Rural Library Digital Navigators in Oklahoma – Summary Brief

**Program Description:** Since 2017, AARP and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) have collaborated with rural libraries across the state to loan out hotspot devices (which provide a mobile Internet connection) to their patrons. We currently have 23 participating libraries in communities ranging from 800 – 10,000 population. In late 2021, we received a national AARP grant to hire a part-time worker in five (5) specific libraries to focus on digital equity issues in the local community. We call those workers “digital navigators.” We selected some of our best library partners in areas of highest need (i.e. locations with lowest home broadband adoption / computer access rates; or that serve mostly minorities).

![Digital Navigator Sites](image)

Digital Navigators can assist local residents in topics such as:

- Signing up for the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) and its follow-on program;
  - The EBB provides a subsidy of up to $75 / month for home broadband service
  - The EBB also provides a 1-time $100 discount for a laptop / tablet
- Obtaining their own low-cost hotspots (through PCs for People);
- Exploring options for low-cost service or devices through national programs and local non-profits;
- Demonstrating telehealth use (sometimes in partnership with local hospitals / clinics);
- Gaining computer skills valued by local companies (Excel; data entry;
- Determining reliable sources of information online.

The current program has hired a digital navigator in each of our 5 participating libraries, who works on these topics for 10-15 hours per week. The navigators hold regular hours in the library to help people with one-on-one sessions, and attempts to follow-up with each patron to make sure they have achieved their goals. The navigators also travel with OCES / AARP personnel to make presentations about their services to the local community.

**Program Length:** The program is currently funded through December 31, 2021. However, more funding for this type of work is available via the recently-passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and we hope to continue – and expand – the program to other libraries across the state.

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