



COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

CITY COUNCIL of SALT LAKE CITY

TO: City Council Members

FROM: Kira Luke
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DATE: August 18, 2020

RE: Salt Lake City Digital Equity Policy

ISSUE AT-A-GLANCE

The Administration is recommending adoption of a **Digital Equity Policy** to guide the City's investments and policymaking toward improving digital literacy and technology access for all residents. The proposal is rooted in the premise that Salt Lake City's residents lack equal access to internet, computers, up-to-date hardware/software, or the training to maximize use of them, and the belief that government plays a role in ensuring equal access. According to [2018 American Community Survey data](#), 13.3% of households in Salt Lake City do not have internet access, and 5.4% have no computer. The impact of this digital divide is underscored during the global pandemic, as many social programs and services have gone primarily virtual.



The proposal arrives at a time when the City is critically examining equity in all aspects of how communities are served. At the time of publication, the Administration is developing the scope of a request for proposal (RFP), to conduct a Citywide **equity study** to identify equity disparities throughout Salt Lake City and develop recommendations to remedy them. The Council approved \$100,000 for the study in Budget Amendment 4 of Fiscal Year 20.

The proposed **Digital Equity Policy** focuses on the values, decision-making framework, and strategies the City can support to confront imbalances specifically relating to digital equity. While this guiding policy does not contain specific projects or proposals, it establishes a baseline of the City's values and goals for future equity-driven initiatives relating to digital access. This is comparable to a Master Plan, which enacts no wholesale changes as a standalone document, but provides a foundation to guide to ordinance amendments, zoning, and City investments. The Policy directly refers to [Plan Salt Lake](#), a vision document adopted in 2015, as an aligning framework (Administrative Transmittal, Page 7). Although Plan Salt Lake doesn't specifically call out the need for *digital* equity, Equity is one of the guiding principles.

The policy draws upon national digital equity standards provided by the [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) (NDIA) and affirms the following five components as essential in a digitally-equitable society (Administrative Transmittal, page 8).

- 1) Affordable, robust broadband internet service;
- 2) Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
- 3) Access to digital literacy training;



- 4) Quality technical support; and
- 5) Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Adoption of the policy would signal an intent to support programs and partnerships that would advance these goals in Salt Lake City. Funding and more specific requests are anticipated in order to enact specific goals, such as anticipated needs assessments and any resulting programs that are proposed in the needs assessment process.

POLICY QUESTIONS

- 1) **Does this cover it?** The Council may wish to discuss, does the language of the policy encompass the Council's values relating to Digital Equity?
- 2) **What are we going to do with it?**
 - a) The Council may wish to ask the Administration for an update on any projects currently planned relating to this framework.
 - b) Does the Council wish to discuss related projects or initiatives they would like to see pursued?
- 3) **Do we need more information to act upon this policy?** At the time of the policy's initiation in 2018, a previous draft had contemplated conducting one or more needs assessments of existing access within the City. This may now be encompassed in the aforementioned **Equity Study**. The Council may wish to discuss whether they would like formal briefings on the results of any assessments related to digital equity within the City.
- 4) **Will it cost anything?** Does the Council want to discuss any potential financial investments that may be needed in order to fulfill the policy's vision?
 - a) In the Fiscal Year 2020-21 budget discussions, the Council designated \$1.67 million for investments in underserved neighborhoods.
- 5) **Who is with us?**
 - a) **Partnerships:** The Council may wish to ask whether the Administration has considered pursuing an arrangement or agreement with any partners who would share goals, information, and/or resources in this effort. For example, previous conversations with internet/telecommunication providers were hoped to be an avenue to pursue the City's digital equity goals. The school district, library, and other organizations have faced the effects of digital divides, especially during the pandemic. An agreement could be patterned after an Interlocal Cooperation Agreement with entities working toward shared sustainability goals.
 - b) **Franchise and Master License Agreements:** The Council occasionally enters into 10-year agreements with Telecommunications Providers to provide City rights-of-way access. The Council may wish to ask the Administration, will the City's standard agreement template be altered to include consideration of the City's digital equity goals?
- 6) **What comes next?** In the midst of the pandemic and discussion about racial equity, the Council and Administration could discuss how findings in this process (either through the **Equity Study**, potential partnerships, community conversations, etc.) can help inform other efforts to eliminate systemic racism. The importance of connecting with communities across digital, geographic, racial, economic divides could have valuable overlap for how public engagement, infrastructure investment, and development projects move forward in the City. If this holistic approach is desirable, the Council may wish to have a discussion about the other budget resources that would be needed.

ADDITIONAL & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Digital Equity Policy builds upon research conducted locally, by Utah Communities Connect, and nationally, by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA). Utah Communities Connect is a volunteer alliance focused on digital inequity in Utah, with stakeholders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. NDIA is "a unified voice for home broadband access, public broadband access, personal devices and local technology training and support programs" (www.digitalinclusion.org).

Engagement: The Administration used several engagement strategies in the process of drafting and revising the Digital Equity Policy, and included an engagement summary in page 21 of the transmittal. This process included academic and professional stakeholders and community partners, as well as the City's Human Rights Commission in April 2019.