody else with the award, that to me would be a successful partnership on that project because then they're leveraging that resource that they didn't have that could help them achieve the goal. But it's still going towards that particular population that this funding's intended for. Something along those lines.

[\(02:19:46\)](#):

Something along those lines. That's something that I do here at BBNA is I'll need technical assistance from SEA Grant. SEA Grant serves the entire coastal area of Alaska and the United States. But say I wanted to apply for a USDA grant that gives you priority for tribal areas. While we're using SEA Grant as a sub-recipient to provide that service to our tribal citizens. SEA grant's not getting that award, we are, and we're contracting them to provide that because they know what they're doing. I

guess would something like that help in the scoring criteria? Lawrence, am I off on thinking around how to make a successful,

[\(02:20:38\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I think that each individual tribe will have to figure out how to implement equity. It's going to be an issue where maybe you do have a partner who has a lot of money, who has a lot of resources, and who has that dedication to be your partner. There's so many partnerships that are developed over the course of our tribal nations, and not all of them have become successful. Not all of them helped the tribes. If anything, you mentioned the salmon industry, the fact that if you take one, you can't have the other. I mean, come on. I mean, there's got to be some sort of thing that we could do to make sure that you can have both. So when leveraging your tribes resources also means about leveraging your location and leveraging where you are situated. Because when I look at, again, my tribe in particular, I know we are strategically located. I know that people need us and I plan to take advantage of that. But how.

[\(02:21:58\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

I think too, with your suggestion, Lawrence and Christina, I love the way you articulate that as well, those being flexible. I'm not saying we can, but this is very informative. But being flexible on how we view those consortiums could enable to my first question at the top of the hour, the less resource tribes to have the capacity.

[\(02:22:34\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Well, in terms of what San Alfonso is doing again, just personally speaking, is that we've hired the staff, we've hired, gotten the accounting systems, we've gotten to policies and procedures in place. We've gotten the procurement policy in place, which is probably the most important part of it. And so we're on our way, but there's a lot of tribes that aren't on their way, and it's up to those consortiums to make sure that their needs are assessed, their needs are understood, and most importantly, their needs are addressed.

[\(02:23:14\)](#):

Christina Andrew

I wonder, that just made me think, so there's this other organization, NDIA.

[\(02:23:20\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Yep.

[\(02:23:21\)](#):

Christina Andrew

And I'm wondering if there's anything that, if they're, because really good about ensuring that that equity happens in a meaningful way. I'm wondering if there's a way that if you have consortiums that you can leverage their work and they want to engage in the community to help guide that process to be equitable and ensure that these tribes that maybe lack that capacity have somebody in their corner that's not

necessarily associated with the project. Just brainstorming, leveraging resources here.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:23:52\)](#):

Yeah, absolutely. That's a great idea.

We do have one question in the chat from Ellen Sharp. She asked, if you are planning, you were planning, if you apply for a planning grant, is there a second deadline date to apply for capacity? Seems it would be logical to plan then apply. But if there is only one deadline date, the planning cycle would last a year until the next year. Funding seems illogical.

Well, Ellen, welcome to the federal government now. So yes, I agree. I mean, we're encouraging folks to can plan and then apply. With this tribal grant, we will launch as stated in an early 2024. If you apply for planning grants, then you would have to wait until the next funding cycle. If that's all you're applying for, you would wait until the next funding cycle to then apply for the capacity. But you can now actually, because we do have the TBCP 2 program, the funding opportunity that is available and open right now. And one of the allowable uses is to utilize those funds to develop a plan you could apply for the TBCP 2 now and develop a plan so that when the window opens for the capacity, you'll be ready to submit for the capacity program.

[\(02:25:20\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So just really want to, I hope it's being emphasized, it's not TBCP 2 or this program. It's both. To take advantage of both programs.

[\(02:25:33\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

No duplication.

[\(02:25:36\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Yes. But you just can't duplicate the activities. That's very key. So I would encourage those who are really wanting to develop their digital equity plans, leverage the TBCP 2 now so that when we launch and open the capacity, you'll be ready to submit for the program.

And I'm going to bring us up to, I think our last slide, which continues on about our evaluation and award methodology. I know we had touched, touched on available data sources that tribes could use to submit in their application. I wanted to talk about that.

Are there suggestions that when they demonstrate, when tribes submit applications and demonstrate their need, should NTIA say, "Hey, you just use the census data", or should we be flexible and allow tribes to put forth a justification why they're using the source of data versus census data?

And then the second question here, under the Digital Equity Act, there are eight covered populations that are intended to be the direct beneficiaries of the program. Recognizing that the cover populations are not monoliths, that they're intersectional because you could belong in multiple covered populations.

[\(02:27:12\)](#):

But the eight cover populations are individuals who live in covered households, which are low income. Aging individuals at age 60 and over, incarcerated individuals other than those in a federal correctional facility, our veterans, our individuals disabilities, our individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners or have low levels of literacy, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. So again, recognizing that one individual can fall into multiple categories of covered populations. So I kind of put those two questions, the data points. And then to what extent does your tribe fall within these covered populations, Lawrence?

[\(02:28:09\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Yeah. For my part, I would just hope that we would honor those tribes who actually took the time to create income evaluations when it comes to their population, like my tribe did. But in regards to DE Act, it covers a lot. So I guess my question is, if you were going to go to a consortium, what resources would you utilize to gather that information? Because you're talking about federal veterans, you're talking about disabilities, you're talking about English learners, you're talking about low income literacy. That's a lot of caveats to cover.

[\(02:28:57\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So Lawrence, we're asking, you we're asking you and the folks in the call, I mean, what exists, right?

[\(02:29:07\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

But I mean, you guys are at the federal government level, and so I guess what exists is what you put out. We don't I guess, unless it's coming to the personal population in our tribe, I don't have any of this information. I don't know how many aging individuals are in Santa Fe and Los Alamos County. I don't know how many incarcerated individuals are there. What source do you want me to use? I mean, because there's a lot of sources we can use, but what source is what's acceptable to NTIA?

[\(02:29:44\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So I'll put the question back to you. Should tribes be able to put forth a source and state why? The rationale for using that source?

[\(02:29:55\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

That comes down to tribal sovereignty. I say yes. Then that's because if a tribe has decided to take all this information and put it all into a report, they've established their sovereignty and they've established their needs. And so for me, if a tribe has that information, they should give it. I think my tribe has almost all that information to be going honest with you.

[\(02:30:24\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Christina.

[\(02:30:25\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, I would echo Lawrence's a tribal sovereignty. Their population data collection is probably going to be more comprehensive than that as the Census Bureau, because they have that established trust to be able to collect that information.

So I would say if a tribe puts forth their own information with a justification, that would be the ultimate source because they're the closest to the source with that local control. But then I'd say that they could still use these government sources because our tribe, the tribe that I belong to just did its own census. But I don't know if it really took into consideration veteran or incarcerated individuals or disabilities whereas Department of Justice would have that incarcerated information. I would suspect that our local hospital or school district would have some information on disabilities.

I think it's just common knowledge that we have a language barrier out here and a low literacy level. I don't know where you would try and prove that, but it's something that exists. So I'd say it could be multiple source data points, but the ultimate weight would come down to the tribe's data and with everything else being supplementary, or if they can't have that tribal data or tribally generated data.

[\(02:32:01\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

With all these brands that are coming out because of ARPA and because everything else that's going on in the world, a lot of tribes are preparing to provide that data. Not many tribes are prepared to present it, but there are some who have thought about this and who have looked long-term in terms of this is what we're going to do, this is where we're going, this is how many people we have in covered households. I mean, our tribe in particular has three households per home. I mean, can you imagine that? It's just astounding. But we have that stat because we looked at it and because we said, "Hey, we need to figure this out". And that's all comes down to housing needs.

[\(02:32:54\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So collecting this data too, I mean when you talk about data sovereignty, that's for Ellen who was kind of asking about the planning too. I mean, that's one of the eligible uses of the planning, right? Is conducting this needs assessment so that you can determine the specific needs for this grant program of the individuals in your communities,

[\(02:33:20\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Which is all about engagement.

[\(02:33:22\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Right! It all goes down to engagement, right? That's right. So Kaye put in the chat. I think tribes should be able to use census data if they have that or can access it in their tribes. But some of the newer tribes, there is no census data, but they can use

their tribal rows. Kaye, would you mind coming off of mute and just kind of talking about that a little bit more?

Kaye Khabir-Harvey

[\(02:33:55\)](#):

Hello? Can you hear me?

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:33:57\)](#):

Yes

Kaye Khabir-Harvey

[\(02:33:58\)](#):

I'm with the **Monon** Indian Nation and one of the, we're not very new, but we were recognized in 2018. And a lot of our jobs in this area, which it's Virginia, so it's northern Virginia and down, we're in Central Virginia. We don't have any census data because for one, in our area, the local community government, they purposely try to eradicate our tribe through birthing records and stuff like that. So there is not census data for us for a long time and we're newly recognized, so there's still not very good census data for us. So we have to rely on our tribal roles to figure out how, what our demographics of our tribe looks like and through surveys. So I just think that maybe tribes should be able to use that if they can provide proof of the numbers that they put forth through their roles.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:35:19\)](#):

Okay, thank you. That was very helpful because I had not even, this is why we do these consultations to bring out things that we didn't even think about. Thank you.

Kaye Khabir-Harvey

[\(02:35:34\)](#):

I have another point. I was just thinking more about it. Even with the BIA, they do keep some records. I understand for tribes, they use their services, especially in the medical field, but in our area, we don't even have really that. Our tribe, we do have, they can come here to the office to use the BIA services for medical coverage and stuff, but the BIA in this area doesn't record that information and they don't share it with us. So we are getting a medical clinic so that information will be able to be quantified for us once that's filled. But so far that hasn't happened. It's happening, but it's not finished. So we don't even have that really to rely.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:36:33\)](#):

And you mentioned that you're receiving a medical clinic?

Kaye Khabir-Harvey

[\(02:36:36\)](#):

Yes, we're in the process of having one built, but it's still being built.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:36:44\)](#):

Okay, so I'm sorry, I'm just going to have to follow up on that. So with the medical clinic being built, was that through a grant? So were you able to pull some data to identify the need to be able to get the medical clinic there built?

[\(02:37:10\)](#):

Kaye Khabir-Harvey

No, that wasn't through a grant. We were actually were negotiating to have one here and the BIA didn't want to put one here. They wanted to put one in Richmond because there's more tribes up there. But Richmond's like a four hour drive from us. So the one thing good we do have is our tribe is one of the largest tribes on the, I guess the eastern half of the country or eastern side of the country. We have like 3000 members. They don't all live right here in central Virginia. But that was enough to get us, for us to make our argument and our pitch. And then we, luckily we had a governor that was pretty supportive of us, so he helped us with that argument and we were able to convince them to go ahead and get us a clinic built here instead of having our citizens have to go to Richmond. But it wasn't necessary. No, it wasn't a grant.

[\(02:38:23\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay, so it was based on population size that you were able to and strong advocacy and support.

[\(02:38:29\)](#):

Kaye Khabir-Harvey

Yeah.

[\(02:38:31\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Thank you. Thanks, Kaye. Christina just put in the chat, I would add that if the applicant has definable metrics in the application that it scores higher than a less lofty, less definable goals. Just to follow up on that, would it be helpful, as you talked about, our sample templates and projects, would it be helpful we provided sample metrics?

[\(02:39:07\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Probably because I think some people don't understand how to, when you set a goal, a SMART goal kind of template almost. This is something I've encouraged with individuals in putting together our saids and asking them to have evaluation measures is that that definable metric piece is something that some folks just can't wrap their head around. And they sometimes they do that purposefully so they can shift goals. But at the same time, it's not very helpful when you're trying to address something like digital equity. You have to have those defendable metrics. We will serve 90% of the population instead "of we're going to serve our tribal members with these services". It's like, okay, well how many people are you serving? And you hear the difference in how that was formed.

Or we are going to produce 16 trainings and we're going to be able to serve 85% of our population versus like we're going to hold a bunch of trainings. Those types of goals. I feel like maybe that would be, yeah, having some kind of template would be helpful so people could see the difference. I think that that's really needed to see success in a project, especially when you're expecting a quick success.

[\(02:40:36\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I would say that the tribes need to have a clear definition of what their digital equity program is and where it's destined to go. You broke out the fact that it is a long program. It's three, four years. And so where do we want to end up as tribes at three, four years? Where are we expected be ACT three, four years, and how did we get there?

[\(02:41:14\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. Okay. I'm going to ask this one question. I know this isn't on here, on this evaluation and award methodology. Should tribes be required to have a plan prior to submitting for capacity or have it plans for a plan if they're applying for the capacity program?

[\(02:41:40\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

I believe that considering the competitive nature of this program, the tribes better have their plan and they better have it set in place and they need to have the full support in the council so that when they do apply, there's no question, there's no question whatsoever about whether or not the tribe supports us. And there's no question about whether or not the tribe will succeed.

[\(02:42:07\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

So you would not, if I'm hearing you correctly, that you would not be a proponent of people being able to just apply for capacity to implement without having a plan articulated.

[\(02:42:19\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

At this point, anybody who applied for the NTIA grant applied for the use and adoption portion of it. They have their plans and if they're not willing to rework those plans to meet the standards, which you all have set, I'm sorry, but there's other tribes who have, and there's other tribes that are being competitive and want this for their bubble or want this for the reservation.

[\(02:42:54\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay, so I'm going to push back a little bit. So from equity, what would say your response be to those tribes who are less resourced, who didn't have the capacity to put a plan together and be able to compete? Do we...

[\(02:43:09\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

We, oh my. I would say why not? Why haven't you thought about this? Why haven't you said to myself, to whoever your program director is, digital equity. What do we do about it? If tribes haven't had the discussion yet, I mean, I feel bad for them, but it should not detriment those tribes that have had a discussion. Those tribes that have a plan, those tribes that know what they want to do to make sure that digital equity happens in their tribe, that they get 90% participation rate, that they get the buy-in. I mean, the buy-in the most important part, if you haven't gotten a buy-in, I mean, what have you got?

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:44:06\)](#):

Okay. All right, Christina.

[\(02:44:13\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, I guess I would say, if you haven't been talking about digital equity issues, even if not in the same...if you haven't had these conversations yet in any capacity and don't have an idea of what the needs are, then you still have some work to do before you're at the application process.

And then I do recognize there are communities that haven't been able to put in the time to create a plan yet. Maybe they just are at capacity. And so if they have an idea of where they want to go though, like a plan for the plan, that's going to help those tribes that didn't have that capacity before be able to create the plan because they have an idea of what areas they want to go for. That might change. Plans are plans. They're not set in stone, but you need to have a direction. You can't just go.

[\(02:45:11\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Also, I mean, I think Christina mentioned it perfectly when she said we need templates. Those templates will go a far way in terms of getting us ahead of the game, in terms of making sure that we're addressing every single issue that NTIA will have. And I hope that with those templates, those tribes who are maybe behind, because there are a lot of tribes who are behind, will catch up.

[\(02:45:40\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Okay. I mean, we do want to be mindful too that we're not exacerbating and widening this digital divide even within the communities. So I mean, you recognize just from these questions all of the different things that we're trying to balance. I see Nefetiti put in the chat, there's a difference from having the discussion and having a plan

Lawrence Pena

[\(02:46:09\)](#):

For my months ago, and we talked about what that means.

[\(02:46:19\)](#):

And it wasn't about the computer, it wasn't about the development. It was about that chance, that chance to be better. And representatives of Pure understands that our people just want the best for their lives. And whatever means necessary, they'll get it. And I'm praying it's a federal government program like this, they don't have, right now, they don't have it. And I hope that when you look at the bottom line, when you look at the end result, it'll be,

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:47:14\)](#):

You broke up Lawrence. Sorry.

[\(02:47:17\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

Sorry. I just wish that, hopefully the end of the result is all being digital equity. That's the bottom line. Equity

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:47:27\)](#):

Equity. Right. Okay. Any other comments, questions, Christina?

[\(02:47:37\)](#):

Christina Andrew

Yeah, this makes me think because there's definitely going to be people left on the other side of the divide when this all shakes out, right?

[\(02:47:44\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Yeah.

[\(02:47:45\)](#):

Christina Andrew

What's t's plan to go forward full Well, knowing that there's limited resources right now to just, and we're trying to get things out the door. People are expecting this. What's the plan for those that are left on the other side in five years? Is NTIA thinking about, can you maybe pull together a smaller program to help that's very technical assisted heavy for the tribes that lacked that capacity, that didn't have the discussions, that didn't start creating a plan for the plan to pull them through to the other side of the divide? Maybe it's not necessarily in the way that they didn't get a chance to set every stone in place, but at least they're on the other side. And it could be more of a cooperative agreement where it's definitely a partnership with NTIA and that tribe to ensure that they're going to cross the digital divide.

[\(02:48:49\)](#):

Angela Thi Bennett

Those are great questions, Christina, where we're bound by the legislation and how as far as this program and if there's future funding opportunities that would be within the power and the discretion of Congress.

And so if those opportunities are made available, we would love, I mean, we definitely hear the need. We're highly sensitive to it. And even within the bounds of this program, we will make every attempt to provide as much technical assistance as we can to help with that capacity. In an ideal world, I mean, this is where a consortium, right? Partnerships would be able to help those tribes that are having the discussions but really needing that support to be able to operationalize those discussions into a plan. But I can share that as we roll out this program, we will try to deliver as much technical assistance as possible to empower those tribal communities to be able to compete.

[\(02:50:07\)](#):

Lawrence Pena

If I can speak for myself, **XX** tribe, you guys have been by far what should have been done 20 years ago. You, NTIA in particular, has been beneficial to all of us tribes because we are now meeting on a biweekly basis. I mean, I hear the same thing about NTIA, but I know it's moving. And the fact that the federal government is focused, that's the key word, focused on providing us access is key. It's key to end

that trust relationship. It's key to end that dependence on federal assistance. It's key to so many things that I really hope that whatever, regardless of what administration comes in, you all continue that focus. Because infrastructure, broadband infrastructure is our new electricity.

[\(02:51:18\)](#):

And if the tribes don't get that, can you imagine what it will happen? Who? I mean, that's a scary thought.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:51:30\)](#):

I agree Lawrence.

Lawrence Pena

[\(02:51:31\)](#):

Thank you.

Angela Thi Bennett

[\(02:51:32\)](#):

Thank you. I know we're getting towards time. I just want to just really express my appreciation for everyone for joining, for your comments, for your feedback, for listening. I'm sure some folks prefer to listen and then respond later. We all have different styles and I want to just kind of acknowledge and appreciate that. And so if you heard something today and if you've had some time to think about it, you can one, either join us on Thursday or you can email your comments and send them to us that way.

So just want to thank everyone. Your feedback can be sent to digitalequity@ntia.gov. It's not due until November 16th at eight o'clock eastern, five o'clock Pacific, acknowledging that most of our tribes are on different time zones than our Eastern time zones. And so want to be respectful of that as well. And if you have questions in the meantime, feel free to also send your question to that email. I'm on the other side of that email, so we'll definitely provide responses as well. And so thank you and enjoy the rest of your day.