Internet

Montague
Digital EquityPlan
2024

frcog

Montague Digital Equity Plan

2024

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INTRODUCTION

Background

While many Montague residents were able to access the internet at home, work, school and throughout the community, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the digital divide that continues to exist within the city. As school and work shifted to online and work-at-home models, the awareness and consequences of this long-time disparity became evident. Along with heat, electricity and water, affordable and available broadband is now a necessity for all residents. It is vital for students to learn and thrive, businesses to remain nimble and competitive, for seniors to take advantage of telehealth options and increase their ability to age-in-place, and a host of other applications. Along with broadband adoption, many residents need devices, technical support and technology training to fully access internet services, educational resources, employment opportunities, and the social aspects of the digital world. While there has been significant investment over the past decade, Montague is not yet meeting the 21st century expectations of a robust and thriving community as residents continue to face a disparity in reliable access, affordability, and digital literacy.

The Montague Digital Equity Plan will help guide municipal decision-making and investments related to increasing access, adoption and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan will help prepare the city to submit grant proposals to state and federal programs to support digital equity activities.

> Digital Equity Plans should focus on "**covered populations**." These are defined by the Digital Equity Act Sec. 60302(8), National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA) as groups within a populations who have a higher likelihood to experience digital inequity.
>
> **Covered Populations:**
> - Individuals who live in low-income households
> - Aging individuals (60 and above)
> - Individuals who are incarcerated
> - Veterans
> - Individuals with disabilities
> - Individuals with a language barrier
> - Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group

Eliminating the Digital Divide through Digital Equity

The digital divide is the gap between individuals and households who have access to connected devices with reliable and affordable high-speed internet, along with the skills to use them, and those who do not. Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Furthermore, digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. Communities should embrace digital equity in order to eliminate the digital divide. Digital equity must evolve as technology advances. Digital equity requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to access and use technology.

There are three broad components of digital equity: **Affordable Connection** (whether the internet connection is fast, reliable and affordable); **Adequate Device** (whether an individual or household has the necessary and needed digital device, such as a desktop, laptop, or tablet); and **Digital Literacy** (whether residents know how to properly and successfully use

technology for their needs, and whether they are receiving quality information and can assess their privacy risks).

Overview of Planning Process

Digital Equity Steering Advisory Group

The Montague Digital Equity Plan is part of the Montague Comprehensive Plan update.[1] The planning process consisted of working closely with the Comprehensive Plan Steering Advisory Group to provide oversight and input into the development of the Plan.
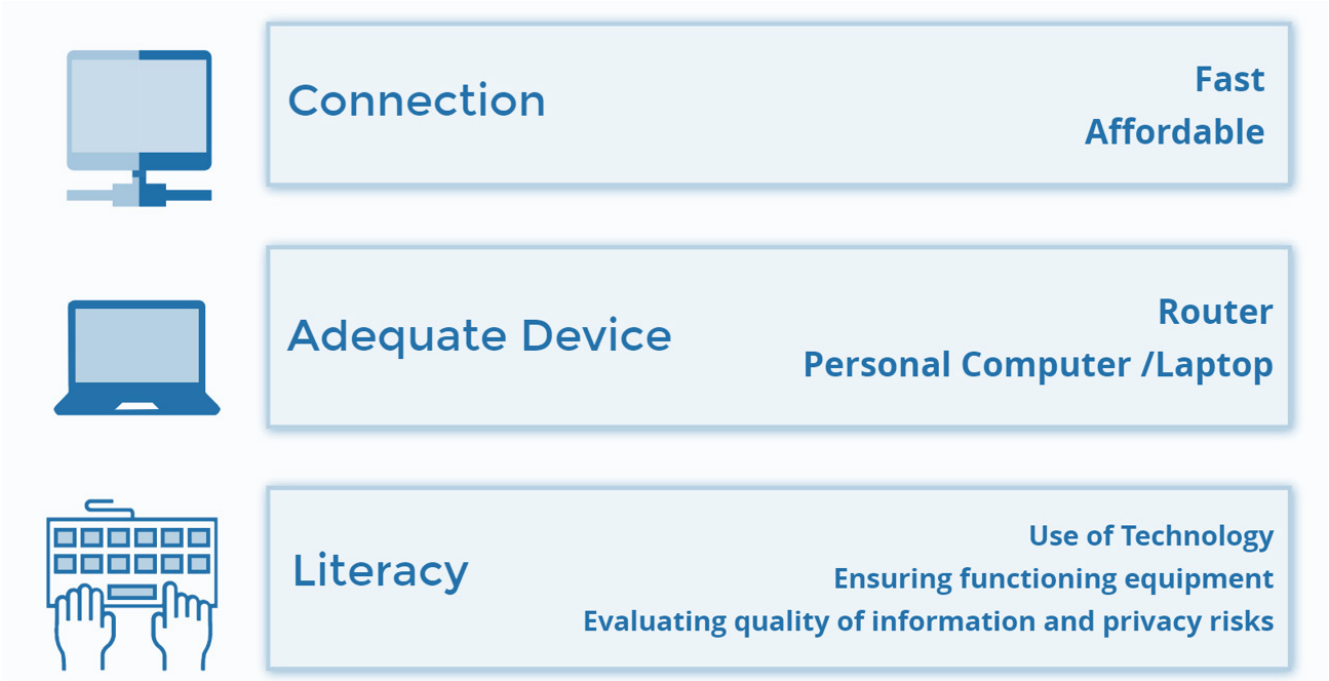
Community Outreach and Engagement

Robust community outreach and engagement provides insights into both the needs of Montague residents and the available digital equity assets. The consultant pursued multiple avenues of outreach and engagement to better understand the current conditions relating to digital equity. There were four (4) Steering Advisory Group meetings, two (2) focus groups, including one with older adults and one with digital equity providers, as well a Community Meeting on December 6, 2023 with ten

attendees. In addition, staff met individually with key stakeholders to gather additional information, including the Director of IT for the Gill/Montague School District, the Montague Library Director, and the Senior Digital Equity/ Montague Mass in Motion Coordinator, as well as the Town Planner and Town Administrator, to gather insights on specific issues of digital equity, current projects, and ideas for future projects.

Digital Equity Survey

The MBI created a statewide Digital Equity Survey to gather information about needs, barriers, and opportunities from Massachusetts residents. The survey was available online and in print, provided in 9 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, and Khmer). Copies of the survey were brought to the Senior Center, the three public library locations, and the Brick House (the Community Resource Center). The online survey was promoted on the Town's website, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments' website & social media, and sent out via the Franklin County Resource Network. There were 55 responses from Montague residents.

Connection		**Fast** **Affordable**
Adequate Device		**Router** **Personal Computer /Laptop**
Literacy		**Use of Technology** **Ensuring functioning equipment** **Evaluating quality of information and privacy risks**

Adapted from the Massachusetts Broadband Institute

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[1] https://montagueplans.org/

VISION AND GOALS

The Vision and the Goals for the Montague Digital Equity Plan were developed through Steering Advisory Group meetings and feedback during the Community Meeting, focus groups, and interviews. The Vision and Goals articulate the values that drive the work and the means by which the town will pursue digital equity for all residents.

Vision

Our vision is for all residents in Montague to be able to access affordable, high-speed internet, with the appropriate devices. Affordable access, which includes cost, speed, devices, and knowledge, is not a privilege for those who can afford it, but a right for our residents.

The Montague Digital Equity Plan will lay the groundwork for economically sustainable long-term investments for Montague to reach digital equity for all its residents. With this plan, the Town will be well-positioned to compete for broadband funds that may become available through federal, state, and private sector broadband infrastructure and digital equity funding opportunities.

Goals

Goal 1: Framework for Promoting and Supporting Digital Equity

Develop and maintain a framework to continue promoting and supporting digital equity for all residents of Montague. The framework will include identifying a team of digital equity champions, pursuing funding, and continuing and expanding partnerships with digital equity providers.

Goal 2: Affordable Connectivity

Support residents' access to the internet connectivity they need and can afford.

Goal 3: Digital Literacy and Safety

Ensure every resident in Montague has the opportunity to learn the skills needed to effectively and safely use digital technology.

Goal 4: Digital Navigation

Ensure access for people who need more support to navigate digital systems.

EXISTING CONDITIONS[2]

Demographics

The Town of Montague is located along the Connecticut River in the upper Pioneer Valley and is the second largest municipality in Franklin County. A rural community, Montague has a population of 8,527 with 3,753 households.[3] The Town is comprised of 5 villages (Montague Center, Montague City, Lake Pleasant, Millers Falls, and Turners Falls). The Village of Turners Falls is home to over half the town's population, and includes the business district.

While in many respects, Montague shares many similarities with Franklin County, the population in Montague differs from the State. For example, the percentage of the population who are People of Color is much lower in both Montague than the State. The population in Montague who speak a language besides English at home is also significantly less than the State. Further, Montague and Franklin County have higher percentages of civilian veterans than the State. Conversely, the percentage of residents in Montague with a disability is higher than the State. While Massachusetts has an aging population, Montague has a greater percentage

of households with residents who are 65 or older, and a smaller percentage of households with children. All municipalities within Franklin County, except Greenfield, are considered Rural by standards set out by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.[4] These demographic characteristics should guide the focus of digital equity in Montague.
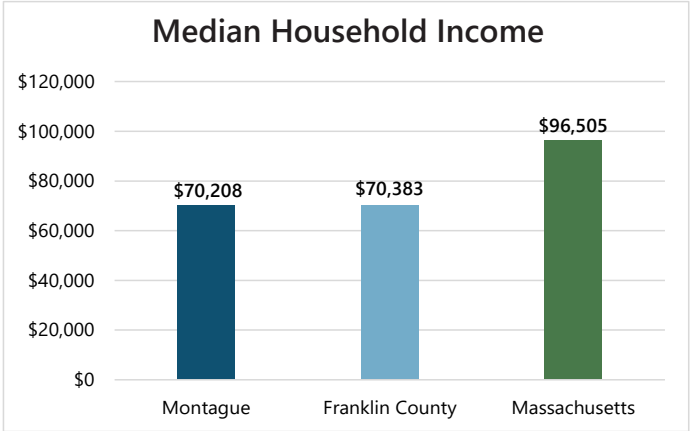
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

A common measure of income for an area is the median household income.[5] The median household income for Montague is $70,208.

Town/Region	Civilian Veterans	Population with a Disability	Speak a Language Besides English at Home	People of Color	Households with Children	Households with 65+ years of age
Montague	7.6%	17.4%	6.5%	9.0%	25%	34%
Franklin County	7.5%	16.8%	6.54%	11.1%	23%	39%
Massachusetts	4.7%	11.9%	24.54%	31.1%	28%	32%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

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[2] See Appendix for full list of sources.

[3] A household consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. A household can include a family, an individual living alone, or unrelated people who share a housing unit.

[4] This Plan uses the MBI definition of Rural, based on the Massachusetts State Office of Rural Health definition, which considers a municipality to be rural if it meets one of the following criteria: Meets at least one of three federal rural definitions at the sub-county level (Census Bureau, Office of Management and Budget, or Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes), and/or has a population less than 10,000 people and a population density below 500 people per square mile, and/or has an acute care hospital in the town that meets the state hospital licensure definition of a small rural hospital, or is a certified Critical Access Hospital.

[5] For this purpose, this includes the income in households that have families, people living alone as well as unrelated people living together. The median is the middle statistic in a data set, which makes the measurement relatively unaffected by extreme numbers (either the very wealthy or very poor) from influencing the overall figure.

This figure is consistent with median household income in Franklin County, while both are significantly lower than the median household income of the State. The poverty rate, while still significant at over 9%, is lower than the State (almost 10%), and much lower than the County (12%). Perhaps more telling of the affordability issues, is the fact that 38% of households have a median income of $50,000 or less.[6]

Region	Unemployment Rate	Labor Force Participation Rate	Percent working from Home
Montague	4.30%	67%	12.4%
Franklin County	5.7%	63.1%	13.7%
Massachusetts	5.3%	67.1%	14.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

In Montague, four Block Groups are considered to have Environmental Justice (EJ) population, based on income where the annual median household income is 65% or less than that of the state. In Montague, EJ locations are in Turners Falls and Montague City. The median household income is significantly lower in these sections, and minority population is significantly higher.

Looking at housing cost burden in Montague suggest the impact of affordability for residents. A household is defined as cost-burdened" if they are spending more than 30% of their income on housing.[7] In Montague, 30% of households are considered cost-burdened, while in Millers

Falls and Turners Falls the percentages are significantly higher (36% and 40% respectively).[8]

Inability to connect to high-speed internet, lack of access to digital devices, and lack of digital literacy, negatively impacts the economic vitality of a municipality. The labor force participation rate in Montague is fairly strong, while the percentage of employees working from home is less than both the County and the State. This suggests there could be untapped labor potential with improved broadband service and availability, allowing more employees to work from home.
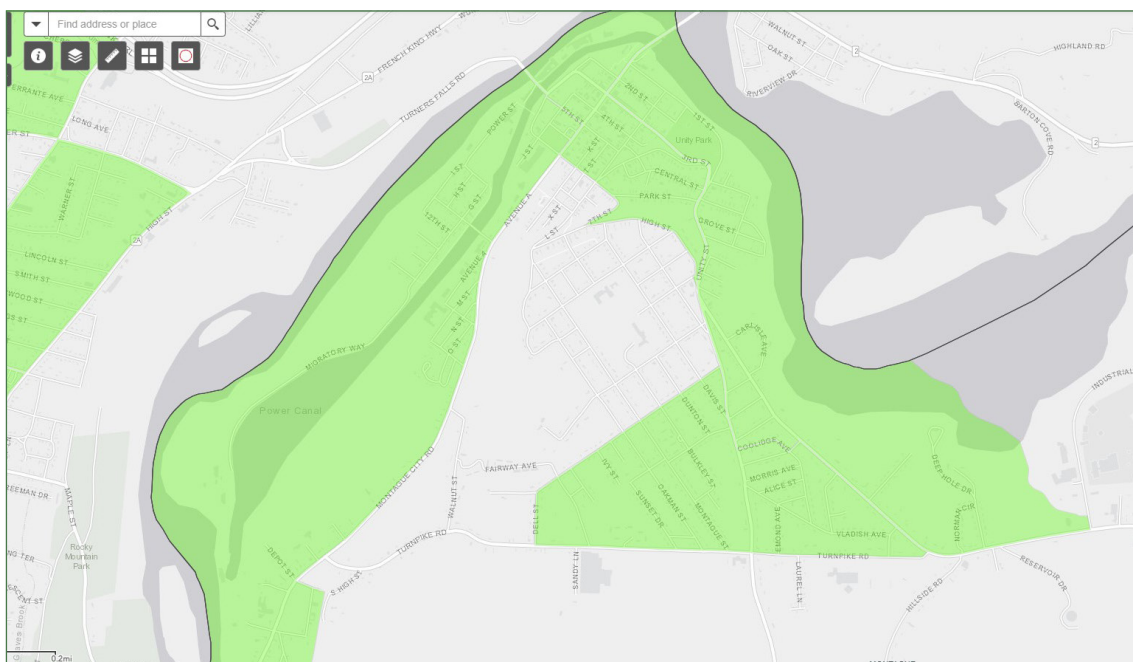
Montague Environmental Justice Block Groups.
Source: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-2020-environmental-justice-populations

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[6] Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates
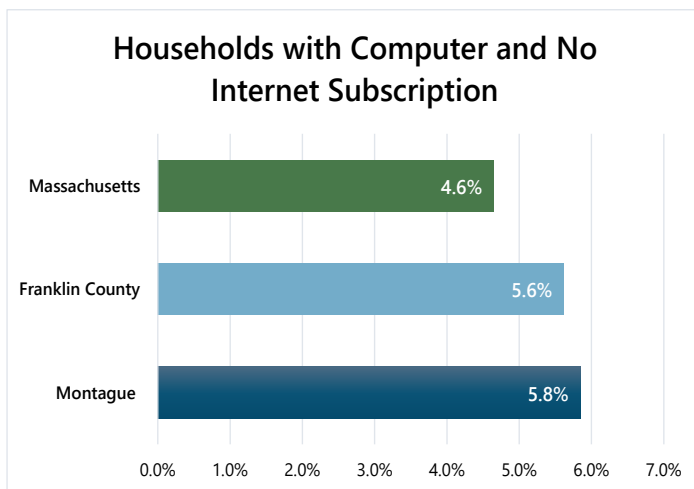[7] National Low Income Housing Coalition (https://nlihc.org/)
[8] Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

Digital Equity

The main factors in determining digital equity include: **Affordable Connection** (ability to connect to broadband service), **Access to Devices** (i.e. computers or tablets), and **Digital Literacy** (ability to navigate the internet safely and effectively). Each of these three components contributes to overall digital equity. While Montague has taken strides to ensure digital equity, the data suggests there is still work to do.

Reliable and Affordable Connection

Having a reliable broadband internet connection is necessary for many vital activities, from filling out medical forms to interviewing for a new job to talking with grandchildren. While Massachusetts has increased internet and broadband access, a percentage of households do not have an internet subscription. In Montague, the percentage of households with a computer but no internet subscription remains slightly higher than the state.

	Tests	% of Total Tests
Speeds < 25 x 3 Mbps	21	2%
Speeds < 50 x 10 Mbps	68	7%
Speeds < 100 x 20 Mbps	231	23%
Speeds at least 25 x 3 Mbps	887	90%
Speeds at least 50 x 10 Mbps	719	73%
Speeds at least 100 x 20 Mbps	455	46%
Speeds at least 100 x 100 Mbps	3	0%
Total Tests: 988; Unique ID Tests: 202		

Speed Tests in Montague (collected by Mass Broadband Institute February 2022)

Households with Computer and No Internet Subscription

Massachusetts	4.6%
Franklin County	5.6%
Montague	5.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

FCC's National Broadband Map indicates 100% of Montague households are "served", meaning they can connect to and utilize internet at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps (the federal fixed broadband speed benchmark).[9] However, we can infer that this is not accurate based on community meetings, focus groups, feedback from residents, and speed test data.

Interviews with residents and town staff suggest that while overall internet connection is generally good, there are issues with speed, and sections of the town where a connection can be slow or prone to drops. According to data available from the FCC, the Town of Montague has 100% broadband coverage throughout the Town[9], yet based on survey data and information from focus groups, it is unlikely that this is accurate. Although there were only 55 survey responses, approximately 31% noted that their home internet is not good enough to meet their household needs. Feedback from participants in the Community Meeting and Focus Groups, there is not 100% broadband coverage in town.

While actual internet speeds can be difficult to measure due to various factors (time of day, how many users are currently on-line, how close a user is to a router, etc.), speed-test data can provide a baseline understanding of how well a community is reaching advertised broadband speeds. The data for Montague suggests that most residents are not experiencing broadband speeds under the current definition, as only 46% of the speed tests showed at least 100/20 Mbps. One limitation with the data is that it does

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[9] FCC Broadband Data Collection (https://www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData)

not differentiate between types of internet or different service providers. This is important information to ascertain as there are issues both with receiving advertised speeds by the coax providers (especially at certain times of day, such as when school is let out or during prime time), and sections of the town where the internet service drops daily, particularly in older apartment complexes, where old wiring and thick walls prevent optimal cable and wireless service (as noted above).

The FCC does allow a Challenge process to ensure accuracy.[10] As part of the upcoming Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, Massachusetts will be coordinating a challenge process to help better ensure the accuracy of the coverage data.[11] This will allow municipalities, like Montague, to better understand where there is limited or poor broadband connection within town.

Comcast/Xfinity (a cable provider) is the only major wireline broadband service provider in Montague. T-Mobile is also a fixed wireless option for residents, although it only covers approximately 17% of the total broadband service locations (BSLs). LeverettNet, a fiber internet service provider also covers broadband service locations (less than 0.5% of all BSLs).

Comcast provides asymmetric internet, meaning download and upload speeds are different. They provide various plans based on price and maximum speed. The most basic plan is currently called Connect and has 150 Mbps download speed and 10 Mbps upload speed.[12] According to Comcast's website, the typical speed is 175/114 Mbps. The fastest plan available in Montague is the Gigabit x10 plan, with 2,000/50 Mbps, with the advertised typical speed as 2087/206 Mbps.

Not only is having a broadband connection required for digital equity, but at least as important is internet affordability. Affordability remains a constant threat to digital equity, particularly in for the covered populations as described above. As a recent study showed, even as broadband connection becomes more available in rural communities, the costs of service often remain insurmountable. Broadband costs can be difficult to comprehensively measure due to various factors, including levels of speed, teaser rates and discounts, and bundling options. However, nationwide, one study found that the median cost of high-speed internet was $74.99 per month.[13] Further, around half of households were paying between $60 and $90 per month. According to the FCC's most recent 2024 Section 706 Report, the national medium price for 100/20 Mbps is $101.

Locally, based on 29 responses to the MBI Statewide Digital Equity Survey, the average monthly cost for internet service was $91 in Montague, with a range of $9.95-$275. It is unclear from the survey results whether the higher pricing indicated in the responses (two indicated monthly pricing over $200 and 11 other responders indicated costs of $100 or more) was for internet only, or a bundled service. Based on the rate sheet for Montague provided by Comcast, costs range from the basic offering of $68/month (called Connect) to a premium offering for $300/month (Gigabit x10).

During conversations with residents, cost was often noted as a barrier to connection. Although a limited sample size (31 responses to this question on the Statewide Survey), 48% of households said it was *Somewhat Hard* or *Very Hard* to pay for internet.

There are few programs available to assist with broadband affordability. One program is

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[10] To learn more about the FCC map and how to file challenges, see: https://help.bdc.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/sections/10467243210651-Consumers-Individuals

[11] More information on the Massachusetts BEAD Challenge is available on the MBI website (https://broadband.masstech.org/bead-challenge-process)

[12] Max speeds are listed in the following review from CNET (https://www.cnet.com/home/internet/xfinity-internet-review/)

[13] "As Broadband Deserts Recede, Cost of Service Still a Question" (https://www.govtech.com/network/as-broadband-deserts-recede-cost-of-service-still-a-question)

the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a benefit program run by the FCC. The goal of the ACP is to help make broadband affordable for all households. The ACP provides a discount of up to $30 per month for internet services of eligible households. The FCC collects data on which households are eligible and how many are enrolled in the program. As of January 2024, 314 households were claimed subscribers to ACP, although over 1,200 households were considered eligible.[14]

As of early 2024, the federal government had not renewed the funding for the ACP. Although there is currently a bi-partisan bill to renew funding, the Program stopped accepting new applications and enrollments on February 7, 2024, and is expected to completely run out of funds by April 2024. Based on interviews, survey results, and the prospect of over 300 households losing ACP funding, broadband affordability will likely only grow as an issue for Montague households.

Device Access

Almost 90% of households in Montague have a smartphone. However, only 83% of households have a desktop or laptop. Not having a reliable desktop or laptop computer can negatively impact a household, preventing the ability to work remotely, or access government services, and educational material.
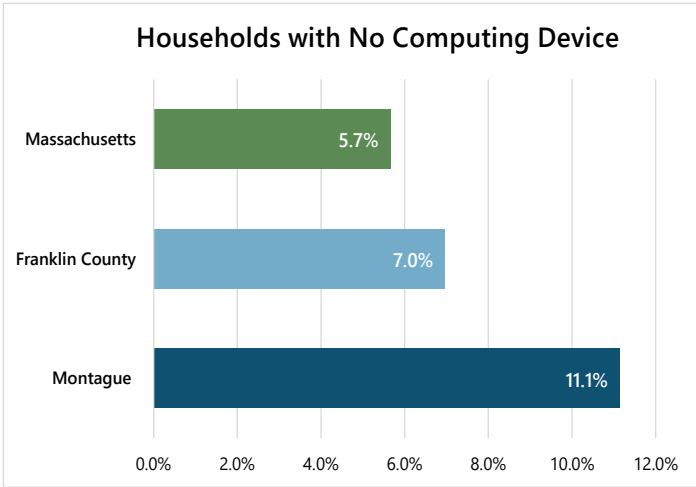
Device Access in Montague
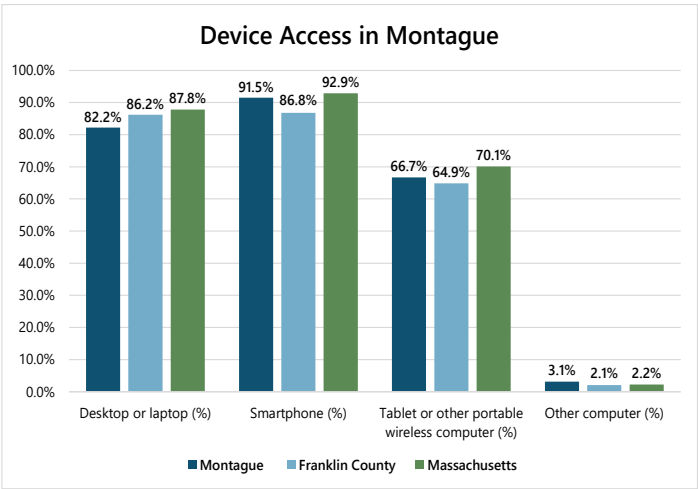
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is more difficult to quantify than either broadband connection or access to devices. While there are different needs for both level of internet speed needed and type of device needed, the range of digital literacy is vast—from knowing how to turn on a computer to learning how to code. Digital literacy needs are often age-dependent as well as language dependent.

When asked in the survey to rank the difficulty of using the internet for various tasks (i.e. job search, healthcare or telehealth services, etc.) most respondents indicated *Easy*. However, 35% said it was *Not Easy* to use the internet for Transportation Information, and 45% said it was *Not Easy* or *Hard* to use the internet to Search of Apply for Benefits for You or Your Family.

In response to COVID-19, classroom technology use has become more extensive in the Gill-Montague School District. According to the IT Director, the pandemic was "an eye-opener" when it came to digital needs and access. The district is currently a one-to-one district, with each student having access to a device (i.e. a laptop). Students in 7-12 grades are able to bring their laptops home. Staff noted that they have run into issues of access, particularly with internet connection and device access at home.

Households with No Computing Device

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

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[14] ACP Enrollment & Claims Tracker (https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/)

Within the current curriculum, the school district works to integrate technology training into the classroom. The school currently has a web portal where all academic information for students is available for parents, allowing them to be fulling engaged in their childrens' academic life. One of the biggest issues centered on technology lies with both students' and their families lack of awareness of online issues, suggesting the need for further and continuous training.

Overall, staff noted four main areas of concern and need for further investment:

- Making sure each household with a student in school as an accessible device at home (so a student would not have to bring the device back and forth from school).
- Expand digital literacy for both students and parents.
- While broadband connectivity is much better, there are still problem spots, which became more obvious during the pandemic.
- Digital safety and cyber security is important for students, but equally, if not more, for parents.

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is recognized as a continuing and growing issue. Based on the survey, 42% of responders were *Somewhat Concerned* about internet security while 45% were *Very Concerned*. Within the Montague schools, internet security is a very big concern with respect to student users, but also for parents, who need to have the tools and education to practice effective cybersecurity.

Digital Assets[12]

Although there are areas of digital inequity in Montague, the town and surrounding region provide numerous assets that promote and implement digital equity.

Public libraries are an important source for digital equity, providing free onsite device usage,

technical assistance, as well as other benefits like free Wi-Fi. There are three public libraries that make up the Montague Public Library system (Carnegie Public Library in Turners Falls, Millers Falls Library, and Montague Center Library).

All the Montague libraries provide computers and laptops for onsite use. The library provides 30-minute one-on-one computer and internet troubleshooting sessions. Previously, the libraries offered digital literacy classes but found that there were few people who didn't know the basics and those that didn't need one-on-one attention for the help to be effective. There are three mobile hotspots at each location for people to checkout, although they are often in high demand.[13] All three branches have public Wi-Fi available. The Town also provides access to public Wi-Fi within the immediate vicinity of Town Hall and at Unity Park, both of which are located in Turners Falls.

The Brick House Community Resource Center provides numerous programs for both youth and families in Montague. The Brick House offers public Wi-Fi onsite and has four computers and five Chromebooks for people to use onsite to fill out job applications, anything related to Brick House programming, or school work.

DIGITAL ASSETS: SENIOR CENTER

Funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Elder Affairs and the FRCOG Mass in Motion program, the **Gill-Montague Senior Center** developed two programs in the winter of 2024.

The Tech Drop-in program will be held once weekly for residents to bring in their laptops, phones or tablets with technical questions (issues that cannot be resolved will be referred to Staples for discounted assistance). The second program is a six-week class for senior residents to learn computer basics. Residents have expressed strong interest in both of these programs.

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[12] See Appendix for list of local and regional assets

[13] A hotspot is a physical location where people can access the Internet, typically using Wi-Fi, to connect their mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, to the Internet. A mobile hotspot is a hotspot that is not tied to a physical location, and the user can move it to different locations.

Digital Equity Assets and Services in Montague and Franklin County

Assets and Strengths

- Local services like hotspots to borrow from the library and free Wi-Fi within all three libraries and a limited number of other public areas
- Local services like the new Tech Drop-In program and computer training class at the Senior Center
- Regional networks and support services like the Franklin County Resource Network, administered by Community Action Pioneer Valley
- Regional services through the 413Cares.org/Digital Equity (working with the Alliance for Digital Equity)
- Digital literacy programs for seniors, including the Cyber Senior Program through Greenfield Community College

- Availability of broadband in most communities in Franklin County through the MBI Last Mile program
- MBI as the point organization to work with state agencies and departments to maintain funding sources and coordinate from the state level (for example, coordinating digital literacy programs between libraries)
- Coordination through organizations like CWMARS

Need and Challenges

- Staff and programs are heavily grant dependent. Lack staff and resources to provide services or other programs
- One-time funding
- Reliance on volunteers
- Difference in bandwidth quality
- Gaps in cell service due to varied geography
- Reliance on federal and state funding due to the COVID pandemic to purchase devices and provide digital equity services
- Reliance on external funding sources
- Need for staff/capacity
- Need for an asset map so people know where to go for services (ex. Seattle-King County Digital Equity Asset Map)
- Having an individual or organization to coordinate between organizations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 1: Framework for Promoting and Supporting Digital Equity

Develop and maintain a framework to continue promoting and supporting digital equity for all Montague residents.

Strategy	Lead Organization	Supporting Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Target
Support and enhance current digital equity partnerships.	Town of Montague	• FRCOG • Alliance for Digital Equity • Clinical & Support Options (CSO) • Gill-Montague School District • Franklin County Tech School	Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Grant	Short-Term
Prioritization of Digital Equity Action Items.	Town of Montague	FRCOG	Various	Short-Long Term
Promote and support local and regional organizations providing digital equity.	Town of Montague	• Library • Senior Center • LifePath • The Brick House	Various (MBI grant funds, Executive Office of Elder Affairs grants, library grants, etc.)	Short-Long Term
Work with other Franklin County towns (especially those who have completed Digital Equity Plans) to promote and implement digital equity regionally.	Town of Montague (Town Planner; Town Administrator)	• Other Franklin County towns • FRCOG • Alliance for Digital Equity • Other digital equity partners	Various	Short-Long Term

Goal 2: Affordable Connectivity

Support residents' access to the internet and device connectivity they need and can afford.

Strategy	Lead Organization	Supporting Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Target
Promote and support BEAD Challenge Program.	Town of Montague	• FRCOG • MBI • Alliance for Digital Equity	• Municipal DE Implementation Grant • BEAD Challenge Funding	Short-Medium Term
Expand Library Mobile Hotspot Program.	Montague Public Library	Town of Montague	• Municipal DE Implementation Grant • Other grant funding • Town budget for long-term maintenance	Short Term
Enhance/implement public Wifi, install hotspots or small cells in high-traffic areas (Avenue A, Peskeompskut Park, Unity Park, etc.). Work with businesses, government entities, and ISPs to determine best approach, considering pricing, internet speeds, and location.	Town of Montague	Alliance for Digital Equity	• Community Space Public WiFi Program • Municipal DE Implementation Grant	Short-Medium Term
Digital device (i.e. laptops or tablets) distribution.	Alliance for Digital Equity	• Town of Montague; Senior Center • Public Libraries • Gill-Montague Public Schools	• Municipal DE Implementation Grant • Other MBI grant funds	Short Term

Strategy	Lead Organization	Supporting Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Target
Negotiate lower internet subscription rates with local ISPs or investigate the possibility of direct subsidies.	Town of Montague (Cable Advisory Committee)			Long Term
Create and disseminate outreach materials for internet subsidy programs and low-cost internet plans. Materials should be available in English, Spanish, and other languages as necessary.	Town of Montague		MBI grant funding	Short-Long Term
Investigate public housing eligibility for the Apartment Wi-Fi program with guidance from MAPC and/or MBI. Montague Housing Authority is eligible to apply.	Montague Housing Authority	Town of Montague	MBI W-Fi Program	Short-Medium Term
Explore and promote options for affordable, quality data plans for mobile phones and more robust and reliable cell service.	Town of Montague (Cable Advisory Committee)	Alliance for Digital Equity		Medium-Term

Goal 3: Digital Literacy

Ensure every resident in Montague has the opportunity to learn the skills needed to effectively use digital technology, including safety.

Strategy	Lead Organization	Supporting Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Target
Support and promote current digital literacy programs.	Town of Montague	Library, Senior Center, Brick House, GMRSD, FCTS	MBI Digital Equity Implementation Fund	Short-Term
Develop digital literacy classes/ workshop program.	• Alliance for Digital Equity • CSO • GCC • The Brick House • GMRSD • Franklin County Technical School	Town of Montague	MBI grant funding	Short-term
Develop and Implement Digital Navigator Program.	• Alliance for Digital Equity • CSO	• Town of Montague • Senior Center • Library • LifePath • Franklin County Technical School	• MBI Digital Equity Implementation Fund • Other grant funding	Short-term
Survey the community to understand the top digital literacy needs and interests (basic computer skills, cybersecurity, public benefic applications, telemedicine, etc.).	Town of Montague; FRCOG	Alliance for Digital Equity	MBI Implementation Grant	Short-Term

Strategy	Lead Organization	Supporting Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Target
Organize workshops and training programs (around topics based on the results of the survey) at Public Library, Senior Center, etc.	Town of Montague (Public Library, Senior Center, etc.)	• FRCOG • Alliance for Digital Equity • Franklin County Technical School	• MBI Implementation Grant • Other MBI grant funding	Short-Medium Term
Cybersecurity/digital safety support.	Town of Montague		Municipal Cyber Security Grant Program	Short-Term
Include cyber security/safety training for all students in families in the Gill-Montague School District	Gill-Montague School District	Northwester DA 's Office	MBI grant funding; other school grant funding	Short-Medium Term

Goal 4: Digital Navigation
Ensure access for people who need more support to navigate digital systems.

Strategy	Lead Organization	Supporting Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Target
Secure private spaces for assisted internet access	Senior Center; Library	Town of Montague	Municipal DE Implementation Grant	Short-Medium Term
Evaluate Town website and communications materials to ensure that they are universally accessible and usable on all Internet-enabled devices including cell phones and tablets. Refer to the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division's guidance on web accessibility and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Town of Montague		Municipal DE Implementation Grant; other grant funding	Short-term
Collaborate with MCTV and other local media channels to spread awareness of community resources, upcoming events, and training opportunities.	Town of Montague	MCTV	Various grant funding	Short-Long Term
Assess businesses' needs in terms of digital access and literacy. Provide support and resources when possible.	Town of Montague	Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and pending downtown Turners Falls Business Coordinator	Various grant funding	Short-Long Term

APPENDIX A: Acknowledgments

The contributions of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Advisory Group and project stakeholders join the comments of residents and stakeholders who participated in meetings and surveys throughout the Digital Equity planning process.

Comprehensive Plan Steering Advisory Group

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Digital Equity Stakeholders

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Caitlin Kelley, Library Director, Montague Public Library
Tina Mahaney, Director of IT and Educational Data Services, Gill-Montague School District
Roberta Potter, Director. Gill-Montague Council on Aging/Senior Center

APPENDIX B: Digital Equity Assets

Organization Name	Municipal, Regional, or Statewide	Website
Alliance for Digital Equity	Regional	https://sites.google.com/view/alliancefordigitalequity/home
Big Brothers Big Sisters Franklin county	Regional	https://bbbs-fc.org/
Black Economic Alliance Foundation	National	https://foundation.blackeconomicalliance.org/
Center for New Americans	Regional	https://cnam.org/
GCET	Municipal	https://www.gcet.net/
City of Greenfield	Municipal	https://greenfield-ma.gov/
Clinical Support Options	Regional	https://www.csoinc.org/
Community Action Pioneer Valley	Regional	https://www.communityaction.us/
Community Compact Cabinet	State	https://www.mass.gov/orgs/community-compact-cabinet
Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts	Regional	https://communityfoundation.org/
CSforMA, Inc.	State	https://www.csforma.org/
Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA)	State	https://www.mass.gov/orgs/executive-office-of-elder-affairs
Community Health Center of Franklin county	Regional	https://www.chcfc.org/
Franklin County Sheriff's Office	Regional	https://www.fcso-ma.us/
Franklin County Technical School	Regional	https://www.fcts.us/
Franklin Regional Council of Governments	Regional	https://frcog.org/
Greenfield Council on Aging	Municipal	https://greenfield-ma.gov/departments/council_on_aging_senior_center/index.php
Greenfield Community College	Regional	https://www.gcc.mass.edu/
Greenfield Public Library	Municipal	https://greenfieldpubliclibrary.org/
LifePath	Regional	https://lifepathma.org/
MA Healthy Aging Collaborative	State	https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/
MA Association for Community Action	State	https://www.masscap.org/
MA Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired	State	https://www.mabvi.org/
MA Board of Library Commissioners	State	https://mblc.state.ma.us/
MA Business Alliance for Education	State	https://www.mbae.org/
MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education	State	https://www.doe.mass.edu/
MA Education and Career Opportunities, Inc. (MassEdCO)	State	https://www.massedco.org/
MA League of Community Health Centers (CHC)	State	https://www.massleague.org/
Mass Computer Using Educators (MassCUE)	State	https://www.masscue.org/
New England Cable & Telecommunications Association	State	https://connectingne.com/
Salasin Project	Regional	https://salasinproject.org/
The Literacy Project	Regional	https://www.literacyproject.org/
Three County Continuum of Care (a project of Community Action Pioneer Valley via HUD)	Regional	https://www.threecountycoc.communityaction.us/
T-Mobile	State	https://www.t-mobile.com/
United Way of the Franklin and Hampshire Region	Regional	https://uw-fh.org/
Verizon	National	https://www.verizon.com/
Xfinity/Comcast	National	https://www.xfinity.com/overview

APPENDIX C: Funding Resources

Program	Type of Assistance
State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program https://www.internetforall.gov/program/digital-equity-act-programs#	A $1.44 billion formula grant program for states, territories, and tribal governments. Funds an annual grant program for five years in support of digital equity projects and the implementation of digital equity plans: 1. Develop, implement, and oversee DE plans + make awards to other entities help develop DE plans. 2. Improve online accessibility & inclusivity of public resources. 3. Implement DE plans and digital inclusion activities. 4. Provide digital literacy and skills education to covered populations. 5. Facilitate adoption of high-speed internet by covered populations. 6. Fund annual grant programs for five years to implement digital equity projects.
State Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program https://www.internetforall.gov/program/digital-equity-act-programs#	A $1.25 billion competitive grant program to fund annual grant programs for five years to implement digital equity projects. Several types of entities can apply for these funds.
Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program https://broadband.masstech.org/digital-equity-implementation	Funding to mobilize, start-up, and implement digital equity activities locally to access a one-time grant up to $100,000 per municipality to execute a project (or projects) defined in their local digital equity plan or related document that MBI deems of sufficient standard. Project implementation will increase access and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program	Expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs. This program builds high-speed Internet infrastructure where needed. It also supports efforts to teach the skills and provide the equipment needed so everyone can use the Internet.
Community Compact Municipal Fiber Program https://www.mass.gov/municipal-fiber-grant-program	1. Implementation of fiber optic networks that connect remote municipal assets to improve municipal operations and/or improve disaster recovery and resiliency. 2. One time capital needs- fiber optic cabling, hardware, software and implementation services. 3. (Centralized management of IT infrastructure, enterprise approach to network monitoring, cybersecurity, records management, and backup and recovery.)
GAP Networks Grant Program https://broadband.masstech.org/gap-networks-grant-program	The $145 million Gap Networks Grant Program will fund the deployment of broadband infrastructure in areas that currently lack broadband service. The Program aims to expand access and connectivity in unserved and underserved locations throughout the Commonwealth to bridge the digital divide.

Program	Type of Assistance
E-rate: Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries https://www.fcc.gov/general/e-rate-schools-libraries-usf-program	The schools and libraries universal service support program, commonly known as the E-rate program, helps schools and libraries to obtain affordable broadband.
Lifeline program for Low-income consumers https://www.fcc.gov/lifeline-consumers	1. Discount on phone or broadband service for qualifying low-income consumers. 2. 2. Promote access to Wi-Fi enabled devices and hotspot functionality to close the homework gap Note: A family that qualifies for Lifeline also qualifies to receive EBB
Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) https://www.fcc.gov/acp	The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more. 1. $30 discount per month for internet service for eligible households; $75 discount for qualifying Tribal lands 2. One time $100 discount to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet if the contribute between $10 to $50 toward purchase price.
Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Outreach Grant https://www.fcc.gov/acp-grants	The ACP Outreach Grant Program provides eligible governmental and non-governmental entities with the funding and resources needed to increase awareness of and participation in the ACP among those eligible households most in need of affordable connectivity.
Community Compact IT Grant Program https://www.mass.gov/community-compact-it-grant-program	1. This is a competitive grant program focused on driving innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology. 2. Grant to support implementation of innovative and transformative IT projects by funding one-time capital needs-tech infrastructure and/or purchases of equipment/ software. 3. One-time planning, design, installation, implementation, and intial training
Efficiency and Regionalization (E&R) Grant Program https://www.mass.gov/efficiency-regionalization-grant-program	Provide financial support for governmental entities (planning and implementation activities are eligible).
Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (TIRAP) https://www.tirap.org/	A competency-based apprenticeship aimed at growing the productivity of the workforce as directly as possible. 1. Career development of telecommunications workforce through cash and in-kind support. 2. Funding to design curricula and deliver training to develop qualified applicants for placement in middle- to high-skilled jobs 3. To target veterans, transitioning service members, military spouses, women, people og color, unemployed, underemployed, incumbent workers, and underrepresented populations.
Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant https://www.eda.gov/economic-adjustment-assistance	EAA provides a wide range of technical, planning, and public works and infrastructure assistance in regions experiencing adverse economic changes that may occur suddenly or over time.

Program	Type of Assistance
Local Planning and Technical Assistance Programs https://www.eda.gov/sites/default/files/filebase/files/programs/eda-programs/FY21-23-Planning-and-LTA-NOFO_FINAL.pdf	Planning and local technical assistance investments to support economic development, foster job creation, and attract private investment in economically distressed areas.
Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-development-block-grant-cdbg#how-to-apply-	1. Conduct broadband needs assessment. 2. Install wiring, fiber optic cables, and permanently affixed equipment. 3. Provide digital literacy classes.
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/grants/apply	Digital literacy- use of technology to improve teaching, learning, professional development, skill development and abilities, career guidance, supportive services, job search workshop, referral to jobs or training, workers' rights and complaint system information.
English Language Acquisition State Grants https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oss/technicalassistance/elstar-user-guide-state-support-network.pdf	Enhance instruction for English learners with digital resources
CommCorps YouthWorks Funding https://commcorp.org/program/youthworks/	YouthWorks is a state-funded youth employment program that helps teens and young adults develop the skills and experience needed to find and keep jobs.
Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities https://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/award/idea/index.html	Assist with implementation of statewide systems of coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, interagency programs and extending early intervention programs.
Determination of Need (DoN) https://www.mass.gov/determination-of-need-don	The goal of DoN and the framework for analysis by the Department of Public Health is to promote population health and increased public health value.
USDA Community Connect Program https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect	The purpose of the Community Connect Program is to provide financial assistance in the form of grants to eligible applicants that will provide, on a "community -oriented connectivity" basis, broadband service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety benefits. Rural communities- extend access where broadband service is least likely commercially available
USDA Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans & Loan Guarantees) https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/telecommunications-infrastructure-loans-loan-guarantees	This program provides financing for the construction, maintenance, improvement and expansion of telephone service and broadband in rural areas.
High Cost Program (including Connect America Fund, Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and 5G Fund) https://www.usac.org/high-cost/	The federal universal service high-cost program is designed to ensure that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access to modern communications networks capable of providing voice and broadband service, both fixed and mobile, at rates that are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas.

Program	Type of Assistance
USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grants https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants	DLT program helps fund distance learning and telemedicine services in rural areas to increase access to education, training, and health care resources that are otherwise limited or unavailable.
YouthWorks Funding https://commcorp.org/program/youthworks/	Youth employment program that supports skills training for youth up to age 25 from households earning less than 200% of the federal poverty rate.
Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds - Determination of Need (DoN) https://mahealthfunds.org/	This program aims to enhance the capacity of multi-sector collaboratives to authentically engage residents and work together to remove barriers to health. Funding can establish training opportunities for local consumers regarding tracking medical records
Residential Internet Retrofit Program https://broadband.masstech.org/retrofit	Initiative to equip public and affordable-housing units across the state with high-speed internet for current and future residents by upgrading in-building telecommunications wiring, equipment, and infrastructure within older housing developments.
Lead for America - America Connection Corps https://www.americanconnectioncorps.org/	The nation's premier AmeriCorps service experience, advancing economic prosperity in rural and emerging communities. 15 American Connection Core Members are being recruited and placed in full-time, year-long fellowships to serve as Massachusetts-based, "boots on the ground" support at local host site organizations to help with expanding broadband awareness and digital adoption.
Connect Humanity https://connecthumanity.fund/	Digital equity connectivity plan 1. Community engagement, survey work and mapping, technical design, and financial modeling. 2. Support community connectivity providers to get "investment ready". 3. Grants for enabling solutions- digital skills, relevant content, workforce development. Promote a diverse broadband sector 1. Research on financing and operating models for community connectivity providers 2. Fund training to promote skills to build and maintain community broadband
Centri-Tech Foundation Digital Integrators Pilot Program https://www.digitalintegrators.org/	CBOs can use the funding to apply the Community Development Framework for Digital Advancement to local digital equity and inclusion efforts. Organizations can use the tool for program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Program	Type of Assistance
Bank foundations https://www.digitalequity.us/resources/cra-funding-guide-for-digital-equity/	Bank foundations can provide funding for the following digital equity-related progrograms and services: broadband, hardware/devices, tech support, librarian assiatance, digital skills.
Patrick J. McGovern Foundation https://www.mcgovern.org/grants/?exposed_mf_search&exposed_taxonomy_focusarea%5B0%5D=22&exposed_grant_approval_date_sort=date_desc&FZEWGNafiqRBuoy=0dfbn.rMQwW&iwNIhrR=VSj-dZGI9sn5FUH&mb_nJCugrtsAIHc=%5BG3iIlaOL0vuBdj	This foundation has awarded new grants for innovative data- and AI-driven approaches that support digital transformation of health systems and healthcare across the globe.
Project UP by Comcast https://corporate.comcast.com/impact/project-up	Connectivity & adoption: Connecting people to the internet, technology, and resources needed to succeed in a digital world. Skills & creativity: Creating opportunities and new caeer pathways in media and technology and opening doors for new voices to be heard and stories to be shared. Entrepreneurism: Equipping entrepreneurs and small business owners with the skills, digital resources, and opportunities they need to thrive.
Tech Goes Home https://www.techgoeshome.org/	Programs for adults, families- Partner with social service org to deliver courses focused on fundamental digital skills. Offered in libraries, community centers, public housing, and other nonprofit org. TGH Connect- partner with cities, libraries, CBOs, schools, health care centers, and faith-based org to disseminate critical info and help community access online resources.

APPENDIX D: MBI Digital Survey Responses

Q5: Do you have internet service in your home?

Yes	95%
No	5%

Q9: How well does your home internet service work?

Not good enough	95%
Good enough	5%
I dont know	2%

Q10: Is your home internet service bundled with other services such as telephone?

Yes	54%
No	46%

Q12: How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?

Not at all hard	34%
Not too hard	22%
Somewhat hard	38%
Very Hard	6%

Q13: Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?

Yes	53%
No	43%
I dont know	4%

Q14: If you do not have internet service in your home, what is the reason?

Can't afford it	2
Safety	1
Don't understand it	1

Q15: If you do not have internet at home, where do you go to use the internet? ?

Friend or family	2
Don't access it	1

Q16: Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?

Yes	42
No	0

Only 42 responses out of 55

Q17: Which of the following devices do you use most of the time to connect to the internet?

Cellphone	76%
Laptop	79%
Desktop	40%
Tablet	38%
Other	2%

Q18: How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?

More than $1000	18%
$500-$1000	28%
$250-$500	18%
$150-$250	15%
$100-$150	10%
$50-$100	10%
$0-$50	3%

Q19: Are you able to regularly use the internet for online activities?

Yes	96%
No	4%

How Hard or Easy is it to Use the Internet for:	Easy	Not Easy	Hard
Searching and applying for a job	76%	21%	3%
Health care or telehealth services	74%	24%	2%
Participating in your local community	71%	21%	7%
General internet searching	92%	6%	2%
Transportation information	68%	27%	5%
Searching and/or applying for benefits or resources for you or your family	62%	31%	8%

Q23: What kind of digital skills support would you be most interested in?	
Do it yourself training module	41%
In person support from friend or instructor	31%
In person classes	15%
Online classes	13%

Q24: How concerned are you about internet safety?	
Not at all concerned	4%
Not very concerned	10%
Somewhat concerned	42%
Very concerned	44%

Q27: How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV services etc.?	
Very Accessible	44%
Somewhat Accessible	42%
Not Very Accessible	6%
Not at All Accessible	8%

Q28: How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV services etc.?	
Very Well	44%
Somewhat Well	42%
Not too Well	6%
Not at All Well	8%