



August 8, 2023

Dear Chelan County Tri-Commission Members,

On behalf of NCW Tech Alliance, I want to thank you for the opportunity to co-present today. Our presentation will focus specifically on the digital divide and NCW Tech Help. Attached to this letter is The State of Broadband Access and Digital Equity in Chelan County and a draft of our upcoming press release on Digital Equity Month. I would like to take this opportunity to share some additional information about our 501(c)3 organization and upcoming events.

At NCW Tech Alliance, our mission is to bring together people and technology resources to support entrepreneurs, STEM education, and technology adoption in North Central Washington. We are passionate about ensuring that rural areas in Washington are not left behind as technology accelerates. Since 1999, we have built a proven track record of delivering high-quality programs that engage, inspire, and connect our community.

We serve the community members across six counties by providing educational events, programs, and resources. We average 45 events each year with over 4,500 people directly served through our pillars of technology, entrepreneurship, and STEM education. We also serve as co-lead of the Apple STEM Network, which drives resources to support STEM opportunities for students, educators, and community. Our annual programs include:

- **Innovator Awards:** The Innovator Awards Luncheon celebrates the drive, passion, and spirit of innovators in our community while inspiring those who are just beginning their journey. Save the date: November 8, 2023.
- **Flywheel Investment Conference:** This conference brings in entrepreneurs, investors, and professionals from across the Pacific Northwest. Save the date: April 17 - 19, 2024.
- **Community Skills Initiative:** This free program helps professionals and job seekers navigate the paths to in-demand roles in the digital economy. There are over 70 classes in English and Spanish ranging from digital literacy to project management.
- **Computers for Community:** Through this initiative, we refurbish and distribute used devices to community members in need.

In addition to the events outlined under Digital Equity Month in NCW, we are also hosting:

- **AI Expo - August 17:** We have partnered with the North Central Educational Service District, the Apple STEM Network, and Microsoft to bring the third annual Artificial Intelligence (AI) Expo to the region. Attendees will gain a better understanding of AI, how it's

being used to solve real-world problems, and how we prepare our businesses and students for the future of work.

- **Tech & STEM Showcase at the NCW Fair - August 24 - 27:** Held over four days at the NCW Fair in Waterville community members will learn about robotics, virtual reality, computer science, and more!
- **Tech Talk: ChatGPT for Nonprofits - August 29:** Join us for this webinar to discover how you can streamline your nonprofit communications and workload using OpenAI tools.
- **Entrepreneurial Panel: Art & AI - November 14:** Hear from entrepreneurs in design, marketing, and art fields as they discuss the impact of artificial intelligence in their industry.

We also host monthly Industry Tours, Happy Hours, and Cyber Meetups, where we offer a behind-the-scenes look into tech and business, collaborative learning and discussion, and opportunities for networking.

Our programs and events are made possible by the generous support of sponsors, partners, members, and volunteers who continue to contribute to NCW Tech Alliance's success.

We invite you to get involved with our organization and to join our nonprofit as a business or individual member. Annual membership ranges from \$110 to \$575. Becoming a member is a charitable donation that helps elevate regional programming in technology, entrepreneurship, and STEM education. Plus, membership grants you access to all our events and programs for free or at reduced prices, and it offers visibility on our website.

If you would like to learn more about our programs and events or how you can get involved, please call us at 509-661-9000 or email us at info@ncwtech.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,



Jenny Rojanasthien
Executive Director
NCW Tech Alliance



The State of Broadband Access and Digital Equity in Chelan County

Chelan County PUD's fiber-optic network provides high-speed Internet access to 76 percent of the county's population. The figure would be higher if not for the difficulty and cost of laying fiber in terrain marked by mountains, canyons, and thick vegetation. The adoption rate for the PUD's network is 55 percent, meaning nearly half of county residents with access to PUD fiber are not taking advantage of the available service.

Percentage of households without Internet service

- Chelan County: 19 percent
- Statewide: 12 percent

Percentage of households without a laptop or desktop computer at home

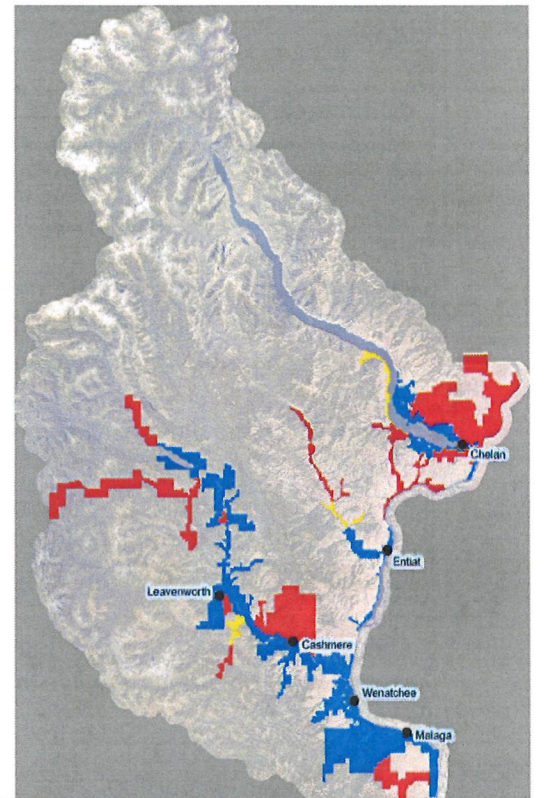
- Chelan County: 22 percent
- Statewide: 15 percent

A Digital Divide Index rating developed by Purdue University shows that virtually every census tract in Chelan county is considered highly underserved.

Even if they have access to the Internet, some residents simply do not have the financial means to pay for Internet service or devices or training, mirroring what nationally is the primary cause of the digital divide.

In addition, many local government agencies and community-based organizations lack the expertise, resources, and capacity to serve the digital needs of marginalized populations. And among those that do, there is a lack of overall coordination.

Internet service providers in the region offer some discounts to low-income households. But there are no government entities or nonprofit organizations offering large, free wi-fi zones in communities. And few public or nonprofit organizations are providing subsidies or grants to those households so they can gain access to digital devices.



Fiber Service Zones Status

- Served
- PPB
- Not Served

This map is for reference purposes only and Chelan County PUD makes no guarantees regarding the completeness or accuracy of the data displayed.

The Impacts of the Digital Divide on Chelan County Residents

Here is a closer look at how the digital divide is impacting residents in Chelan County

Learning: As education is increasingly delivered online, those without the resources to access the Internet are cut off from learning and skills-building opportunities.

Employment: The rapid pace in which technology is advancing in the workplace is leaving behind workers and potential workers who do not have access to the Internet and to computing devices.

Commerce: Businesses may lack the ability to respond to economic conditions and become more efficient and competitive. During the pandemic, some restaurants transitioned to take out or delivery services obtained online by customers. Other restaurants did not transition as they did not possess the technology and/or online skills.

Government services: Government agencies are increasingly offering services online. These services include things like available housing, job listings, educational materials, and other programs that help them meet their basic needs.

Health care: The digital divide has left some people unable to schedule and appear for telehealth appointments.

Behavioral health: People without online access may struggle to stay connected with family, friends, and the overall community. This isolation can lead to poor mental health.

Civic participation: Those without access to broadband and devices struggle to access virtual meetings and hearings, engage in civic discourse, and participate in community activities.

Sources

- Chelan County PUD
- Digital Equity Asset Inventory (DEAI) survey
- U.S. Census Bureau
- Digital Equity Dashboard Microsoft BI
- Pew Research Center
- NoaNet