Division of Broadband and Digital Equity

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 a plan to close the digital divide to achieve digital equity for all North Carolinians.

SETTING THE STAGE

DEFINITIONS

- **Digital Equity:** 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.

- **Digital Inclusion:** 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; and

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

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STATE OF DIGITAL EQUITY

Infrastructure

At least 266,000 North Carolina households, likely much higher, currently do not have access to high-speed internet of 100/10+ due to lack of infrastructure.[3]
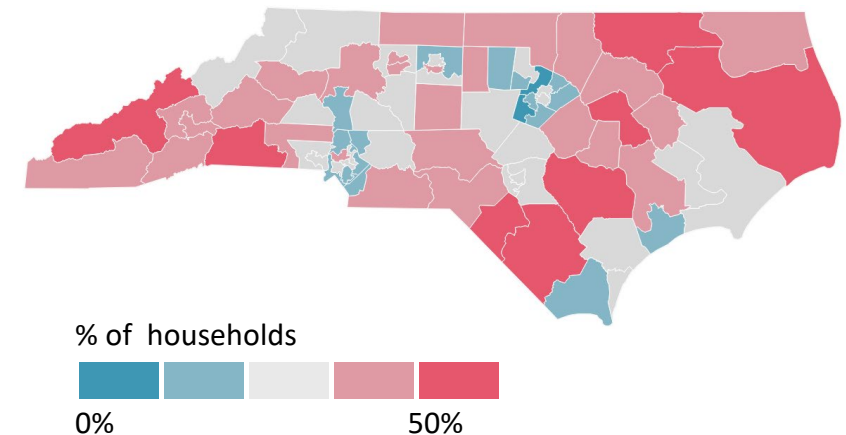
Affordability

Approximately 1.3 million households would have to pay more than 2% of their annual income to afford a broadband cost of $60/month.[4]

Devices and Digital Literacy

An estimated 430,000 households are without a home laptop or desktop computer. Of those, approximately 180,000 do not have a smartphone.[5] As many as 1.2 million adults may lack the digital literacy required to begin taking advantage of digital services.[6]

Percent of Households Without a High-Speed Internet Subscription (2019)[7]

% of households

0%   50%

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Achieving Digital Equity in North Carolina

	N.C. Today	N.C. 2025
Households with broadband internet access	"95.5%"	98%
Households with broadband internet subscriptions	73%	80%
Households with children with broadband internet subscriptions	81%	100%
Adoption rates across racial subgroups		
• Native American	57%	80%
• Black	64%	80%
• Hispanic/Latinx	68%	80%
• White	76%	80%

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Common Barriers to Broadband Adoption

Cost

Digital Literacy

Relevancy

Access

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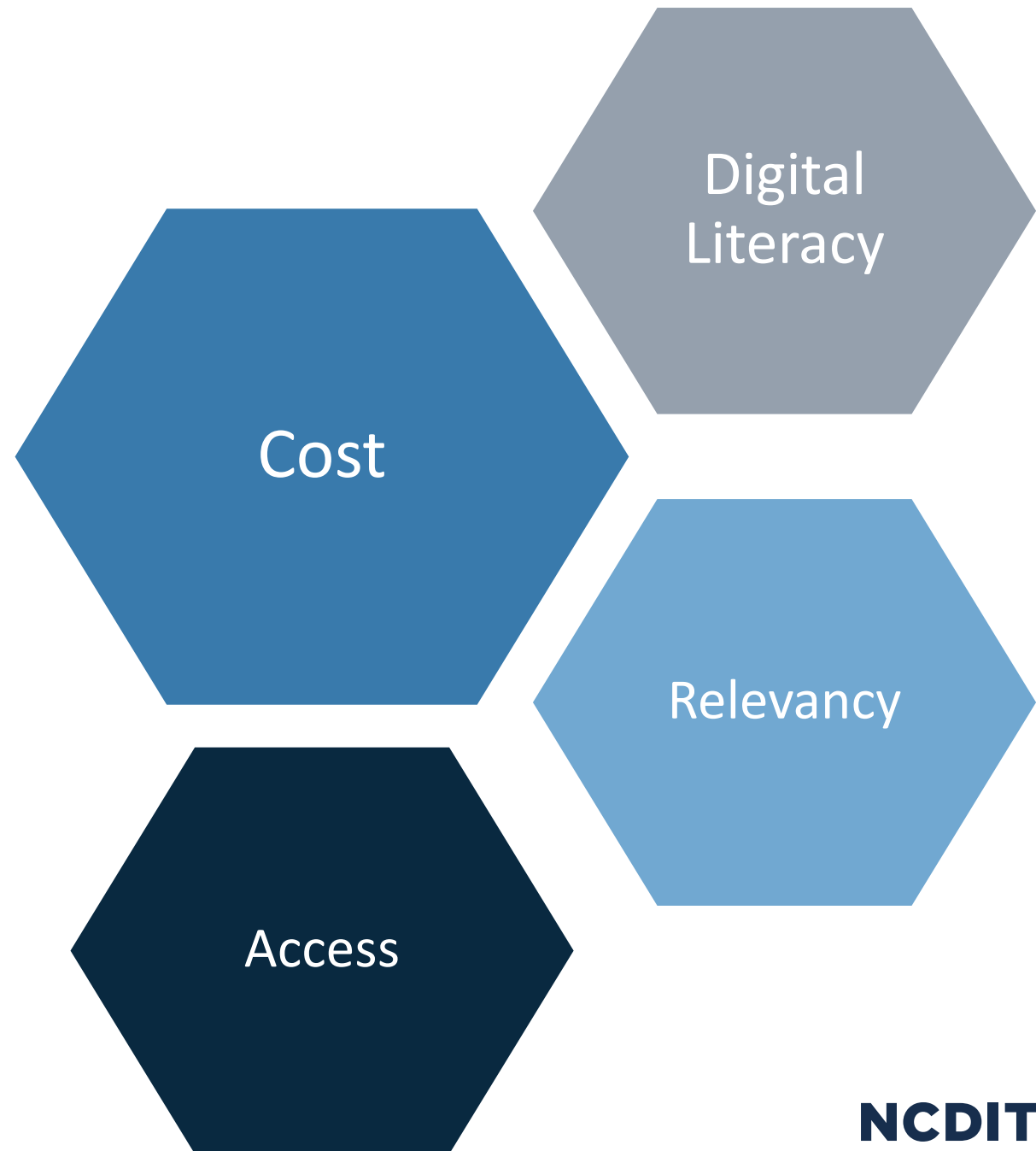
The Funding: American Rescue Plan

INFRASTRUCTURE

$971M — Ensure availability of internet service at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps for more than 98% of North Carolina households

$380M
- GREAT Grant ($350M American Rescue Plan Act; $30 State CIF)

$400M
- Completing Access to Broadband (CAB)

$90M
- Stop Gap Solutions

$100M
- Broadband Make Ready Accelerator (Pole Replacement Fund)

$1M
- Broadband Mapping

AWARENESS AND DIGITAL LITERACY

$50M — Improve awareness and enable North Carolinians to realize the benefits of high-speed internet through digital literacy and upskilling aimed at accessing the digital economy.
- Increase enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program
- Increase access to devices for households
- Increase access to high quality digital literacy and skills training
- Build local digital equity capacity

Why does Digital Equity matter?

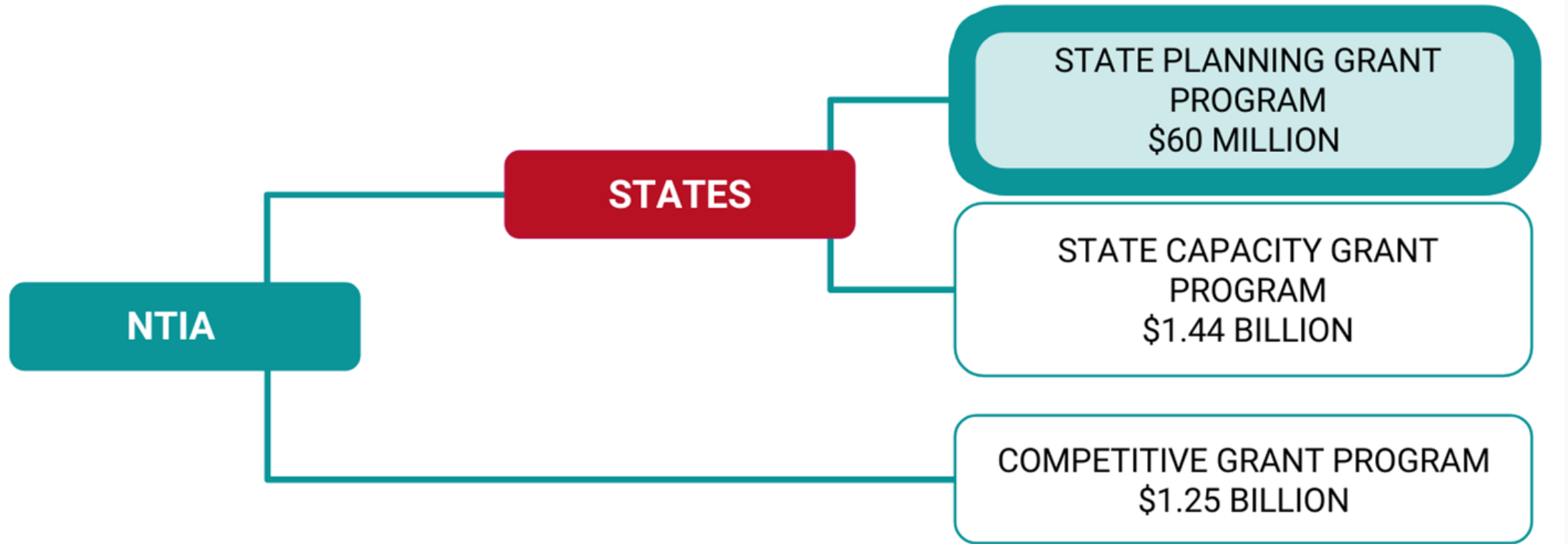- Workforce/Economic Development:
  - Nearly one in three U.S. workers (31%) had few or no digital skills (National Skills Alliance)

  - High levels of broadband adoption in nonmetropolitan counties are *positively* associated with higher numbers of businesses and jobs, meaning internet adoption is a driver of economic growth (Gallardo)

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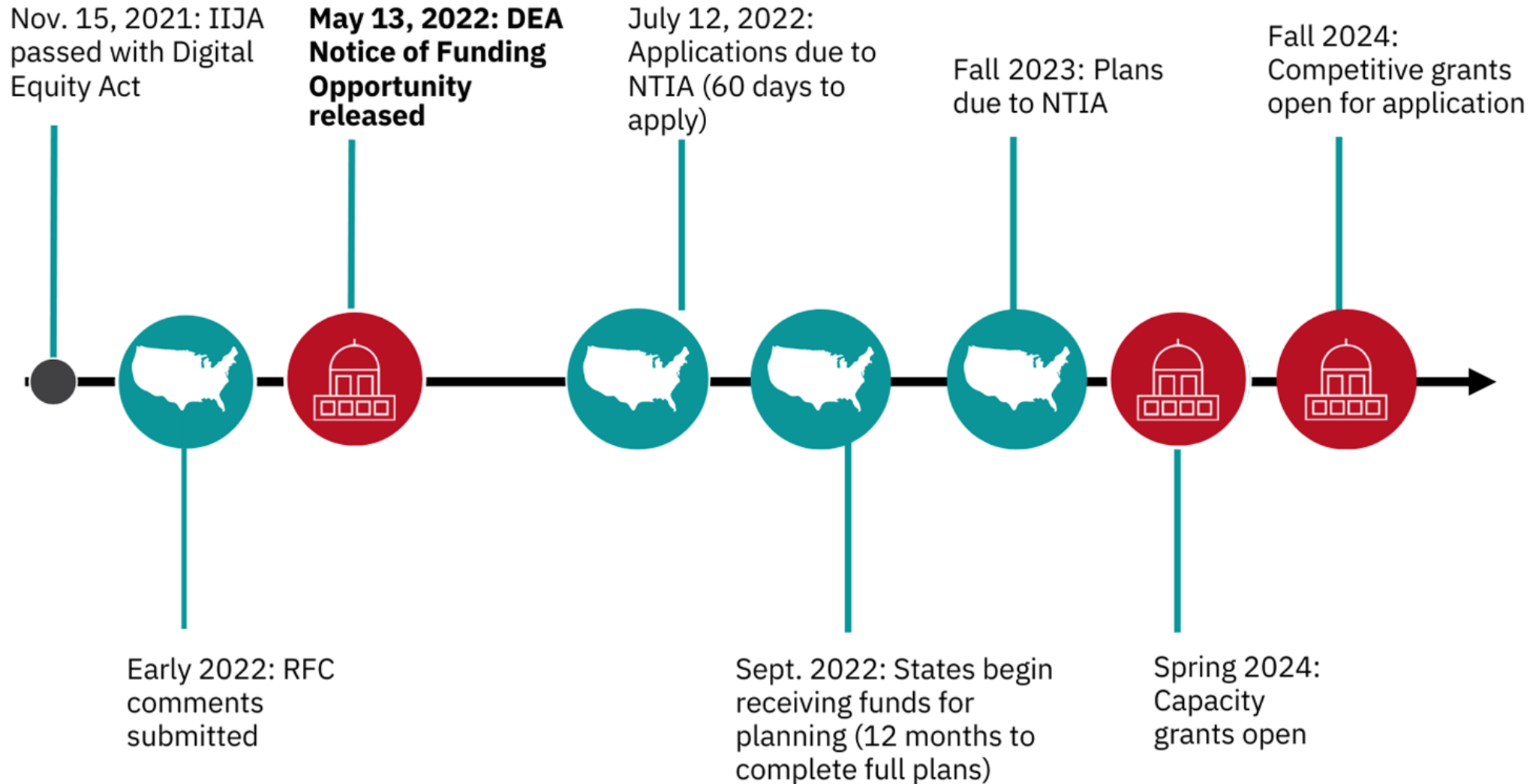
Why does Digital Equity matter?

- Healthcare:
  - Blue Cross NC saw its members' telehealth usage increase by more than 7,500 percent in 2020

- Education:
  - Only 81% of NC households with children have a broadband internet subscription

DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING

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DIGITAL EQUITY ACT PROGRAMS

TIMELINE

Nov. 15, 2021: IIJA passed with Digital Equity Act

May 13, 2022: DEA Notice of Funding Opportunity released

July 12, 2022: Applications due to NTIA (60 days to apply)

Fall 2023: Plans due to NTIA

Fall 2024: Competitive grants open for application

Early 2022: RFC comments submitted

Sept. 2022: States begin receiving funds for planning (12 months to complete full plans)

Spring 2024: Capacity grants open

NDIA
NATIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE

PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Aims to focus on the needs of the following groups:

- Aging individuals
- Individuals who live in households at or below 150% of Federal poverty level
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy
- Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
- Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility
- Veterans

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STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING

- Year-long state digital equity planning process (Set policy priorities for next 5 years)
  - Identify barriers to digital equity for general and priority populations:
    - Listening sessions with priority populations
    - Regional Convenings
    - Surveys
    - Data baseline
  - Develop measurable objectives for overcoming barriers
  - Asset Inventory and Needs Assessment
  - Integrate local digital inclusion plans into the state plan
  - Interagency coordination

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STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING

- A holistic implementation strategy that addresses the barriers to participation in the digital world, and includes measurable goals, objectives, and proposed core activities to address the needs of covered populations, establishes measures to <mark>ensure the plan's sustainability and effectiveness</mark>, and mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and update

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STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING
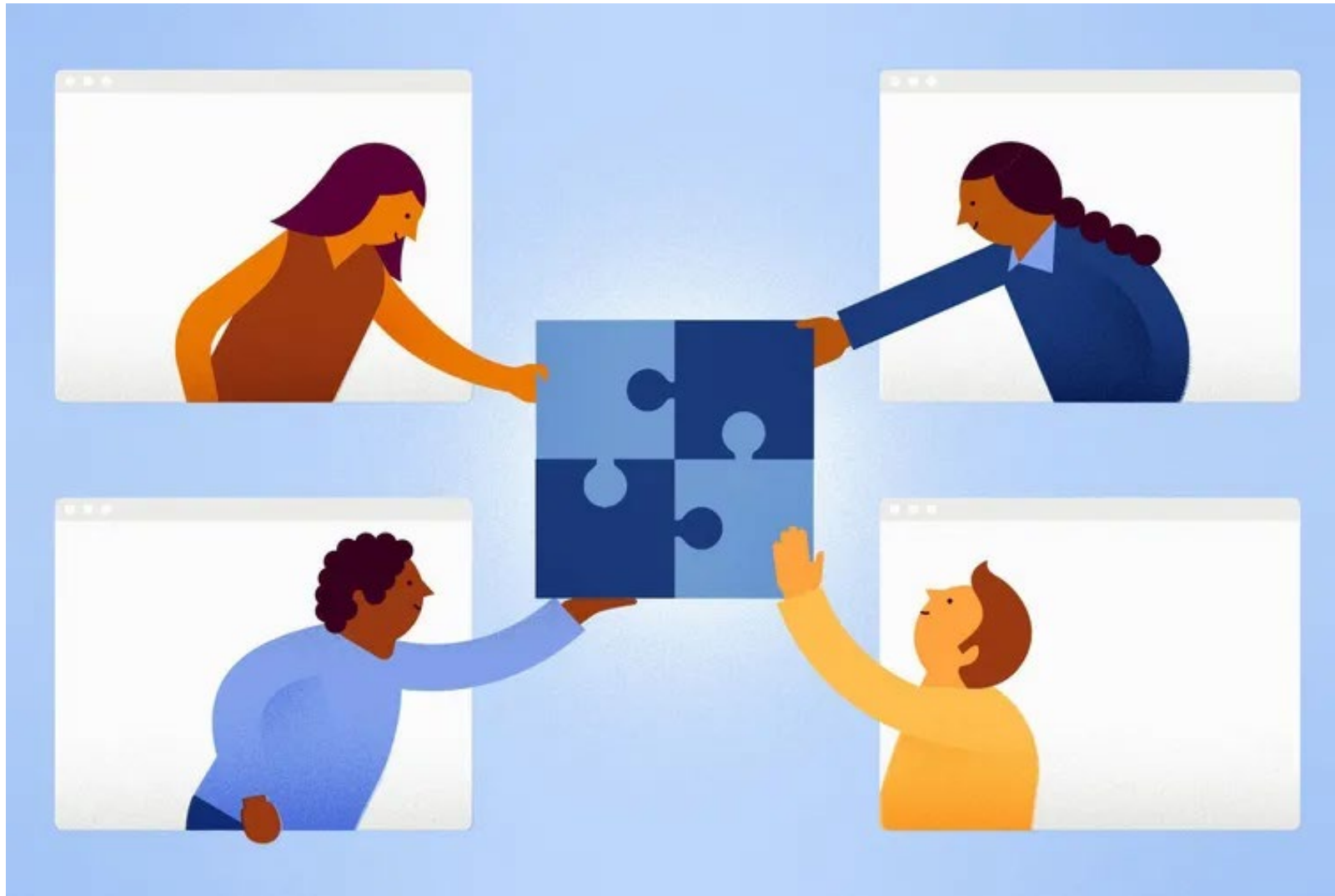
NC PHILANTHROPIC WORKING GROUP ON DIGITAL INCLUSION & EQUITY

- DRAFT PURPOSE:
  - To inform the State's digital equity plan, including clarity about what role philanthropy will play in helping to implement it
  - To be informed by the State's digital equity plan
  - To consider philanthropy's collective action in helping NC become the most digitally equitable state in the US by 2030

- OSP will staff it, with assistance from NCDIT and philanthropy

- First meeting to be during NCNG Annual Meeting (exact time TBD)
  - Revise goals; set meeting frequency; co-chairs?

- Contact joy.vermillion@osbm.nc.gov

NC Office of
Strategic Partnerships