Berkshire Region Massachusetts Broadband and Digital Equity Listening Session

September 2023

Agenda

Welcome!

Introducing MBI

Statewide Planning Process

Digital Equity and Broadband in The Berkshires

Breakout Sessions

Thank You & Closing

Meeting Ground Rules

Be **fully present** by not checking your phone or computer

Know when to lead versus **creating space for others to speak**

Be open and listen to others. Even when you disagree, suspend judgment, and look for common ground.

Recognize that **we are all approaching this process with different levels of understanding and lived experiences** surrounding equity and digital equity.

01

Introducing MBI

About the Massachusetts Broadband Institute

MBI's mission is to make affordable high-speed Internet available to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices, and other public places across the Commonwealth. MBI works closely with key stakeholders to bridge the digital divide in Massachusetts.

Investments: Tech Goes Home

Expanding the TGH program to reach learners in **Pittsfield** that will receive **digital literacy instruction, a new device**, and registration support for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) – a $30 federal subsidy for broadband service.

How to get involved?

Refer learners to partner sites via TGH Staff and program website!

Western MA Alliance for Digital Equity w/ Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

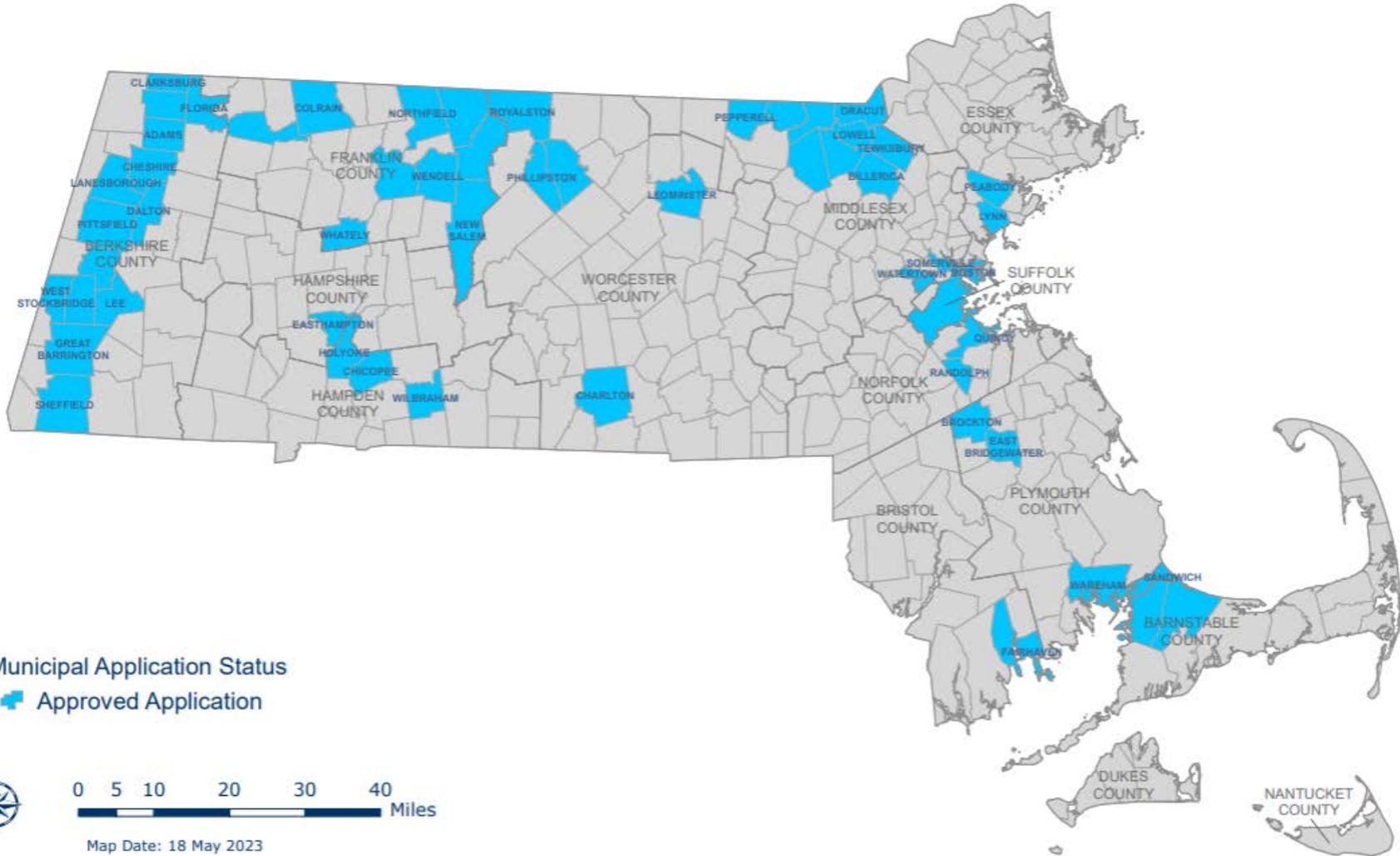This investment will support the following key activities:

- Distribution of mobile hotspots to homeless and relocated immigrant individuals through **the Three County Continuum of Care Coalition – serving Berkshire County.**

- Expanded digital skills programs with Holyoke Community College, **Berkshire Community College**, Springfield Tech College, and Greenfield Community College that will provide digital skills training to **360 learners** from the communities served by these colleges.

- **$500k** investment to Berkshire County to improve internet access and facilities at public spaces such as community centers, libraries, and public housing common areas through the **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.**

The Digital Divide and Challenges to Digital Equity

IN HAMPDEN, HAMPSHIRE, AND FRANKLIN COUNTIES, MASSACHUSETTS

MAY 2021

How to get involved?

Join the Alliance!

MBI | MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE | at the MassTech Collaborative

MBI's Digital Equity Programs and Partnerships

Berkshire Participants

Clarksburg
Adams
Florida
Dalton
Pittsfield
Cheshire
Lanesborough
West Stockbridge
Lee
Great Barrington
Sheffield

Municipal Application Status
Approved Application

Map Date: 18 May 2023

MBI | MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE | at the MassTech Collaborative

Massachusetts Broadband & Digital Equity Funding

$75M - State ARPA Digital Equity Fund

$175M - US Treasury Capital Projects Fund

$1M - NTIA Digital Equity Act Planning Grant

$147M - NTIA Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Grant (including $5M Planning Grant)

City of Pittsfield

Michael Obasohan
Kevin Zawistowski

02

Statewide Planning Process

State Broadband and Digital Equity Planning

The State Digital Equity Plan will include...

- Vision and input gathered from communities across the state in the planning process

- Community-identified barriers to digital equity

- An assessment of what's working to advance digital equity

- Strategies to build on existing data, reports, and plans

How you can further shape the plan!

Contribute to Asset Mapping Database

Fill out Asset Mapping form with relevant assets including programs, organizations, reports, engagement activities

Take our Public Survey

Send to your friends and family!

Promote a Listening Session

Tell your networks about the regional listening sessions!

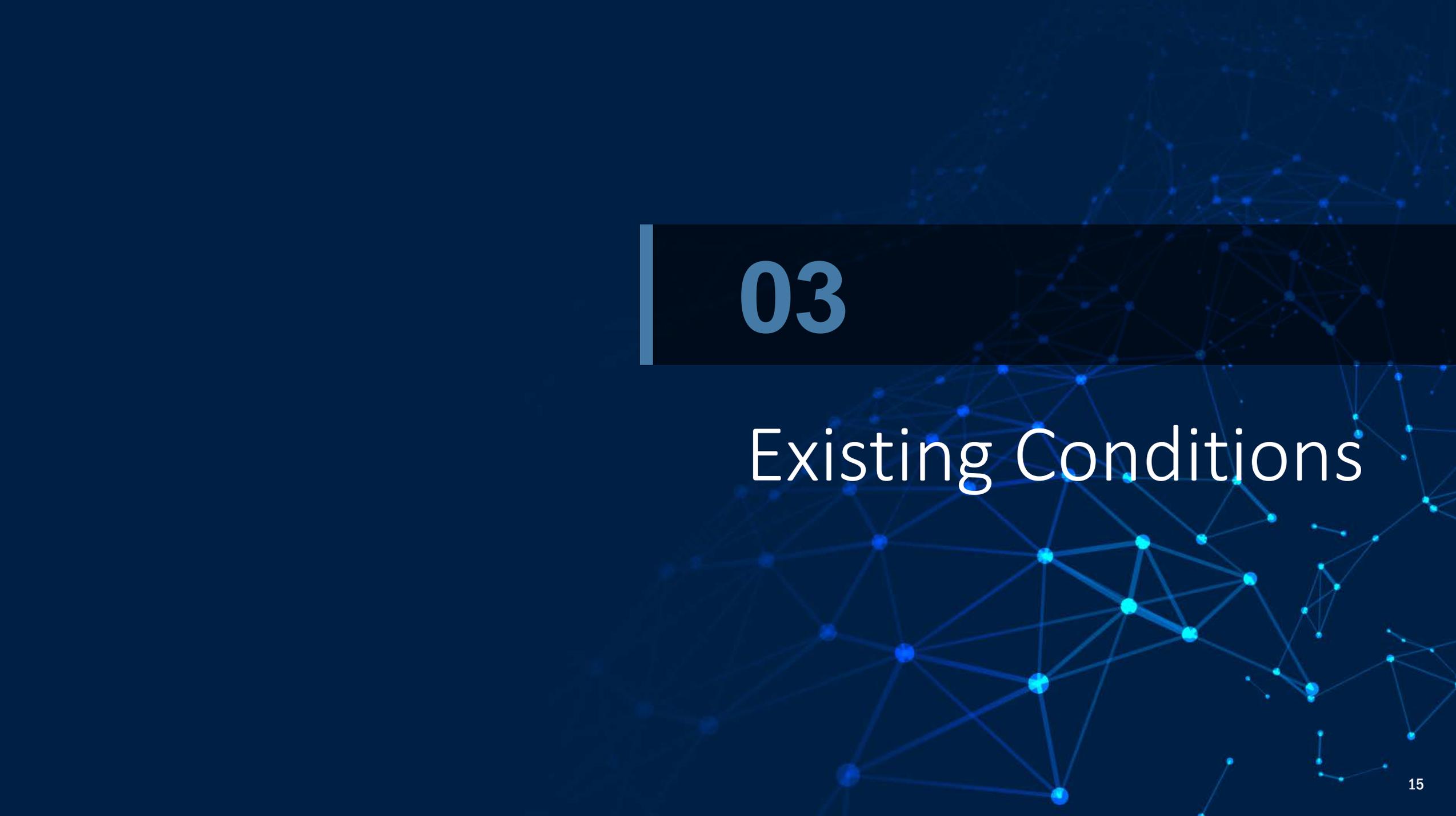Holyoke 9/14
Lowell 9/20
Hyannis 9/28
Boston 9/30
Greenfield 10/3

Timeline

Summer to Fall 2023	**Regional listening sessions, focus groups, public survey, asset mapping**
Fall (Oct. & Nov.) 2023	Plan drafting and writing
Winter (Nov. & Dec.) 2023	Public comment period
Winter (Dec. & Jan.) 2024	Plan Submission
February 2024	Ongoing community engagement, challenge process launch, and grant deployment

➔ *Visit broadband.masstech.org for upcoming events and ways to get involved.*

03

Existing Conditions

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. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

– National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Image Source: Detroit Community Technology Project

Determining Factors of Digital Access
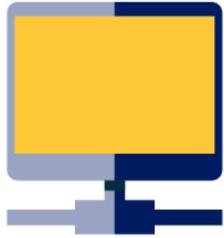
Connection

Fast
Affordable

Adequate Device
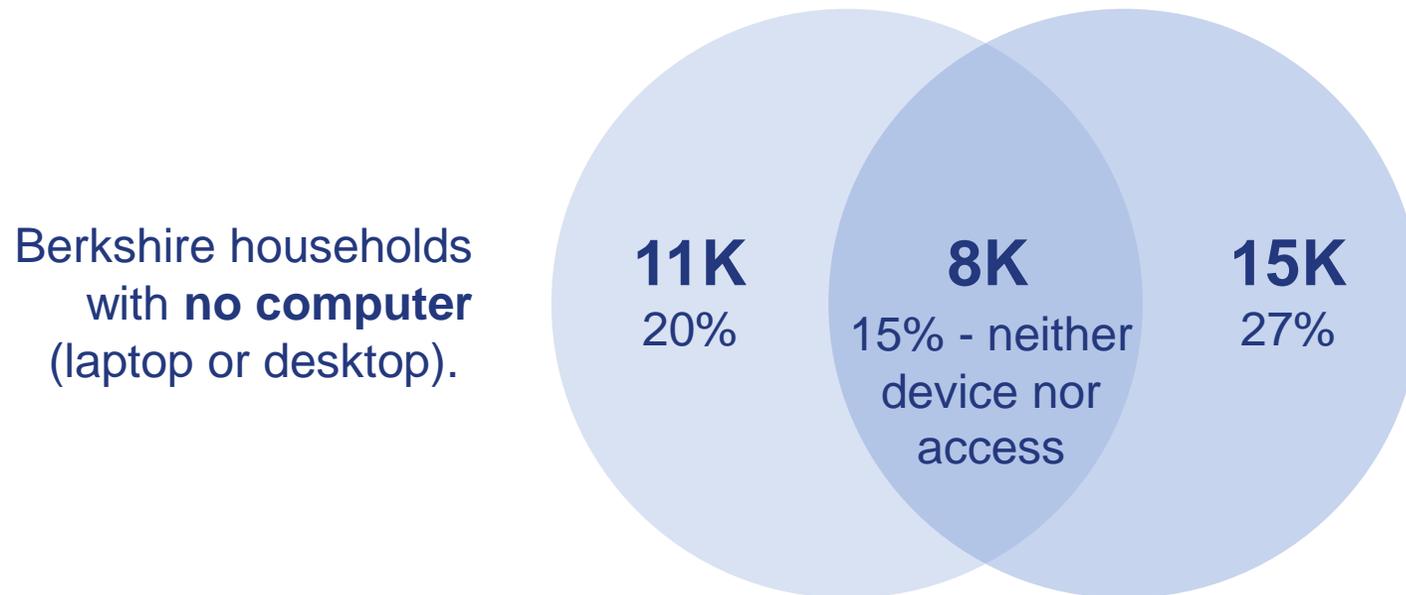
Router
Personal Computer /Laptop

Literacy

Use of Technology
Ensuring functioning equipment
Evaluating quality of information and privacy risks

Digital Gaps in the Berkshires

Of **55,500 households** in the Berkshires...

**Many more** face challenges with finding the support they need to use the internet safely and meaningfully.

Berkshire households with **no computer** (laptop or desktop).

11K
20%

8K
15% - neither device nor access

15K
27%

Southeast households with **no broadband internet subscriptions**.*

These challenges have **disproportionate impact for specific population groups** depending on a range of socioeconomic, historical, and geographic factors.

* Residents with no broadband access (cable, fiber optic, or DSL) in their household. **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau

Statewide Survey - Preliminary Findings
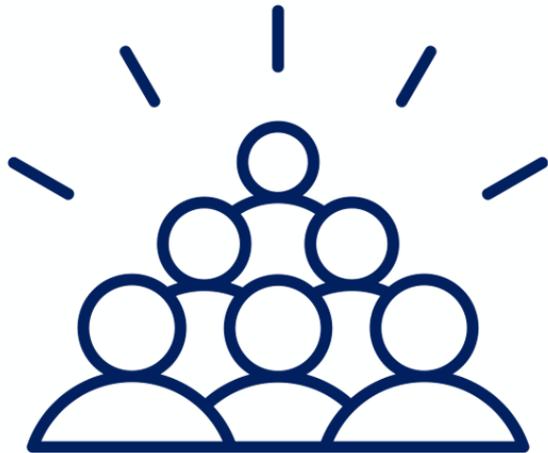
Total Responses x Region

Region	Responses	Target
Pioneer Valley Region	821	307
Greater Boston Region	1,091	1,085
Cape Cod & Islands Region	828	112
Southeast Region	1,101	608
Northeast Region	1,034	455
Central Mass Region	175	378
Berkshire Region	918	55
Unknown	62	-
Total	**6,030**	**3,000**

Covered Population Responses the Berkshires

| Covered Population	Responses	Target
Aging Individuals	455	18
Veterans	54	3
People of Color	211	6
Households with Limited English**	10	0
Individuals with Disabilities	115	8
Low-Income Households	86	9
Residents in Rural Areas	707	37

*Response numbers are updated as of Wednesday, 9/13, 12pm.
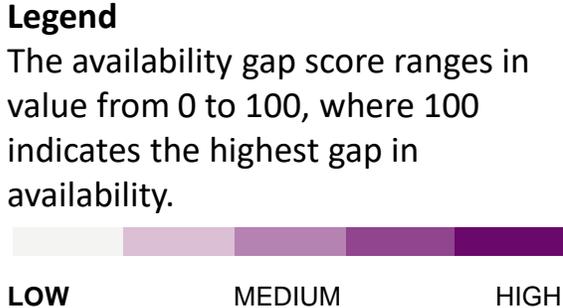** This is an estimate based on the number of non-English surveys submitted.

Access and Quality of Service

26% of statewide survey respondents reported that their internet service is not good enough to meet their household's needs.

59% of municipalities in the Berkshires have little or no competition in the broadband market.

North Adams

Adams

Pittsfield

Lenox

Great Barrington
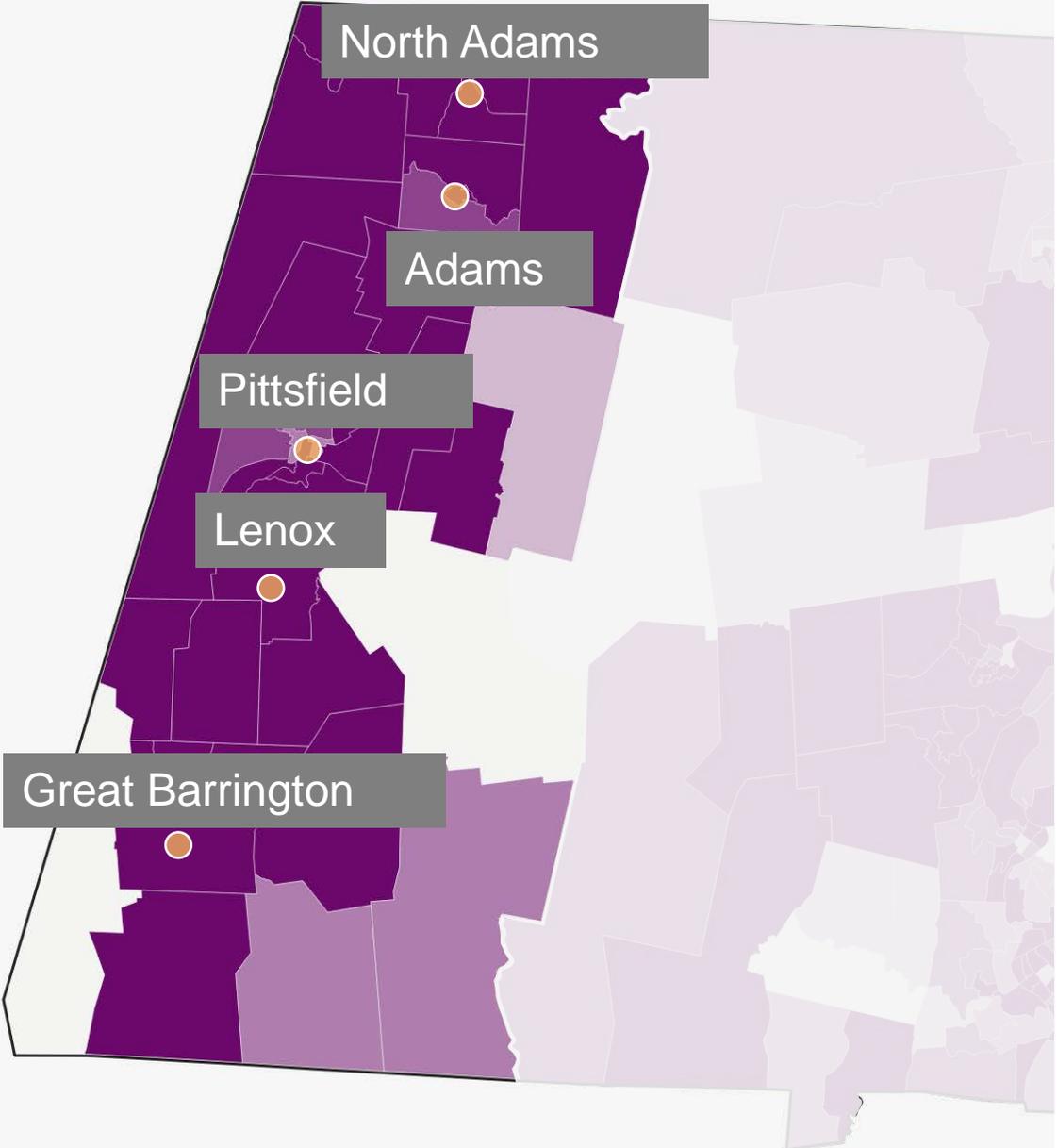
Note: The availability gap score is comprised of three scores: 1) average upload speeds, 2) average download speeds, and 3) percent of the population (2021) not using internet at 100/20 megabits per second. This metric does not capture infrastructure.
Sources: ACS 2017-2021, 5-year estimates and Ookla speed tests.

Legend
The availability gap score ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest gap in availability.

LOW   MEDIUM   HIGH

Access and Quality of Service

In the Berkshires, there are ~**1,900 Unserved or Underserved** locations.
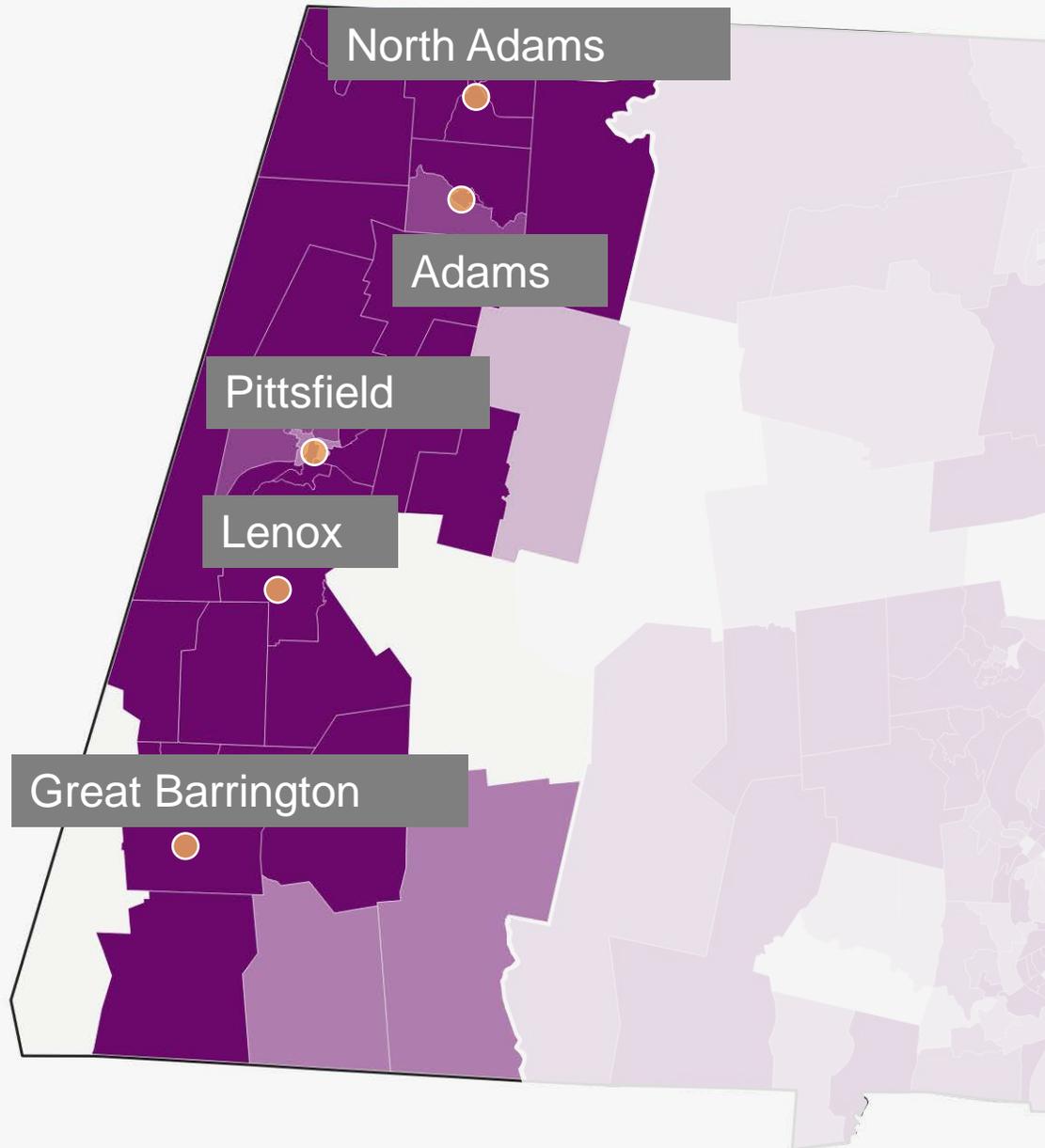
Top 5 Municipalities – Unserved Locations	
Savoy	133
Florida	127
New Marlborough	114
Lee	70
Hancock	61

Top Municipalities – Underserved Locations	
Florida	238
Savoy	251

Challenge Process

NTIA Approves
Initial Proposal Volume I

Challenge
submission window

Evaluation and
final determination

30 calendar days   **30 business days**

120 calendar days   **60 business days**

BEAD funding eligible
locations posted

Rebuttal period

Allocation of funds
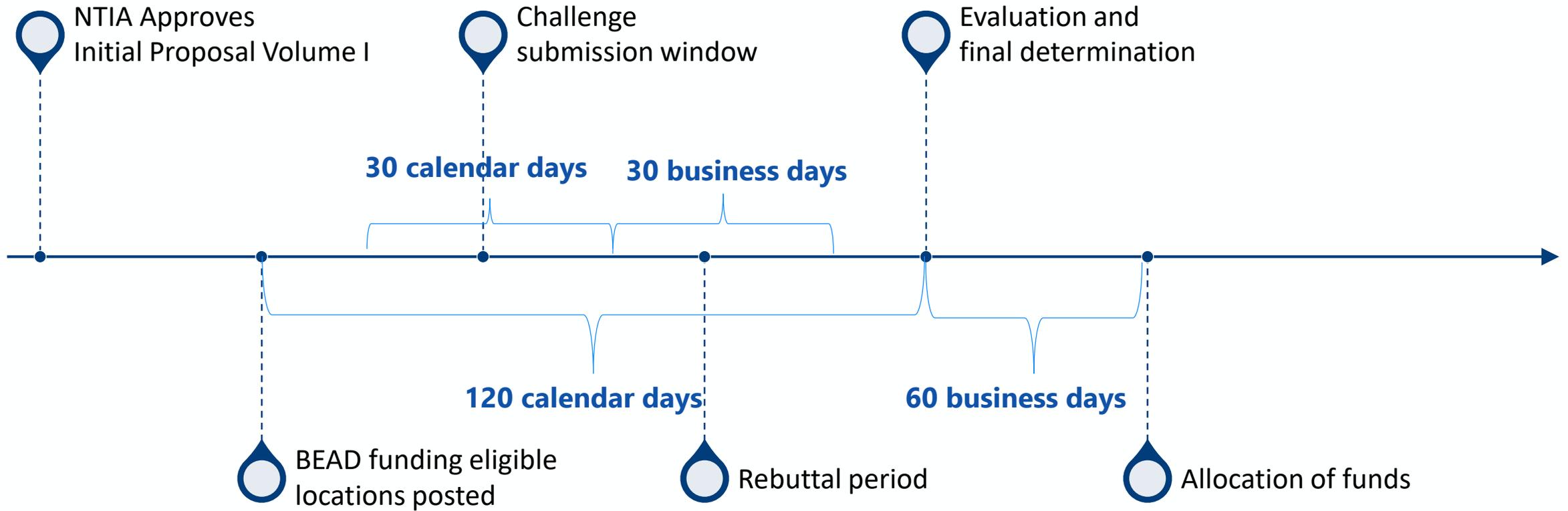
Affordability Gap

Over **1 in 3** survey respondents statewide reported having at least some difficulty paying for their internet.

The average lowest broadband plan regionwide is **$68.50.**

Legend
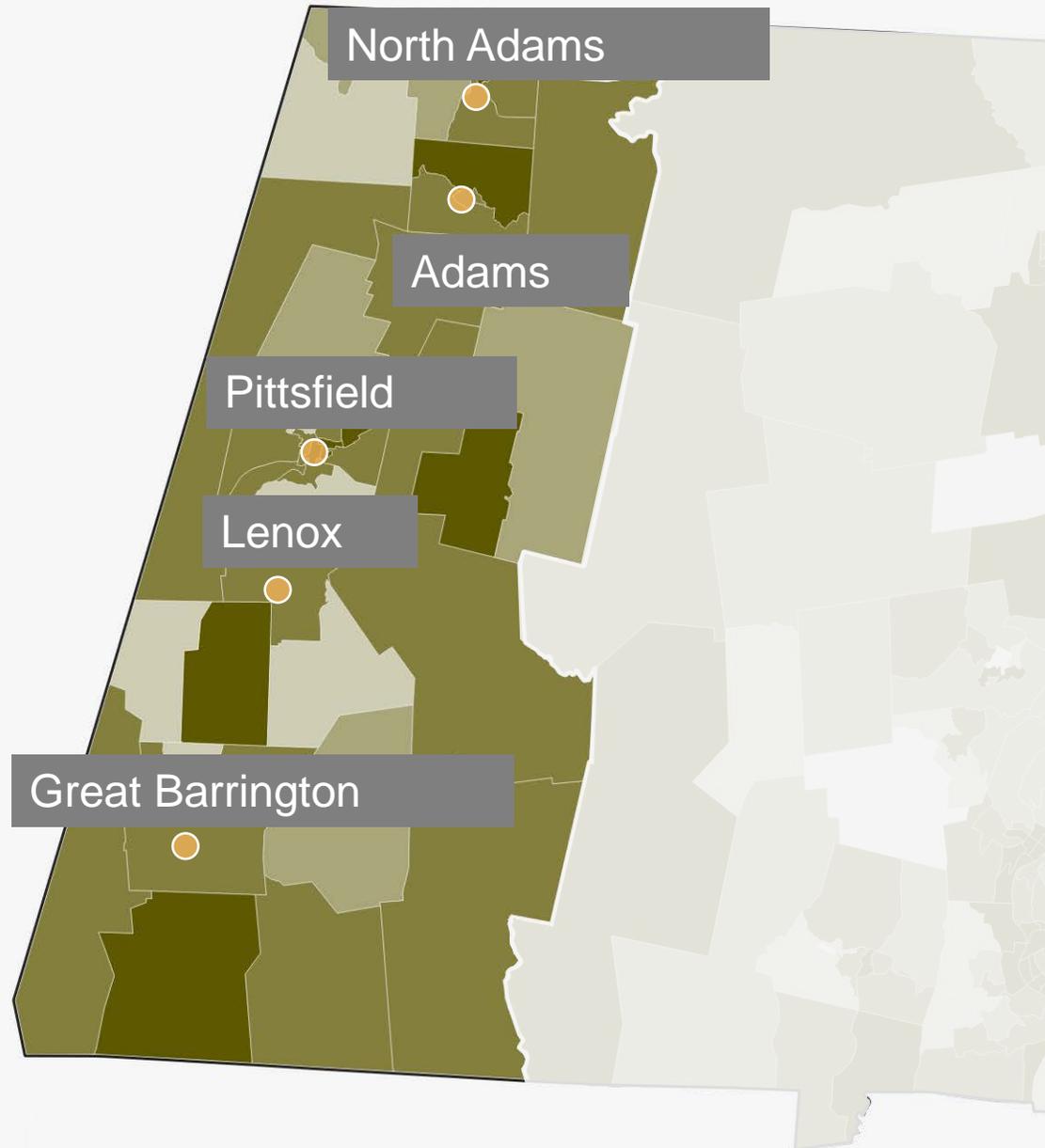The affordability gap score ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest gap in affordability.

LOW   MEDIUM   HIGH
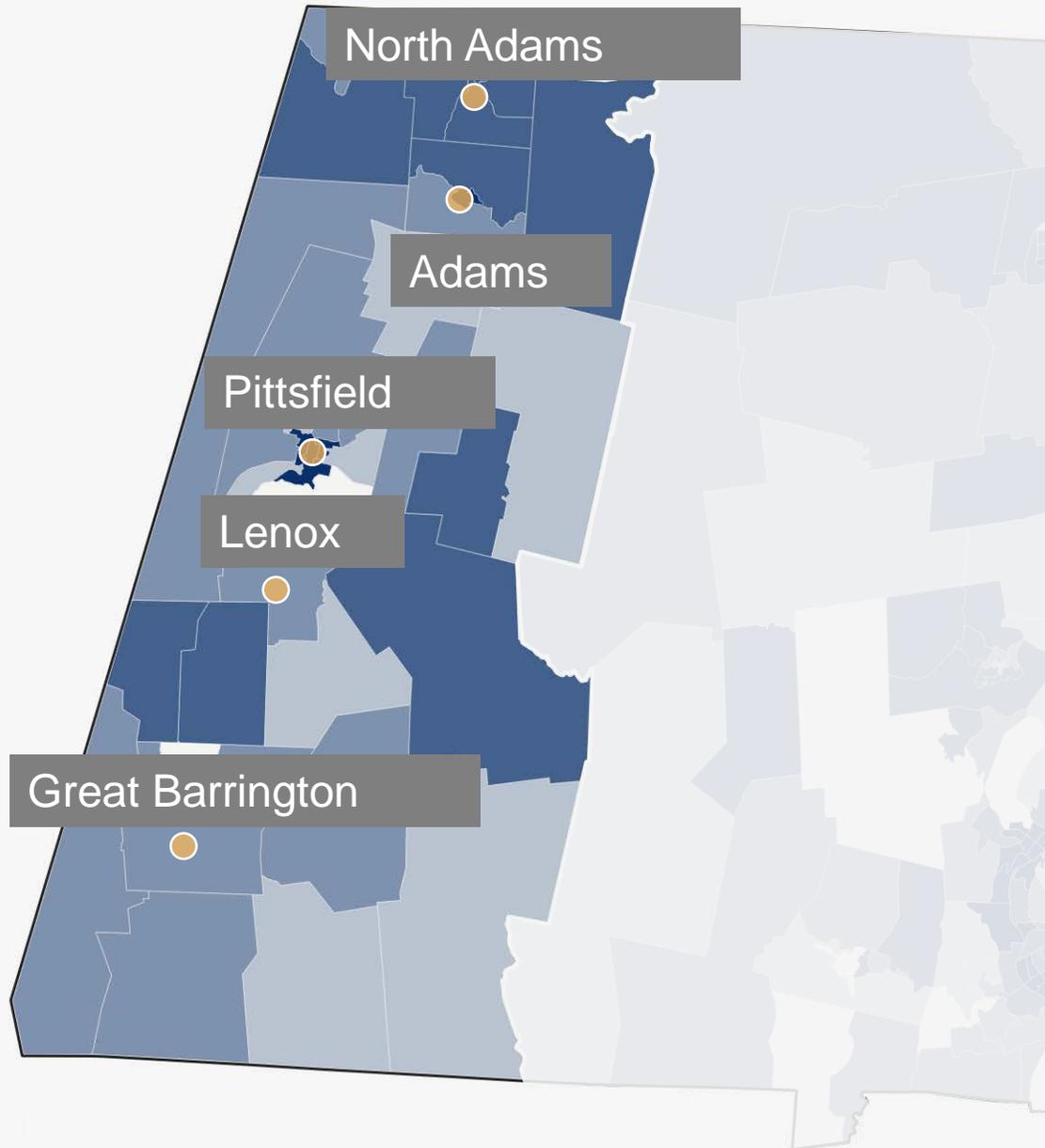
Note: The affordability gap score is comprised of percent of households in poverty. Sources: ACS 2017-2021, 5-year estimates.

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Great Barrington

Adoption Gap

In the Berkshires, adoption gaps vary across the region and are likely reflective of population specific needs.

Statewide, **nearly half** of survey respondents without internet at home cite cost as a prohibiting factor.

North Adams

Adams

Pittsfield

Lenox

Great Barrington

Note: The adoption gap score is comprised of two scores: 1) percent of homes without internet access or not subscribing, and 2) percent of homes with no computing devices. Sources: ACS 2017-2021, 5-year estimates.

Legend
The adoption gap score ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest gap in adoption.

LOW   MEDIUM   HIGH

Community Anchor Institutions

Education Institutions

Community Centers

Libraries

Museums and Cultural and Religious Centers

Healthcare Infrastructure

Public Housing

Assets in the Berkshires

MBI is collecting unique assets that contribute to digital equity in each region.

29 *Digital equity assets submitted to date for the Berkshire region*

Example Assets:

Berkshire Athenaeum at the Pittsfield Library - Free "Digital Literacy for All" series with Pittsfield Library staff, including classes on email use, the internet itself, cybersecurity, iPhones, iPads, and video chat.

Ralph Froio Senior Center - free, volunteer 1:1 instruction to seniors about computers, cellphones, tablets, and any electronic device they are having difficulty with navigating.

Need the internet in Berkshire County but can't afford it?

Go to @ bit.ly/Internet4all and help change that.

See MBI's Public BETA Map @ https://mapping.massbroadband.org/map

FLOWCODE
PRIVACY.FLOWCODE.COM

BRPC
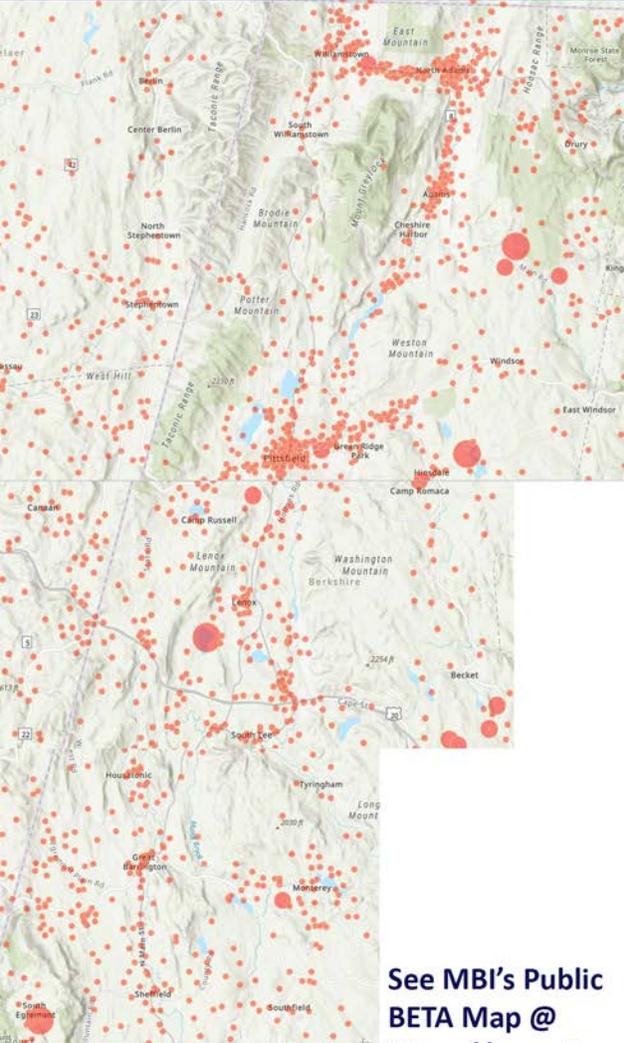
03

Breakout Discussions

Remember the Ground Rules

Be **fully present** by not checking your phone or computer

Know when to lead versus **creating space for others to speak**

Be open and listen to others. Even when you disagree, suspend judgment, and look for common ground.

Recognize that **we are all approaching this process with different levels of understanding** surrounding equity and digital equity.

Respect confidentiality. What is discussed in this room stays in this room.

Breakout Rooms

We look forward to hearing from you on the topics below.

Virtual Breakout Rooms:

Please follow this jam board link:

bit.ly/3PxSV9P

In Person:

Staff will assign breakout group participation

Visioning Exercise

Thank you for your participation in breakout discussions. We would like to move into a visioning exercise to close out today's activity.

What does Internet for All mean to you?

Imagine it's five years in the future. The Digital Equity Plan has been a resounding success. After some initial challenges, Massachusetts's solutions are having a huge impact on the world in ways you'd never even imagined!

- Take 1 minute to scan the QR code to the right and use one word to answer the question above.

04

Closing Session

Report back

Thank you for your participation in our facilitated discussion. We want to learn more about what you heard and discussed.

What was discussed in your breakout room?

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