

Online Privacy and Cybersecurity Barriers and Needs

1. Low-income Households (household income no more than 150 percent of federal poverty threshold)

Confidence. Low-income households were one of the least likely covered populations to feel confident when it comes to online privacy and cybersecurity. Only 33% of individuals felt 'Very Confident' (32% 'somewhat confident') in knowing how to keep themselves safe online. Fewer (30% 'very confident; 32% 'somewhat confident') were confident they could protect the privacy of their personal data.

Percentage of low-income households that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Low Income	65%	62%

2. Aging individuals

Confidence. Adults 60 years and older also need help keeping themselves safe online. Only 35% of survey respondents indicated they felt 'very confident' in keeping themselves safe online (39% 'somewhat confident'), and only 31% felt 'very confident' in protecting their privacy online (40% 'somewhat confident'). The need for cybersecurity and privacy training also came up frequently in the listening sessions.

Percentage of aging individuals that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Aging Individuals	74%	71%

3. Incarcerated individuals

Confidence. Incarcerated individuals or those who are re-entering from jail or prison had some of the lowest confidence in their ability to keep themselves safe online (28% were 'very confident;' 36% were 'somewhat confident') and protect the privacy of their personal data (25% were 'very confident;' 36% were 'somewhat confident').

Percentage of incarcerated individuals or those who are re-entering from jail or prison that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Incarcerated/re-entry	64%	61%

Just Getting Online. Online safety and privacy did not come up in discussion at either of the listening sessions specifically focused on formerly incarcerated individuals. Their primary technology concern was accessing the internet/devices and learning how to use those resources. They had specific concerns about navigating online banking, background checks, credit checks, and other tasks related to finding work and housing, but they did not express worries about online security.

Critical Digital Literacy. Lack of experience with digital devices and the internet leaves returning citizens at a disadvantage in safely navigating the internet. As reported in the FI Digital Literacy Report, “Incarcerated and those formerly incarcerated need digital access and skills including how to obtain free or low-cost connections to the internet and devices; how to navigate through various online systems for banking, utilities, healthcare and more; and perhaps most critically, how to determine the value and veracity of information they find when they are connected” (Davis et al., 2023).

4. Veterans

Confidence. Confidence in cybersecurity and privacy among veterans largely mirrors the general population. Forty-one percent of veterans feel ‘very confident’ (37% ‘somewhat confident’) in keeping themselves safe online, and only 38% feel ‘very confident’ (36% ‘somewhat confident’) in protecting the privacy of their personal data. Other areas for accessibility include digital privacy and job skills training. In telehealth, there is a lack of access to both the technology and communication skills needed for telehealth appointments.

Percentage of veterans that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Veterans	78%	74%

Understanding internet security measures. In listening sessions, veterans also expressed concerns about using the internet for health services, which is a particular barrier to getting services such as healthcare and Veterans Administration services which are conducted more and more online. For veterans, a segment of the community is unaware of the possibility of accessing resources like proper VPN and secure browsing. A resident expressed:

“The younger generations know the security of the internet pretty well, but I’d like to know more about a VPN and other security things.”

This need for digital affordability underscores the community's aspiration for further skill development in a quick and complex digital world.

5. Individuals with Disabilities

Confidence. People with disabilities’ confidence in their ability to keep themselves safe online (30% were very confident; 39% were somewhat confident) and protecting the privacy of their personal data (26% were very confident; 38% were somewhat confident) was lower than that of the general population.

Percentage of individuals with disabilities that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Individuals with Disabilities	79%	75%

Lack of Disability Inclusive Training. Many cybersecurity training resources may not be inclusive for those with disabilities, making engaging with the content and developing skills challenging. Listening sessions revealed that training programs are also often held in locations that lack physical accessibility or remote access.

Communication Challenges. Residents shared their concerns that those who are deaf or hard of hearing may face communication challenges in training sessions that do not have a sign language interpreter or video conferencing tools. Residents want to ensure that community members with disabilities can be engaged with adaptive technology and speech-enabled software and that decision-makers must keep their needs in mind.

6. Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy

Confidence. On the Digital Equity Survey, respondents were asked how confident they were keeping themselves safe online and protecting their privacy. Individuals with a language barrier were less confident in protecting their online privacy and cybersecurity than the general population. Most noted feeling either ‘Very’ (39%) or ‘Somewhat Confident’ (35%) in keeping themselves safe online and ‘Very’ (34%) or ‘Somewhat Confident’ (32%) in protecting the privacy of their personal data.

Percentage of individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Language Barriers/English Learners	74%	66%

7. Individuals with low levels of literacy

Individuals with low literacy were far less confident than the average North Carolina resident and all other covered populations when protecting themselves online (31% were very confident; 22% were somewhat confident) and protecting the privacy of their personal data (29% were very confident; 22% were somewhat confident).

Percentage of individuals with low levels of literacy that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Language Barriers/ English Learners	53%	51%

8. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group

Confidence. On the Digital Equity Survey, respondents were asked how confident they were keeping themselves safe online and protecting their privacy. Members of racial or ethnic minority groups were less confident than the general population in protecting their online privacy and cybersecurity than the general population. Most noted feeling either 'Very' (41%) or 'Somewhat Confident' (32%) in keeping themselves safe online and 'Very' (38%) or 'Somewhat Confident' (32%) in protecting the privacy of their personal data.

Percentage of individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Racial/ethnic minorities	73%	70%

Security. Mothers in one of the listening sessions mentioned that their children operate devices better than they do, which leads to concerns about internet safety security.

9. Rural Residents

Confidence. On the Digital Equity Survey, respondents were asked how confident they were keeping themselves safe online and protecting their privacy. Rural residents felt slightly less confident in protecting their online privacy and cybersecurity than the general population, saying they felt either ‘Very’ (42%) or ‘Somewhat Confident’ (36%) keeping themselves safe online and ‘Very’ (37%) or ‘Somewhat Confident’ (37%) protecting their privacy.

Percentage of Rural Residents that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
Rural Residents	78%	74%

Fear. Among the barriers shared during the listening sessions were cybersecurity and privacy. Some rural residents were hesitant to use technology for fear of cybersecurity issues affecting them or their children. Many parents shared how their own children were more digitally literate than they were, and not knowing how to manage or safely protect their children was a concern.

Cybersecurity Training. Families in rural communities need cybersecurity training to help the safety of school-aged children and access materials carefully. A mother raised her concern about her teenagers:

“Parents need classes with their kids to learn how to use the internet and apps safely and one that wouldn’t be so expensive that’s nearby in our community.”

On the other hand, families may not be fully aware of the importance of cybersecurity training or may prioritize other needs over digital security, potentially leaving them vulnerable to cyber threats.

10. LGBTQIA+

Members of the LGBTQIA+ community generally felt more confident keeping themselves safe online, saying they felt either ‘Very’ (49%) or ‘Somewhat Confident’ (40%) keeping themselves safe online and ‘Very’ (42%) or ‘Somewhat Confident’ (37%) protecting their privacy.

Percentage of LGBTQIA+ individuals that feel Very or Somewhat confident

	Knowing how to keep yourself safe online	Protecting the privacy of your personal data
Overall	79%	75%
LGBTQIA+	89%	79%