

Supporting Digital Literacy Programming to Advance Workforce Readiness, Educational Attainment, Telehealth Access, and Technological Confidence

Issue: The increasing reliance on digital tools for employment, education, healthcare, and essential services has amplified the urgency of ensuring all residents have access to digital literacy programming.

Proposed Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and relevant federal agencies to expand funding and support for county-led and community-based digital literacy programs. These programs should include digital skills training for workforce development, education, telehealth access, and general technology confidence-building initiatives. NACo also supports policy and funding efforts that enhance coordination between federal, state, and local stakeholders to improve digital skill-building infrastructure and enhanced access to digital tools.

Background: Digital skills have become a basic requirement for full participation in society. Whether applying for a job, accessing virtual classrooms, participating in telehealth appointments, or managing personal finances online, residents must possess a foundational level of digital competence. Counties are increasingly responding to these needs by investing in digital literacy programming that builds individual capacity and removes barriers to digital access.

Programs that offer one-on-one digital navigator services, structured curricula for skilling and upskilling, and targeted outreach to vulnerable populations—such as older adults, veterans, low-income households, non-native English speakers, and individuals with disabilities—have demonstrated measurable impact in bridging the digital divide. Without continued investment, counties risk leaving behind those most in need of digital access and support.

The need for inclusive digital literacy programming is underscored by compelling national data. According to Pew Research Center, nearly 15% of U.S. adults do not use the internet at all, with significantly higher rates among older adults, those without a high school diploma, and individuals with annual incomes below \$30,000. Additionally, over one-third of workers report lacking the digital skills required to successfully perform their jobs—a challenge particularly acute among individuals without access to ongoing skilling opportunities.

It is essential to sustain and expand local programs that help residents build the skills and confidence they need to use technology effectively. Doing so will ensure more people can participate fully in modern society, improve their economic well-being, connect to healthcare and education, and stay informed and engaged in their communities.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact: Increased federal funding for digital literacy programs would enable counties to expand services, partner with local organizations, and deploy more inclusive strategies tailored to rural, urban, and underserved communities alike. This support would ensure sustainable and scalable access to the digital economy and essential online services.

Sponsor: Board Member Jennifer Clark, Lake County, Illinois