

**MBI**

MASSACHUSETTS  
BROADBAND INSTITUTE



at the MassTech  
Collaborative

# Rural Massachusetts Broadband and Digital Equity Listening Session

October 2023

# Agenda

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Welcome!

Introducing MBI

Statewide Planning Process

Digital Equity and Broadband in Rural MA

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

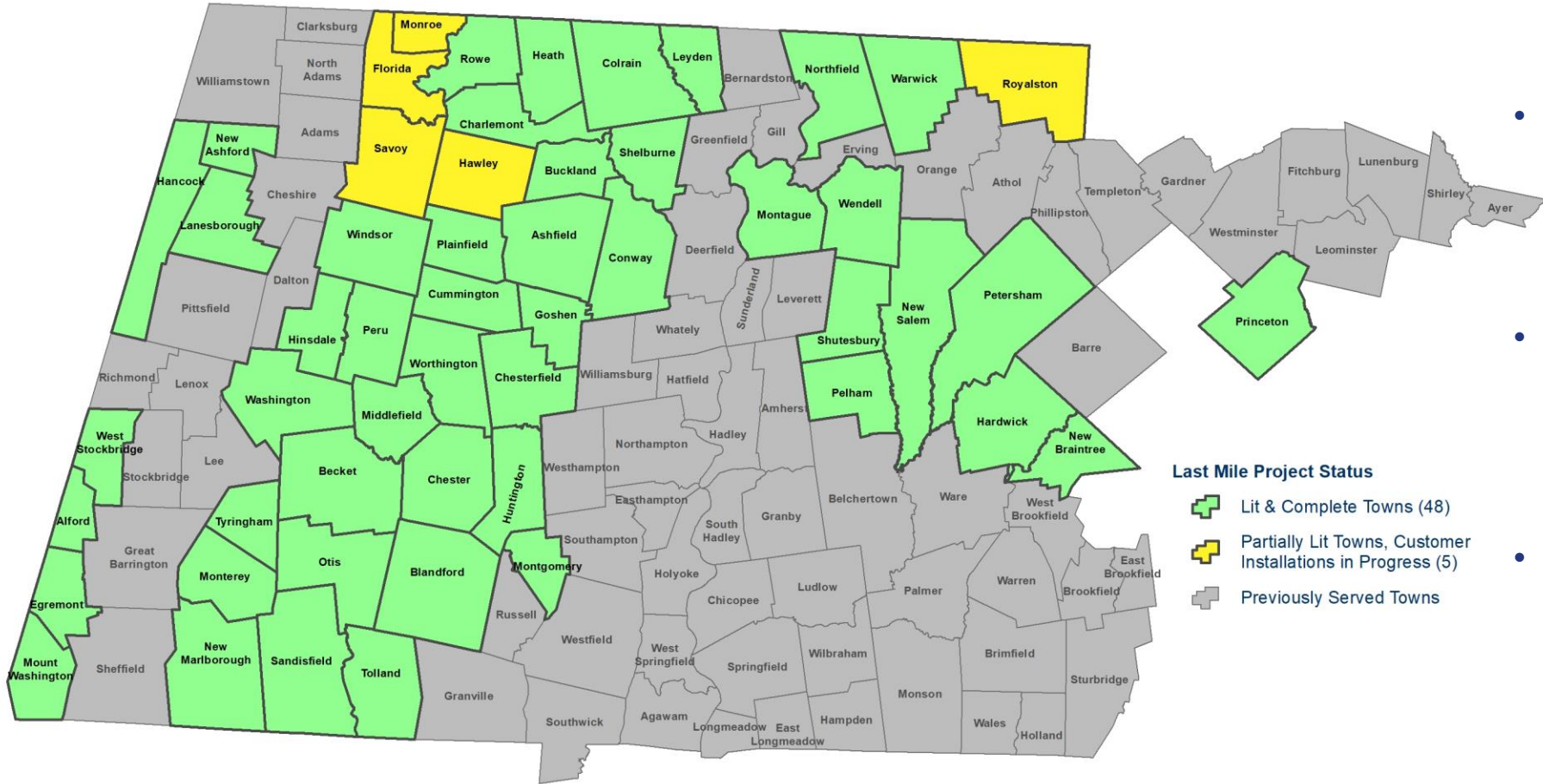
# About the Massachusetts Broadband Institute



***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: MBI's Last Mile Program

## Broadband Access

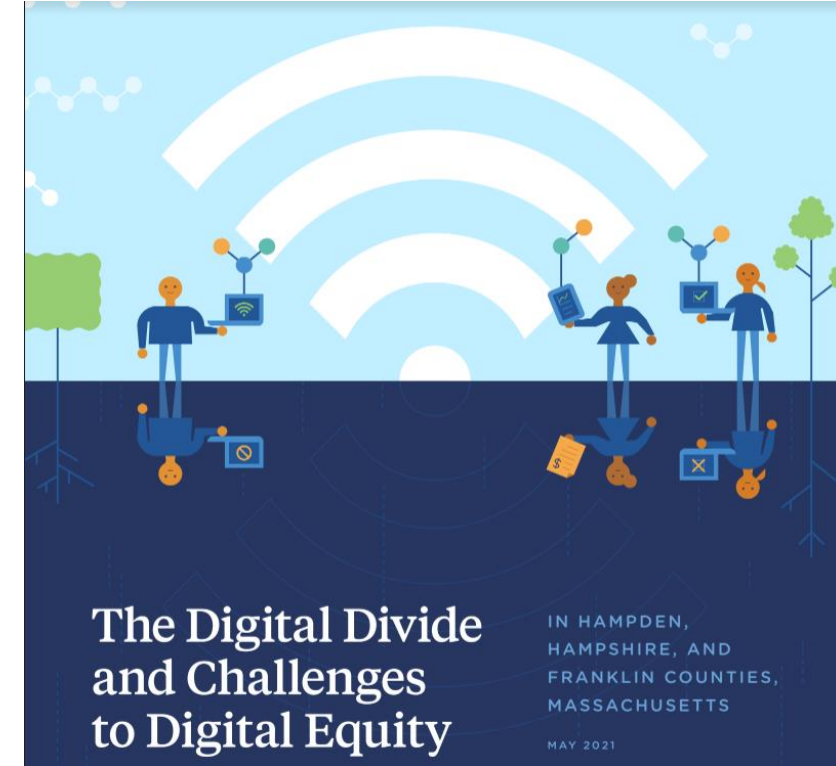


- In 2016, 53 towns in western and central Massachusetts lacked broadband access.
- As of September 2023, 48 of 53 Last Mile towns have networks that are fully operational.
- The remaining 5 towns have networks that are partially operational and will be completed in FY24.
- The state will use federal funds to close the final broadband availability service gaps statewide in all cities and towns.

# Western MA Alliance for Digital Equity

This investment will support the following key activities:

- Re-granting to nonprofit and community programs to expand Wi-Fi internet access to the public.
- Distribution of mobile hotspots to homeless and relocated immigrant individuals through **105 local community based organizations**.
- Expanded digital skills programs with Holyoke Community College, **Berkshire Community College**, Springfield Tech College, and **Greenfield Community College** will provide digital skills training to **360 learners** from the communities served by these colleges.
- Older Adult Digital Equity Network will provide digital literacy programming via organizations such as Oasis, Village Neighbors, Councils on Aging, and LifePath.
- Coordinated network of **20 organizations** focusing on increasing ACP registration and adoption in the region through the ACP Helper Network.



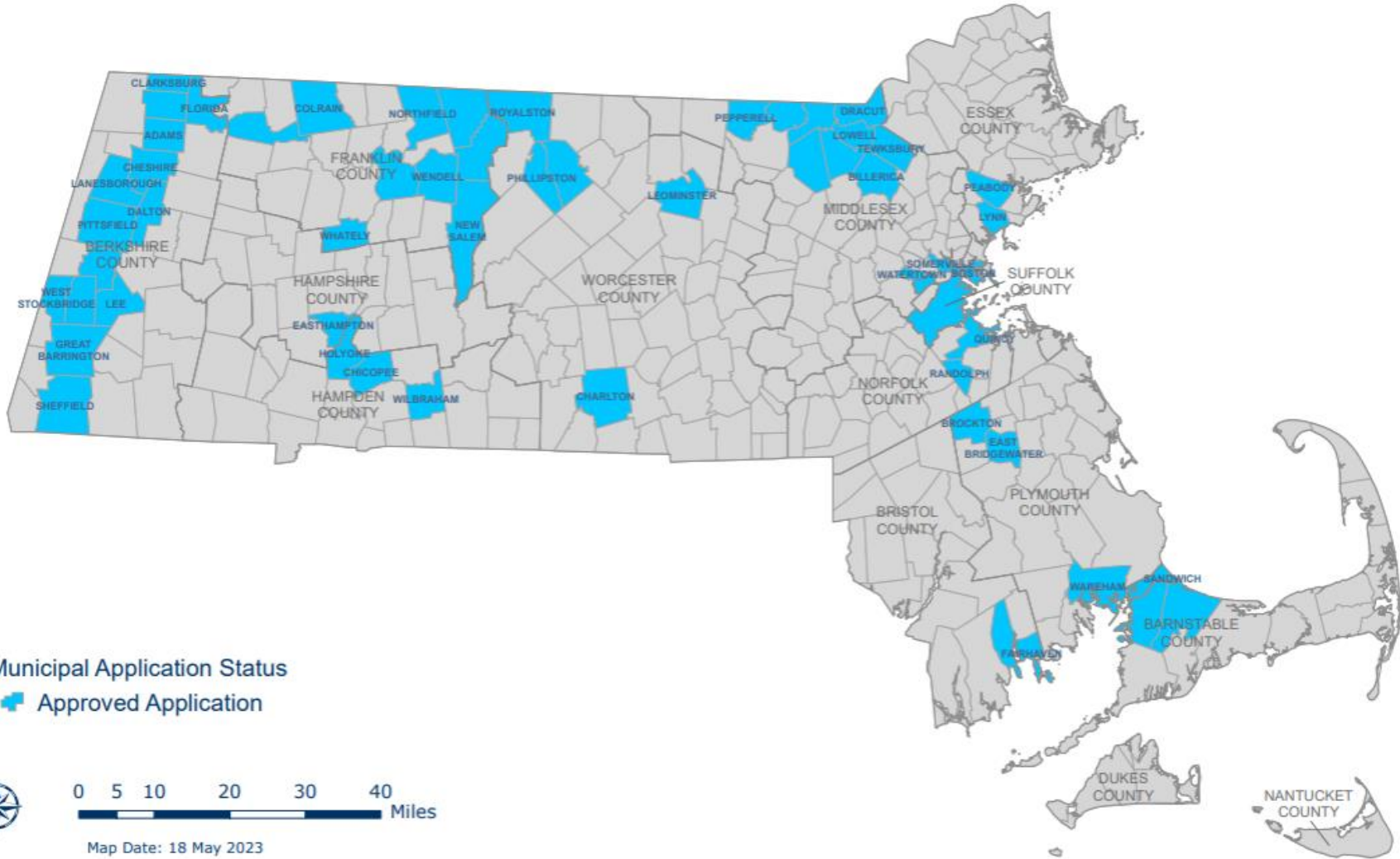
## How to get involved?

Join the [Alliance!](#)



# MBI's Digital Equity Programs and Partnerships

## Rural MA Participants



- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Adams        | New Salem     |
| Ashby        | North Adams   |
| Beckett      | Northfield    |
| Charlemont   | Orange        |
| Charlton     | Orleans       |
| Cheshire     | Otis          |
| Clarksburg   | Pepperell*    |
| Colrain      | Phillipston   |
| Dalton       | Royalston     |
| Dunstable    | Sheffield     |
| East         | Stockbridge   |
| Bridgewater* | Templeton     |
| Florida      | Tyngsborough* |
| Great        | Warwick       |
| Barrington   | Washington    |
| Lanesborough | Wendell       |
| Lee          | West          |
| Lenox        | Stockbridge   |
| Leyden       | Whately       |
| Montague     | Wilbraham*    |
| New          | Winchendon*   |
| Marlborough  | Windsor       |

\*These towns are considered "rural" under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program guidance, but do not meet the State Office of Rural Health's definition.



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## 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)





**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!

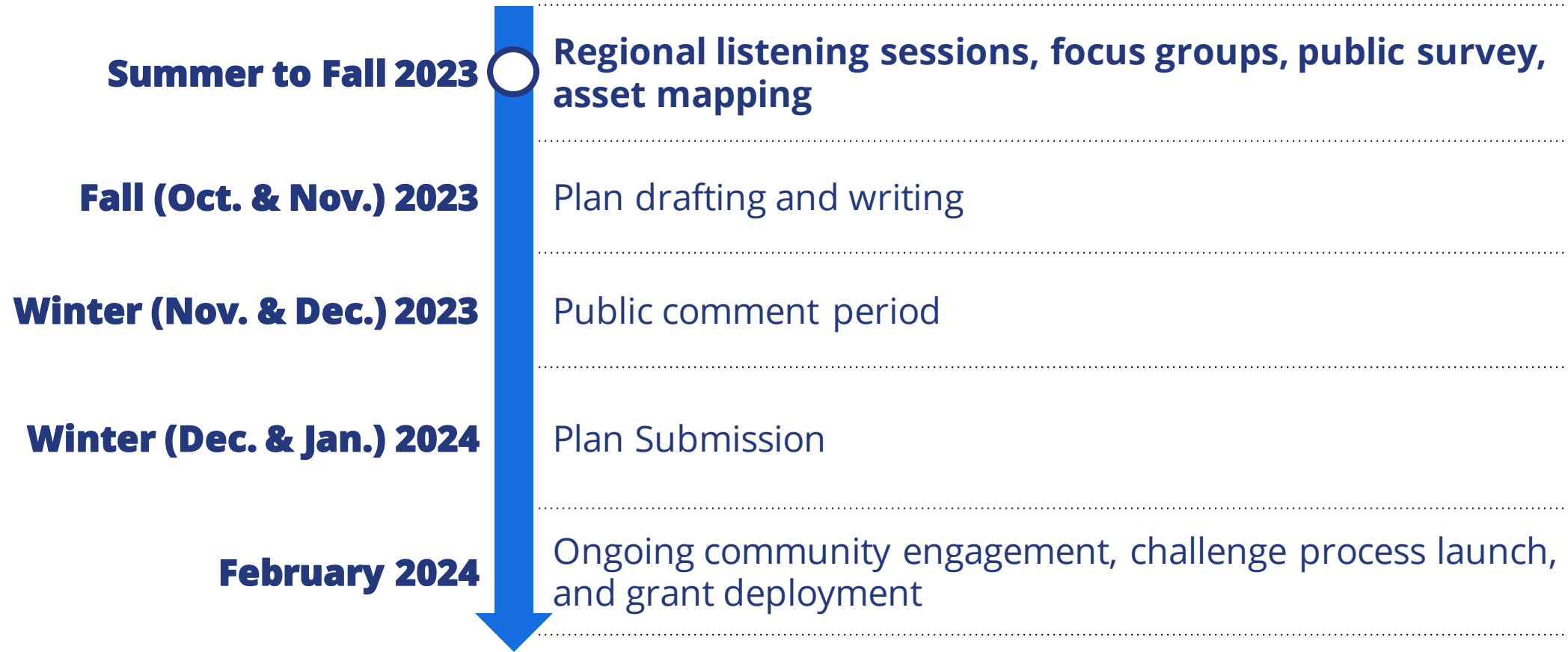


## Promote a Listening Session

Tell your networks about the regional listening sessions!

**Central MA 10/5**

# Timeline



→ ***Visit [broadband.masstech.org](https://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

# Determining Factors of Digital Access



**Connection**

**Fast  
Affordable**



**Adequate Device**

**Router  
Personal Computer /Laptop**

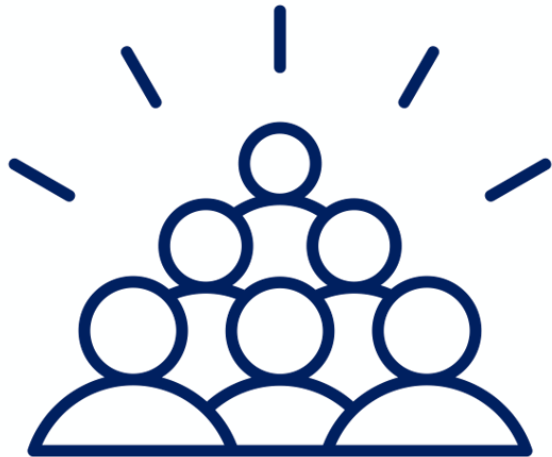


**Literacy**

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



# Statewide Survey - Preliminary Findings



## Total Responses

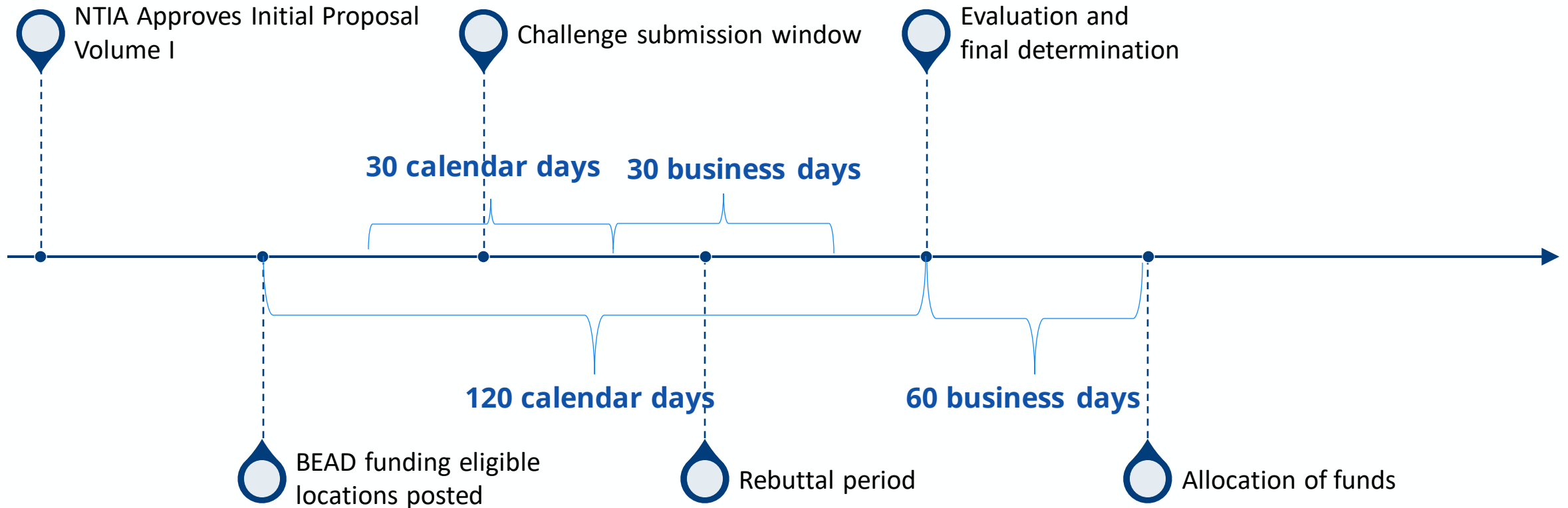
## Covered Population Responses

Region	Responses	Target	Covered Population	Responses	Target
The Valley	933	307	Aging Individuals	2,822	302
Greater Boston Region	1,182	1,085	Veterans	334	119
Cape Cod & Islands Region	936	112	People of Color	3,032	764
Southeast Region	1,303	608	Households with Limited English**	316	71
Northeast Region	1,181	455	Individuals with Disabilities	1,069	341
Central Mass Region	764	378	Low-Income Households	1,253	454
Berkshire Region	1,479	55	Residents in Rural Areas	2,257	302
Unknown	87	-			
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,865</b>	<b>3,000</b>			

\*Response numbers are updated as of Monday, 10/2.

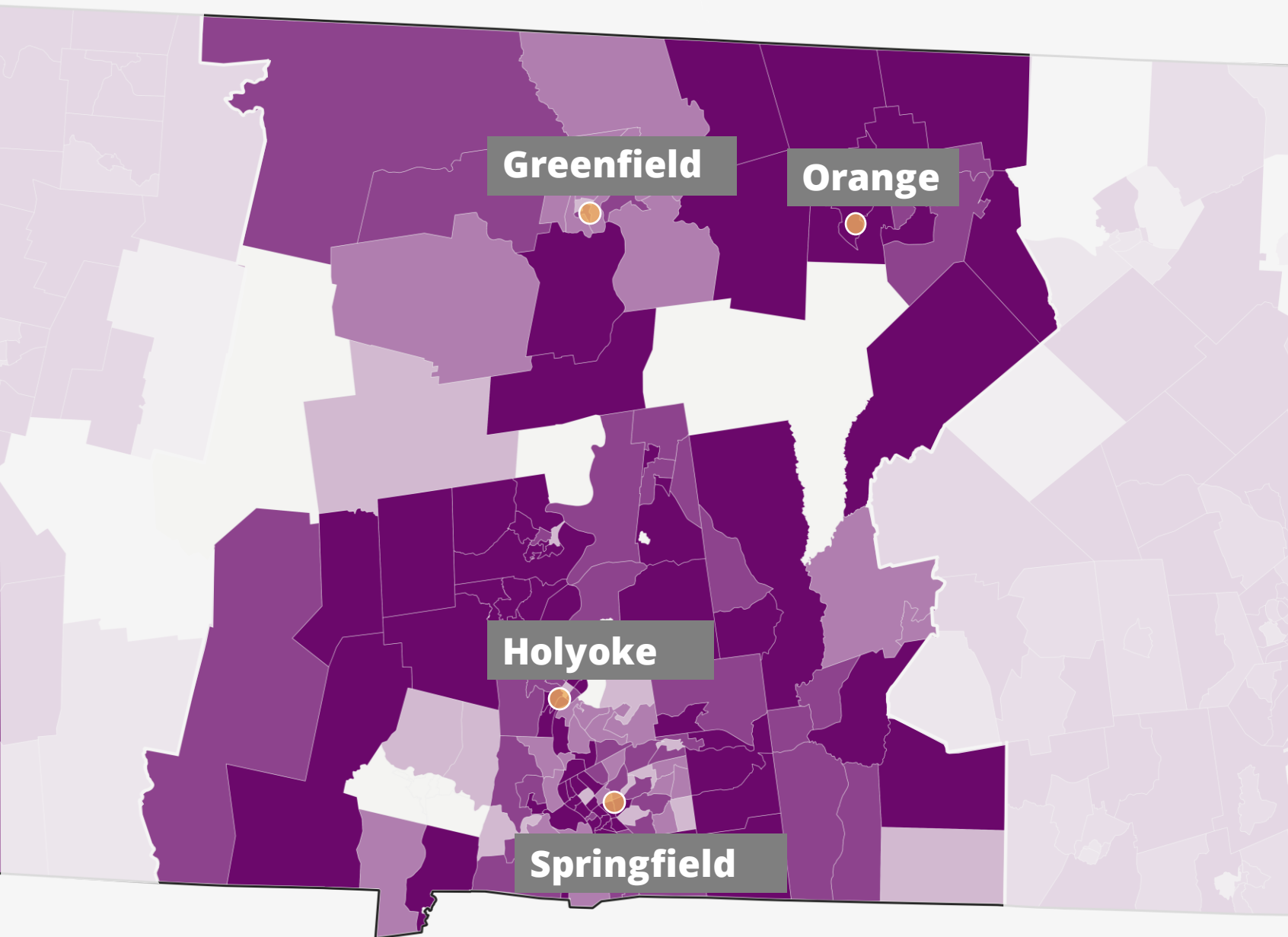
\*\* This is an estimate based on the number of non-English surveys submitted.

# Challenge Process



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.



## Access and Quality of Service

**52%** of municipalities in the Valley have little or no competition in the broadband market.

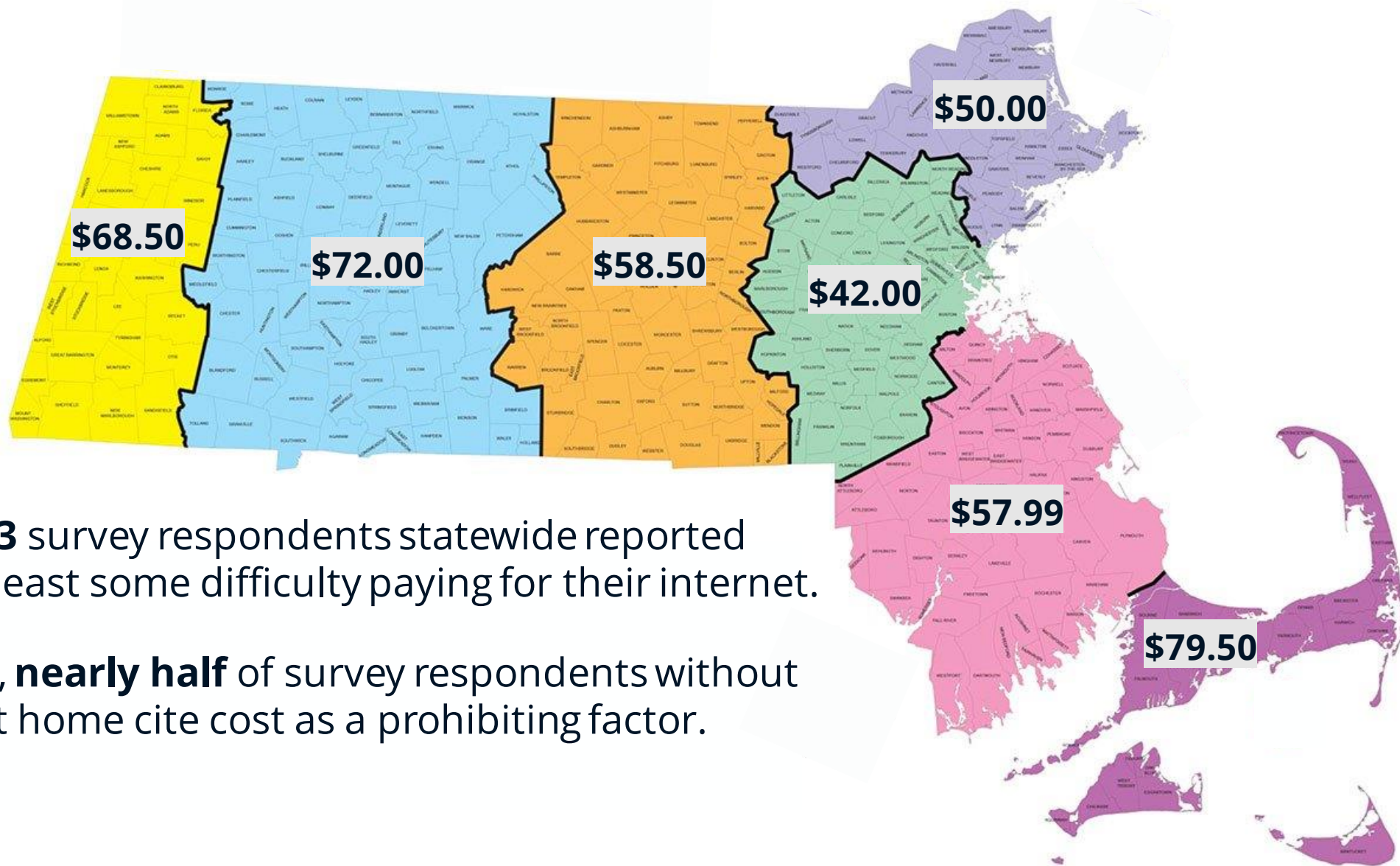
### Legend

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



# Affordability Gap

The average for the lowest broadband price by region.

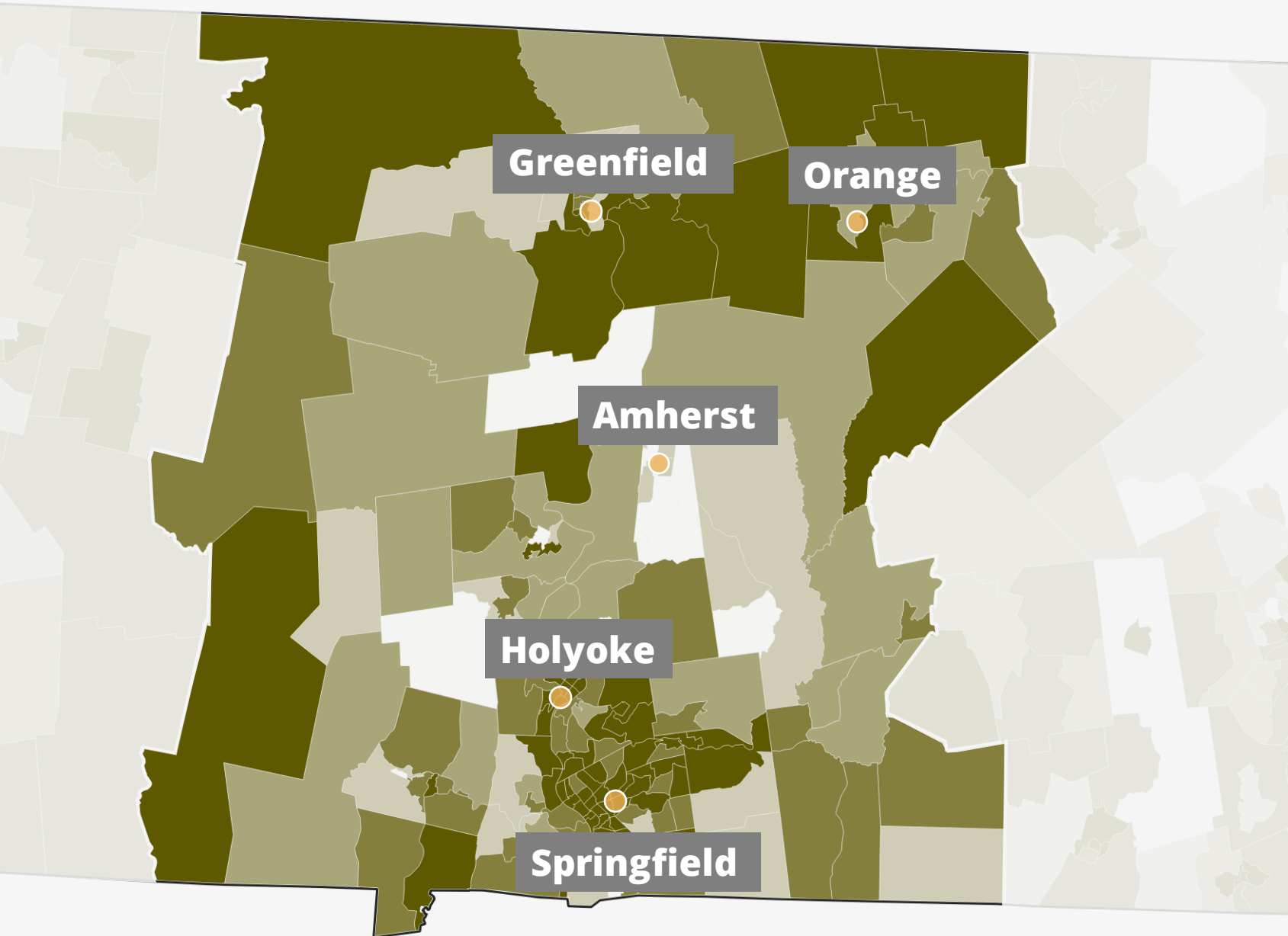


Over **1 in 3** survey respondents statewide reported having at least some difficulty paying for their internet.

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

**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.



## Adoption Gap

In the Valley, adoption gaps are highest in Springfield/ Holyoke and in rural communities like Rowe, Deerfield, and Tolland.

### Legend

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



# Community Anchor Institutions



**Education Institutions**



**Community Centers**



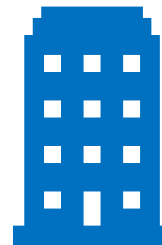
**Libraries**



**Museums and Cultural  
and Religious Centers**



**Healthcare  
Infrastructure**



**Public Housing**

# Assets in the Commonwealth

MBI is collecting unique assets that contribute to digital equity across the state.

708

*Digital equity  
assets submitted to  
date Statewide*

Example Assets:



**The Dickinson Memorial Library** in Northfield provides free Wi-Fi access, access to hotspots, public computers, device support, and general help navigating technology and the internet.



**Cape Cod Community College Adult ESOL** - Digital literacy support interwoven throughout curriculum to support students through their learning journey.

A background network diagram consisting of numerous blue nodes connected by thin lines, creating a complex web-like structure. The nodes are of varying sizes and are distributed across the entire frame. The overall color scheme is dark blue with lighter blue highlights for the network elements.

# Ted Harvey

Franklin Regional Council  
of Governments



# MBI's Digital Equity Programs and Partnerships

## Franklin County Participants

- City of Greenfield
- Town of Montague
- Town of Whately
- Franklin County Regional Plan for the towns of Leyden, New Salem, Northfield, Orange, Warwick, Wendell

# Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program in Franklin County

## Planning

- 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.
- Prepare municipalities to submit **grant proposals** to existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities.

### In Franklin County...

- Regional Plan: Charlemont, Colrain, Leyden, New Salem, Northfield, Orange, Warwick, Wendell
- City of Greenfield
- Town of Montague \*
- Town of Whately \*

\* Developed in coordination with municipal Comprehensive Plan

# Outreach & Engagement in Franklin County

## MBI Statewide Digital Equity Survey



<https://bit.ly/madigitalequitysurvey>

To be distributing paper surveys and conducting "office hours" at select locations in participating communities.

## MBI Asset Inventory Tool



<https://airtable.com/shrJXmXsN7CJ32AZU>

## Improving Digital Equity Google Form:

<https://forms.gle/U8gHDHND5M9CnbjR7>

# Outreach & Engagement in Franklin County

## Community Meetings (6)

- Review findings of data collected and survey responses
- Review current conditions and assets, and discuss needs and opportunities
- Discuss potential recommendations

## Focus Groups (10-12)

- Invites specific segments of the community to share their experience.

*Examples: Older adults, Families with school-age children, Residents of households with low incomes, Residents with English as a second language, etc.*



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:**

**You will be invited to a breakout room shortly**

## **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?

# Timeline



**→ Visit [broadband.masstech.org](https://broadband.masstech.org) for details on events and ways to get involved.**

# Thank you!

Contact MBI at

[broadband@masstech.org](mailto:broadband@masstech.org)

Visit the **Internet for All Page**

[broadband.masstech.org/internetforall](http://broadband.masstech.org/internetforall)