

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI to Receive \$150,000 'Digital Equity' Grant as Part of Biden Administration's 'Internet for All' Initiative

Technology / **Published On May 18, 2023 05:45 AM /**

Staff Consortium **May 18, 2023**



In a stride towards digital inclusivity, the U.S. Virgin Islands has been awarded a grant of \$150,000 from the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

This grant, a part of the Biden administration's "Internet for All" initiative, is dedicated to the development of digital skills training programs in the territory. It is funded by the recently passed bipartisan infrastructure law, according to a release from NTIA issued Wednesday.

NTIA says the award represents an investment in the planning of equitable, affordable, and reliable high-speed internet services across the USVI. As the territory continues to navigate the "new normal" shaped by the pandemic, the need for robust digital infrastructure has become evident and imperative, the agency says.

"Infrastructure isn't just about concrete and steel, it's also about laptops, keyboards, and monitors, and even the skills to use them," said US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. "Through this digital equity funding, we're helping make the Internet more accessible to the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands. This grant is a testament to the commitment of Governor Bryan and his vision for a digitally empowered society."

This endeavor is part of a broader vision laid out by USVI Governor Albert Bryan Jr., who aspires for territorial-wide Wi-Fi accessibility. "Digital equity is pivotal for the nation and its territories," Governor Bryan declared. "The pandemic has accelerated the need for distance learning, telemedicine, and virtual government. Affordability has been a major barrier to broadband adoption in the USVI, but with digital equity and pervasive free Wi-Fi, we aim to change that."

Under the Digital Equity Act, \$2.75 billion has been provided to initiate three grant programs. The overarching goal is to ensure that all individuals and communities have the skills, technology, and capacity to harness the full potential of our digital economy.

As part of this initiative, the \$150,000 grant will finance a range of activities in the USVI, such as the development of a Territory Digital Equity Plan to benefit primarily unserved and underserved communities, and data collection for digital inclusion asset mapping. Other areas of focus will include stakeholder engagement, as well as staff recruitment and development.

The grant signifies a major step in the nationwide effort to bridge the digital divide, NTIA says. The initiative began in earnest last year with new high-speed internet grant programs funded by this law, which aims to create more affordable internet options and address digital equity issues in communities across the nation.