

Equity Action Plan Digest: Federal Communications Commission

Summarized by Travis Reginal

This is one in a series of Urban Institute digests summarizing federal agencies', subagencies', and commissions' 2022 equity action plans, which were released in response to the Biden administration's January 2021 executive order, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The Federal Communications Commission's equity action plan is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/federal-communications-commission-equity-action-plan>.

Overview

What <i>problem</i> is the agency trying to solve?	Facilitating equal access to broadband and preventing digital discrimination of access (p. 2)
Priority groups	Historically underserved people, people of color, people who live in rural areas, people with disabilities, tribal nations (p. 4)
Historic harm mentioned?	No
Partners in implementation	Community groups, faith-based institutions, tribal nations, libraries, schools (p. 6)
Equity defined as	"Provision of and access to digital communication services and products for all people of the United States, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, or disability" (p. 3)

Pillars and Principles of Equity

Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers	Digital divide (p. 4); expensive broadband services (p. 5); homework gap where children are lagging behind their peers due to lack of broadband access (p. 7); unreliable broadband connections (p. 9)
Impact goals	Preventing digital discrimination (p. 4); affordable internet service (p. 5); more detailed broadband availability maps (p. 8)
Actions and activities	Discounts for internet services (p. 6); providing laptops and Wi-Fi hot spots to students, school staff, and library patrons (p. 7); new webpage (www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData) (p. 9)
Accountability measures and approaches	Infrastructure and Investment Job Act requirements (p. 5); public comments for rules (p. 5)

Note: For the rubric we used to evaluate these components of the equity action plans, see the appendix to the Urban Institute's 2023 brief "Pathways to Equity at Scale: An Analysis of the 2022 Federal Equity Action Plans and Recommendations for 2023 Plans," available at https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf.

Types of Equity and Related Activities

Procedural (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Using government navigators at the state and local levels to help communities navigate the application process for subsidized internet (p. 7); included a strategic goal to pursue a “100 percent” broadband policy (p. 8); conduct listening sessions
Distributional (example: creating new procurement program)	Launched the Affordable Connectivity Program (p. 5); launched the Emergency Connectivity Fund (p. 7)
Structural (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Created the cross-agency Task Force to Prevent Digital Discrimination (p. 4); rechartered the Communications Equity and Diversity Council (p. 4); adopting new consumer protection policies (p. 7); formed the Broadband Data Task Force (p. 9)

Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ adopting final rules to facilitate equal access to broadband no later than November 15, 2023 (p. 5)■ number of Affordable Connectivity Program enrollments and claims (p. 6)■ number of Emergency Connectivity Fund applications and claims (p. 8)■ quality and availability of broadband services (p. 9)
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Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Diagnose barriers to connectivity based on listening sessions and needs identified in emergency applications, and create ongoing program structures to support those needs
Areas for future investment and growth	Potential collaboration with other agencies deploying Infrastructure and Investment Job Act funds to increase access in underserved areas and enforce antidiscrimination rules
