

Massachusetts Internet for All Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |

Massachusetts Broadband Institute

MBI
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at the MassTech
Collaborative



Digital Equity in Massachusetts: A Transformational Opportunity

Massachusetts is at a pivotal moment with a unique opportunity to drive transformative change in digital equity.

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) is the central broadband office for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MBI is one of five primary divisions of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech), a quasi-public economic development agency that works closely with the state Executive Office of Economic Development.

MBI has made significant investments to expand internet access across the State. MBI has funded last mile projects, established a middle mile network, and facilitated public-private partnerships to extend high-speed internet access to underserved and remote areas. These efforts have included grants, technical assistance, and collaborations between public entities and private service providers, all aimed at bridging the digital divide and ensuring better connectivity. With these investments, Massachusetts has achieved an availability rate that exceeds 98%, measured by the number of locations with high-speed internet infrastructure. This leaves a limited number of locations lacking high speed connections. Through a once-in-a generation federal funding investment, Massachusetts has an unprecedented opportunity to achieve its strategic goals and unlock meaningful economic potential for all residents.

Vision for Digital Equity

The vision for broadband and digital equity in the Commonwealth is that:

Every resident in Massachusetts has high-speed, high-quality internet availability and can confidently adopt and use the internet regardless of who they are or where they live. This universal connectivity will ensure that everyone has the support they need to enjoy full personal, civic, and economic digital participation throughout their lives with safety and security.

Availability	Adoption	Quality of Service
Every location has high-speed internet available .	Every resident can utilize and afford the internet.	Every location has reliable service.

Shaping the BEAD and DEA Planning Processes

MBI's planning process for Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Act (DEA) prioritized alignment. While the BEAD and DEA plans seek unique goals - with BEAD investing in statewide infrastructure, and DEA focusing on digital equity investments - MBI aligned the efforts to ensure coordinated stakeholder engagement and visioning activities. This allowed MBI to develop a shared strategy to bridge the digital divide across the Commonwealth.

MBI's historic investments in middle mile and last mile infrastructure has set the stage for the Commonwealth to achieve universal broadband availability in the coming years. The sequencing of MBI's infrastructure grant funds will begin with the Broadband Infrastructure Gap Networks Grant Program¹ which aims to fill the remaining gaps in Massachusetts broadband coverage. Any remaining

coverage gaps that remain after the Gap Networks Program or that are identified through the BEAD Challenge Process will be addressed with BEAD Deployment funds.

Following the guidance provided by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), we conducted a large-scale engagement process to understand the state of digital equity in Massachusetts and where gaps exist. MBI established a Broadband & Digital Equity Working Group to bring together practitioners across the Commonwealth to inform every step of this work; conducted stakeholder interviews; hosted statewide listening sessions and focus groups; distributed a statewide Digital Equity survey in nine languages; and conducted data analysis involving publicly available data.

This Plan is made possible by our robust network of partners, including existing MBI grantees advancing local, regional, and municipal digital equity planning efforts across the Commonwealth. Throughout the planning process, we deliberately created opportunities to invite these partners to inform both the BEAD and DEA Plans and ensure these Plans reflected their expertise and understanding of digital equity. This exercise helped to strengthen the community of digital equity practitioners across the Commonwealth and positions Massachusetts well to effectively allocate and execute on the Plan with BEAD funds and Digital Equity Capacity grants when available.

Main Findings

Based upon learnings from this process, MBI established digital equity gaps, sourced from the State's major digital equity needs. From these gaps, MBI generated correlating actions, linked to future programs to implement throughout Massachusetts. Gaps were categorized by the NTIA's Measurable Objectives, and are connected to forward-looking strategies established in the Statewide Digital Equity Plan. High-level findings from each Measurable Objective area include:

Broadband Affordability & Availability

- High internet subscription costs are the largest identified barrier that prevent Massachusetts residents from having broadband at home.
- Many residents with internet subscriptions experience poor internet quality.

Accessibility of Devices and Device Support

- Residents identify a need for low-cost devices.
- Residents need devices that are easy to use.
- Residents need sustainable devices.

Digital Literacy

- Residents need greater digital literacy support, especially support that is linguistically and culturally accessible across different demographic groups.
- Residents need support using the internet to conduct essential day-to-day activities, including accessing job opportunities and healthcare.
- Institutions offering digital literacy programs, including libraries, need operating support.

Privacy & Cybersecurity

- Residents are concerned about internet safety, especially with regard to protecting themselves from having their data stolen, from online scams, and from digital surveillance.
- Individuals with disabilities are particularly concerned about medical data breaches.
- Residents are concerned about youth safety online.

Accessibility & Inclusivity of Public Resources

- Residents, particularly those with language and accessibility barriers, identify difficulty accessing public resources online.
- Residents need more information about how to access online public resources and desire support programs tailored to their needs.

MBI's assessment of needs found that greater affordability, higher quality of service, and increased internet safety are top priorities for residents across Covered and Underrepresented Populations and regions of the state. These consistent themes underlie the diverse needs across different regions and demographic groups. As a result, MBI is committed to being responsive to the diversity of resident needs, recognizing the unique differences in needs across regions and demographic groups and avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. MBI used this understanding of needs to recommend programs to improve digital equity in the Commonwealth.

Implementation Plan

MBI developed an implementation strategy to organize our efforts to achieve digital equity in Massachusetts. We designed the framework to rely on extensive collaboration with our local and statewide partners and to make the Plan effective and sustainable over the long term. MBI's implementation strategy is structured to achieve the vision through 3 sets of activities: build on existing programs, develop new programs, and create foundations for success. The list of recommended programs below provides examples that MBI may want to prioritize from the full list of programs.

Build on Existing Programs

Digital Equity Partnerships Program. MBI will scale its existing Partnerships program with a focus on 3 objectives: expand geographical coverage to regions with gaps in support, expand coverage by target populations regardless of geographic location, and expand initiatives supported through past grants where these have proven to be successful.

Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program: Building on the 70 municipalities that have participated in this program to date, MBI's future investments will focus on two initiatives: provide participating municipalities with easily accessible funding to implement priority initiatives based on their plans and create meaningful funding options to implement larger, longer-term projects.

Develop New Programs

State-Supported Technical Assistance. MBI will develop a Front Door program to support quality of service through a consumer-facing web portal dedicated to addressing quality-of-service concerns for the residents through education, troubleshooting tools, and escalation options.

Statewide Digital Navigator Corps. MBI will support organizations throughout Massachusetts to hire, train, and staff digital navigators who can provide local support with technology troubleshooting, education, program access, and more. We will prioritize increasing the number of navigators in regions and among populations where this resource is currently unavailable.

Create Foundations for Success

Foster Regional and Topic-Specific Digital Equity Coalitions: MBI will facilitate the creation of coalitions that promote digital equity across Massachusetts. MBI envisions that coalitions could be structured by

region, Covered Population or other socioeconomic or demographic characteristics, priority outcome areas (economic and workforce development, education, healthcare, housing, and infrastructure), or other dimensions.

Establish Best Practices Catalogue: MBI will strengthen the ability of all organizations to support digital equity objectives by educating practitioners and developing a catalogue of best practices. This support will be available both to organizations that focus on digital equity and to those that do not.

MBI will track the outputs and outcomes of its programs in multiple ways. Existing MBI programs already have in place methods to track KPIs and overall progress. Building on these structures and KPIs, MBI will set program evaluation measures with its partners for all programs—based on the Measurable Objectives and key performance indicators—that allow it to assess whether programs are producing results and, if not, where they should improve. MBI will also establish mechanisms for lessons learned to be shared statewide so that successful programs can be expanded more broadly.

The Way Forward

Completing the Massachusetts Internet for All Broadband and Digital Equity Plans is the first step.

As we move towards putting the Plans into action, we understand the need to ensure Plans remain as “living documents” that will continue to reflect the realities of diverse communities in the Commonwealth and can guide investments and partnerships where it meets the need and the moment. To do so, MBI will continue ongoing connections with stakeholders and communities across the Commonwealth to have an up-to-date understanding of needs and barriers.

This will be an all-hands-on-deck effort over the coming years, and we look forward to joining hands with major stakeholders in and outside of government—including Commonwealth and local government agencies, nonprofit leaders, and private industry partners—to meet this pivotal moment and ensure universal connectivity and its benefits for all.