THE STATE OF DIGITAL EQUITY IN **NORTH CAROLINA**

IF EVERYONE HAD FREE ACCESS TO FAST AND RELIABLE INTERNET, WOULD THAT SOLVE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE?

IT'S TIME TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN NORTH CAROLINA

At least 1.1 million North Carolina households lack access to high-speed internet, cannot afford it or do not have the skills needed to take advantage of the digital economy. Gov. Roy Cooper has prioritized closing the digital divide to achieve digital equity for all North Carolinians.

DIGITAL EQUITY
DIGITAL INCLUSION
DIGITAL DIVIDE

DIGITAL EQUITY (THE GOAL)

- All individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy

- Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services

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DIGITAL INCLUSION (THE WORK)

- Activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies:

  - Access to affordable high-speed internet

  - Access to a device that meets the needs of the user

  - Access to digital literacy training

  - Quality technical support

  - Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration

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DIGITAL DIVIDE (THE CHALLENGE)

- Gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not

- Disproportionately affects people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults

BROADBAND AFFORDABILITY

1.3 million

N.C. households would have to pay more than two percent of their annual income to afford broadband cost of $60/month

Many low-income households must decide between purchasing high-speed internet or other necessities

DIGITAL DEVICES

328,000

Estimated N.C. households without a home laptop or desktop computer

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DIGITAL SKILLS

91%
of N.C. jobs require some digital skills

Source: National Skills Coalition

1/3
of U.S. workers don't have foundational digital skills

Source: National Skills Coalition

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THE OPPORTUNITY

BEAD & DIGITAL EQUITY TIMELINE

November 2022:
NC awarded funds for planning

June 2023:
Notice of State Funding Allocation from NTIA & Draft Plan posted for public comments

December 2023:
Draft Digital Equity Plan posted for public comments

2023-2028
BEAD and Digital Equity Plans Implemented & Additional Federal Funding Sought

January to August 2023:
Local Coordination: Listening Sessions; Needs Assessment; Asset Inventory

July 2023:
BEAD Five-Year Plan Due to NTIA

February 2024:
Digital Equity Plan due to NTIA

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PLANNING PROCESS

Phase 1: Identifying Key Partners and Developing an Outreach Plan

Phase 2: Community Outreach and Data Collection

- Hosted nine public regional convenings
- Developing an asset inventory of more than 1,300 resources, programs and initiatives
- Deployed first of its kind Digital Equity Survey, which received more than 7,000 survey responses May through October 2023
- Hosted 23 listening sessions focused on the needs and experiences of covered populations, including tribal communities

Phase 3: Plan Development and Public Comment

- Describes efforts to advance digital equity and commits to continued outreach and partnership through public comment and public engagement
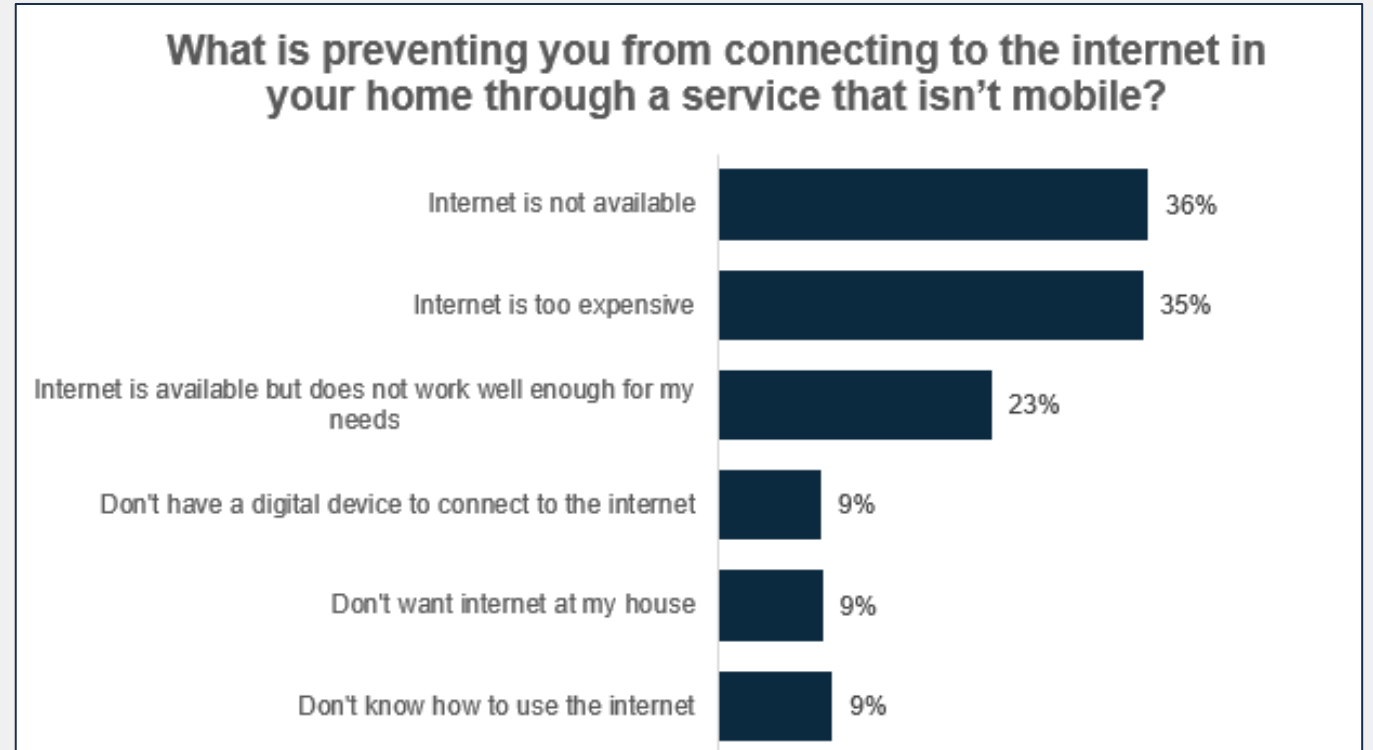
BARRIERS AND NEEDS

1. Access to and affordability of high-speed internet

2. Accessibility and inclusivity of online public resources

3. Digital literacy

4. Cybersecurity and privacy

5. Availability and affordability of devices and technical support

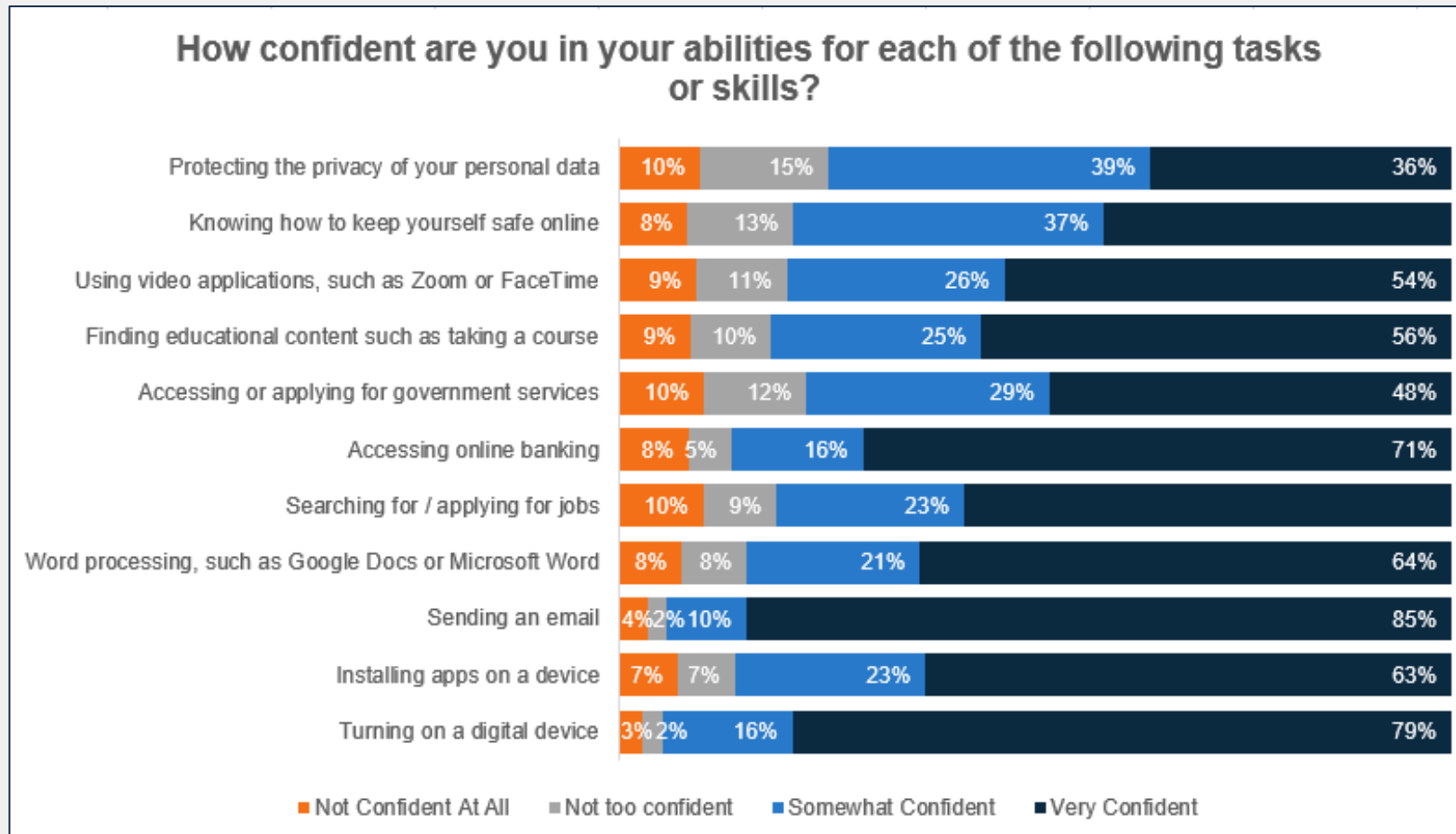# BARRIERS AND NEEDS: ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

Barriers and Needs

- Limited service providers

- Inadequate broadband coverage

- More public Wi-Fi in downtowns

- Affordable and reliable service

- Internet access (infrastructure)

What is preventing you from connecting to the internet in your home through a service that isn't mobile?

Reason	Percentage
Internet is not available	36%
Internet is too expensive	35%
Internet is available but does not work well enough for my needs	23%
Don't have a digital device to connect to the internet	9%
Don't want internet at my house	9%
Don't know how to use the internet	9%

"I couldn't work without reliable internet, and my young adult/teen kids would struggle with their work and school. Days when the internet cuts out are really tricky."
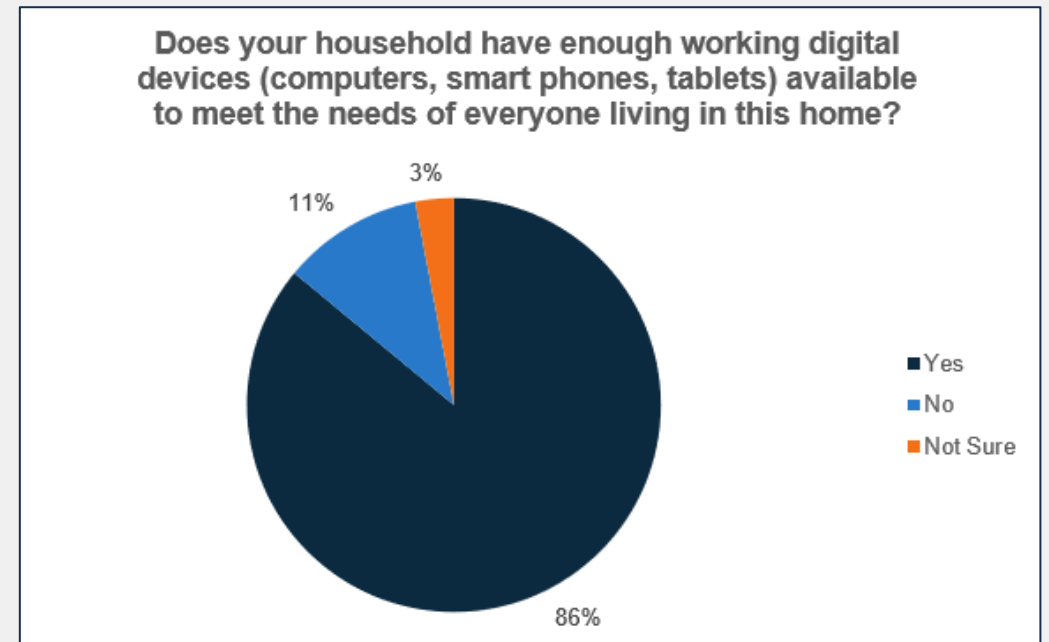
BARRIERS AND NEEDS: DIGITAL LITERACY

How confident are you in your abilities for each of the following tasks or skills?

Task/Skill	Not Confident At All	Not too confident	Somewhat Confident	Very Confident
Protecting the privacy of your personal data	10%	15%	39%	36%
Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	8%	13%	37%	
Using video applications, such as Zoom or FaceTime	9%	11%	26%	54%
Finding educational content such as taking a course	9%	10%	25%	56%
Accessing or applying for government services	10%	12%	29%	48%
Accessing online banking	8%	5%	16%	71%
Searching for / applying for jobs	10%	9%	23%	
Word processing, such as Google Docs or Microsoft Word	8%	8%	21%	64%
Sending an email	4%	2%	10%	85%
Installing apps on a device	7%	7%	23%	63%
Turning on a digital device	3%	2%	16%	79%

"If I had the digital skills, it would have made the transition to get on my feet sooner and easier."

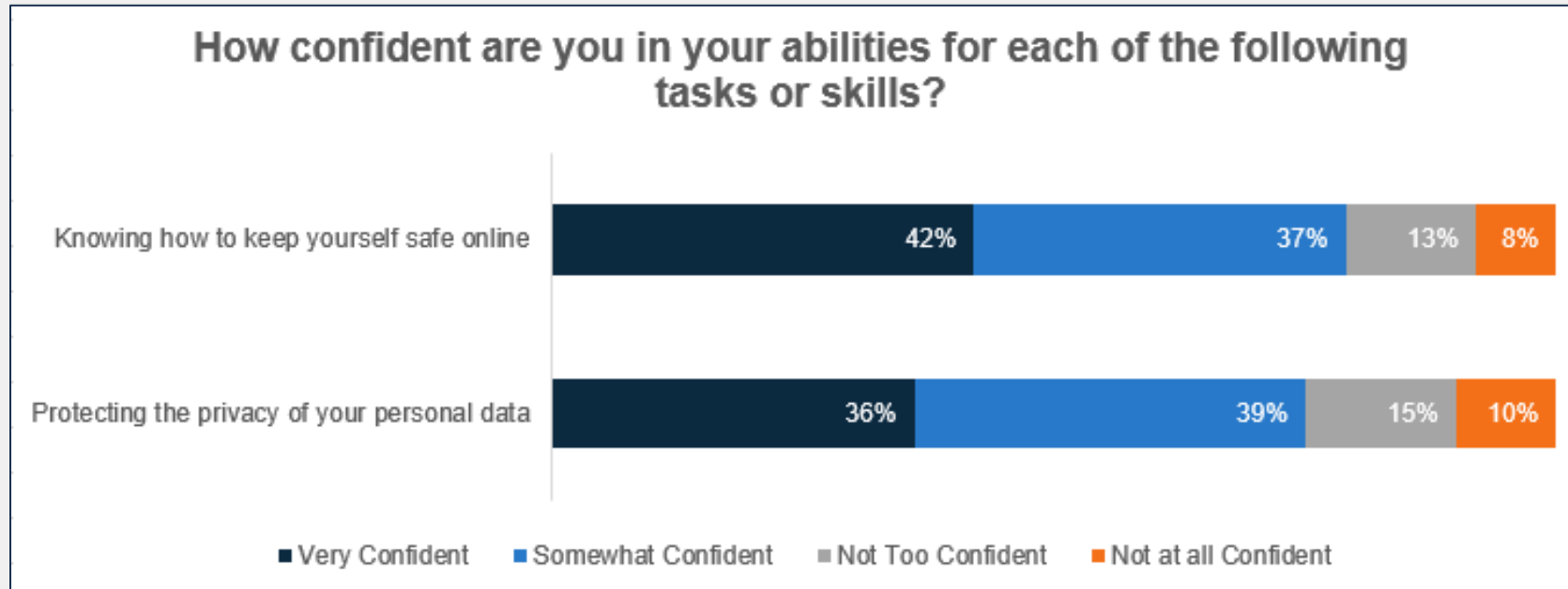# BARRIERS AND NEEDS: DEVICES & TECH SUPPORT

Barriers and Needs

- Outdated technology

- Lack of or unaffordable technical support

- Devices at public spaces often have time limits

- Need local device refurbishers to provide high-quality, low-cost devices

Does your household have enough working digital devices (computers, smart phones, tablets) available to meet the needs of everyone living in this home?

3%

11%

86%

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

BARRIERS AND NEEDS: ONLINE SAFETY

Cybersecurity and Privacy

How confident are you in your abilities for each of the following tasks or skills?

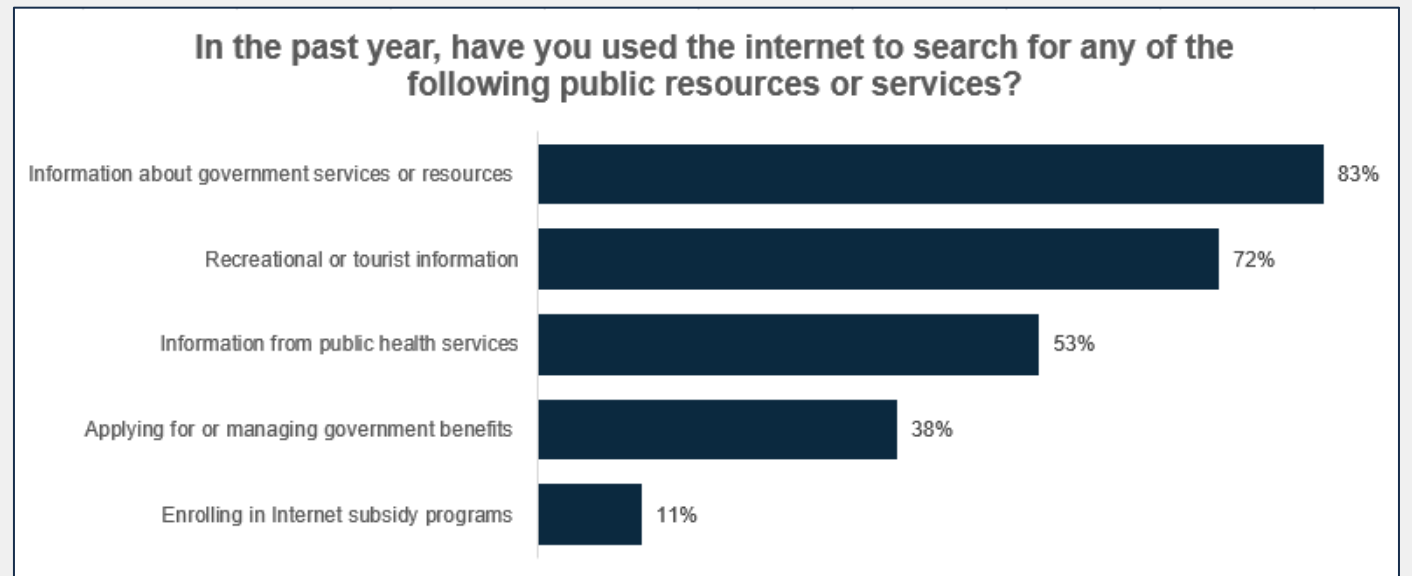|	Very Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Too Confident	Not at all Confident
Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	42%	37%	13%	8%
Protecting the privacy of your personal data	36%	39%	15%	10%

"The younger generations know the security of the internet pretty well, but I'd like to know more about a VPN and other security things."

BARRIERS AND NEEDS: ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVITY (PUBLIC SERVICES)

Barriers and Needs:

- Lack of language accessibility
- Internet searches not meeting their needs
  - Benefits programs
- Plain and accessible language

In the past year, have you used the internet to search for any of the following public resources or services?

Resource or Service	Percentage
Information about government services or resources	83%
Recreational or tourist information	72%
Information from public health services	53%
Applying for or managing government benefits	38%
Enrolling in Internet subsidy programs	11%

"I still need help with websites or searches in my language, if it had more languages, it would be easier."

WHAT RESONATES WITH YOU?

WHAT'S NEXT?

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- **Strategy 1: All North Carolinians have access to high-speed internet and to affordable, low-cost internet services**

  - By 2029: 100% of unserved and underserved households have access to high-speed internet (*472,676 unserved and underserved households*)

  - By 2028: 90% of households subscribe to high-speed internet (adoption rate) and reduce the disparity across covered populations *(Currently 85%)*

- **Strategy 2: Promote practices that support online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services**

  - By 2028, increase in confidence to access or apply online for government services by 5%

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

- **Strategy 3: Ensure that North Carolinians can acquire the digital skills and understanding to meet their personal needs and the workforce needs of the state**

  - By 2028, increase in percentage of North Carolinians who are confident using word processing programs, finding educational content, applying for jobs, and communicating with a healthcare provider by 10%

  - By 2028, increase access to and geographic reach of services that meet individual needs to advance digital literacy including digital navigator programs

- **Strategy 4: Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security**

  - By 2028, improve confidence and ability to protect personal data online by 10%

MEASURABLE GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- **Strategy 5: Ensure that North Carolinians have access to digital devices to meet their needs**

  - By 2028, all North Carolinians have access to a quality public computer through a community anchor institution

  - By 2028, 95% of North Carolina households will own a working, large-screen device (92% currently)

STAY IN TOUCH

Division of Broadband and Digital Equity Resources:

- o Digital Equity Plan draft
  https://www.ncbroadband.gov/Digital-Equity-Plan

- o Digital Equity Survey Dashboard
  https://www.ncbroadband.gov/surveys/digital-equity-survey

- o Broadband Maps:
  https://www.nconemap.gov/pages/broadband

- o BEAD and Digital Equity Planning Info and Resources:
  https://www.ncbroadband.gov/BEAD

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QUESTIONS?

Maggie Woods
maggie.woods@nc.gov