

Narrowing the Digital Divide: Digital Equity, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Digital Government

Elizabeth Vitullo
West Virginia University
eavitullo@mail.wvu.edu

Stephen Thorpe
Auckland University of Technology
stephen.thorpe@aut.ac.nz

Johnathan Lazar
University of Maryland
jlazar@umd.edu

1. Introduction

Governments at all levels continue to promote, grow, and augment their digital engagement with the citizens that they serve. Through social media, mobile applications, online services, and other forms of digital services, governments are increasingly expecting that individuals will interact with them through a range of digital media and technologies. This includes public policy-making (e.g., governance), government operations (e.g. emergency management), citizen engagement (e.g. transparency), and government services (e.g., information provision).

As the pandemic illustrated, there remains a significant divide in terms of access, know-how and infrastructure in terms of citizens accessing the internet and fully participating in society. This divide extended to engagement with government and associated resources and services. The pandemic, and the post-pandemic environment, has highlighted the disparities that various populations, particularly marginalized groups, and governments face in achieving a vision of digital inclusion for all.

As governments promote digital pathways for service and resource provision, as well as engagement, it is critical for governments to ensure that all citizens are able to realize their needs through inclusive design, availability, and accessibility. Digital divides remain, from access to sufficient technologies (e.g., broadband, devices, costs), the ability to use technologies, and the design of digital government services. This minitrack focuses on digital inclusion within digital government services.

The minitrack includes (but is not limited to) topics such as:

- Supporting digital equity efforts to engage underserved populations;

- The development of inclusive digital government;
- Longitudinal analyses of inclusion in digital government;
- The role of digital literacy in use/non-use of online government services;
- The use of digital government by immigrant, migrant, and displaced populations;
- The use of digital government by indigenous populations;
- The use of digital government by low-literacy populations;
- The role of socio-economic status on the use of digital government;
- Accessibility of digital government for people with perceptual, motor, or cognitive disabilities;
- The role of government in the development of international standards for digital accessibility;
- The role of community-based organizations or anchor institutions (e.g., public libraries, non-government organizations) in fostering digital inclusion;
- Development and/or implementation of statutes, regulations or policies related to digital inclusion;
- Developments in case law and policy related to digital inclusion;
- Trends in comparative or international law related to digital inclusion;
- The relationship between trust of institutions and use of digital government by diverse populations;
- How digital-based voting impacts involvement of citizens in elections
- LGBTQ+ interactions with digital government;
- Usability evaluation methods for testing digital government services with diverse user populations;

- Impacts of the COVID-19 on the ability of marginalized groups to engage with digital government;
- Research methods for understanding why diverse individuals avoid using digital government; and
- Inclusive design methods to involve diverse populations in the development of digital government services.

2. Minitrack Paper

The minitrack accepted one paper this year, *Equity in Public Access to Scientific Research Results:*

Insights from Federal Agency Responses to the Nelson Memorandum Policy.” The paper offers insights into the meaning of equity in public access based on an empirical analysis of how federal agencies, as a key set of stakeholders, are responding to the requirement for equity in the 2022 White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Memorandum on “Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research”. The conclusion indicates little consensus on the concept of equity in public access to research results and a wide-ranging set of factors related to equity.