ExploreVR
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, UMASS BOSTON

RURAL YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP QUICK GUIDE DIGITAL ACCESS

This **Rural Youth Apprenticeship Quick Guide** is a product of the Rural Youth Apprenticeship Toolkit, an online collection on tools and resources developed for vocational rehabilitation staff interested in creating new or adapting existing apprenticeship programs for youth with disabilities in the rural communities they serve. The quick guides present strategies to address apprenticeship program development challenges and enhance inclusion and accessibility for youth with disabilities in rural areas.

In today's job market, almost all jobs require basic digital skills, such as word processing, emailing, doing web searches, inputting data, and setting up online meetings. These skills come with practice. Access to computers and Internet is important for developing these digital skills, exploring work, and participating in job training.

Most employers also advertise positions and opportunities online. These job positions require that job seekers fill out online applications and use email. Many rural apprenticeship programs also require online learning to develop job skills. Unfortunately, access to technology can be limited in rural communities because of cost, availability, and know-how. ***Here are some tips if your digital access is limited:***

Use Public Computers

If you don't own a computer, or if your computer does not have Internet, consider these resources:

» Most **public libraries** have computers available for short-term use. You might need a library card to access their computers.

» **Public schools** may have computer stations. This is a good option if you are still going to high school.

» Some communities have **community centers** or **adult learning centers** where public computers are available for public use.

» Call a local **Center for Independent Living** to see if they have computers or ideas for other options.

Find Free or Discounted Internet

Internet access can be expensive. If you have a computer at home, but your computer doesn't have internet access, consider these resources:

» The Affordability Connectivity Program can provide discounts for internet costs based on your resources. Submit the online application for discounted internet or download a print application that you can send by mail. If you are eligible for the program, contact your Internet provider to select a plan and apply the discount.

» Another strategy is to access Internet from your own computer by visiting public hotspots, such as local restaurants or agencies that you work with.

Learn Digital Skills

It can be hard to learn new technology! You might know a lot about your cell phone, but not as much about how to use a Windows operating system, for example. There are several ways to expand digital skills.

» Look for **community classes** or **adult education** focused on building computer skills.

» **Search online** for information, tutorials, or YouTube videos focused on specific skills you want to learn or improve. Here's how:

1. First, go to a browser (such as Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, or Microsoft Edge).
2. Then, in the search bar, type in what you would like to learn more about. Here are some examples of searches for the following questions:
   - What is a simple definition of a web address? Internet Basics: Web Addresses –Academic Guides
   - How do you create a new email account? YouTube – How to Make and E-mail Address
   - How do you fill out an online job application form? Indeed – How to Fill Out an Online Job Application

» Look for digital equity initiatives in your state and community, which are funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Install Accessibility Features

Accessibility features and assistive technology can be difficult to set up on public computers. However, there are some innovative solutions to this problem.

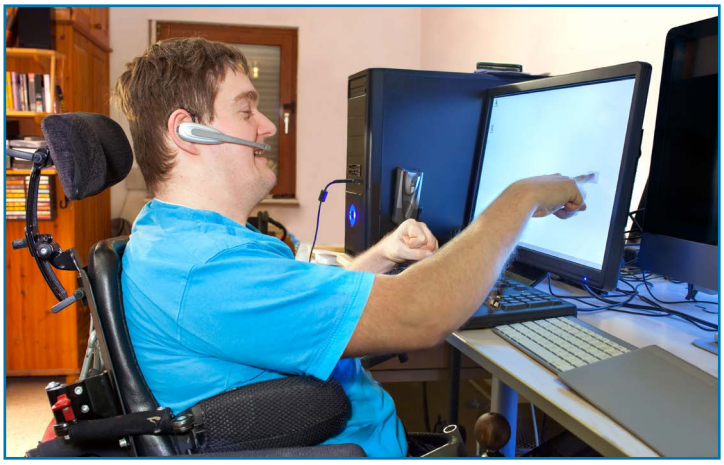
» Morphic is a free, open-source application that you can load on personal and public computers to use built-in accessibility features. It just takes a few seconds to install. The Morphic bar provides quick links to the built-in features in Windows and Mac operating systems, like text enlargement, magnifiers, contrast, and read-selected features.

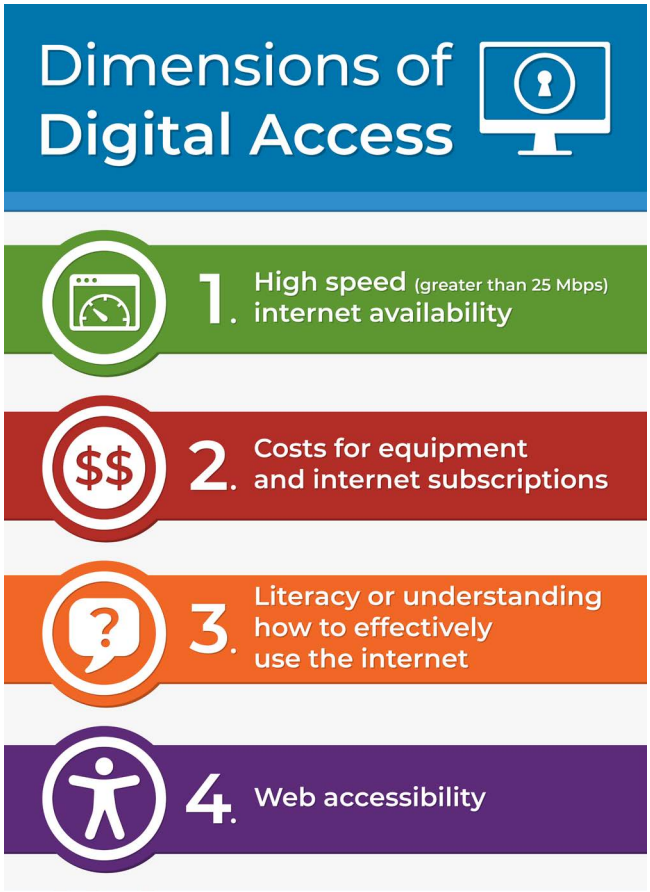
» AT on Demand (AToD) works with Morphic and allows you to use assistive technologies on public computers. AToD can be installed for free on all computers at a school, library, or any other place where there are public or shared computers. The owner of the computer must install AToD. Once AToD is installed, anyone can log in and use it. When they do so, any assistive technologies they use are automatically installed from a secure server onto the public computer for personal use. The assistive technology disappears from the public computer when the user is done.

These innovative programs are meant to expand opportunities in places with limited resources. If you would like to learn more about using these applications in your own community, contact info@raisingthefloor.org.

For a full listing of accessibility for information and communications technology, see the Unified Listing.

Over 90% of US jobs require digital skills and the ability to learn new and evolving industry or work-specific software. A first step to building these skills is using the computer and internet to communicate, search for information, and learn new skills. Don't be discouraged by limited access!





Project Partners

The RYAD Project is a project of ExploreVR at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston, in partnership with:

- Mathematica Policy Research
- Montana Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities
- Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
- Arkansas Career Development Center

ExploreVR offers VR agencies easy and convenient access to a range of VR research, related data, training and tools for planning, evaluation, and decision-making.

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