

Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program Questions & Answers

1. When is the deadline to apply for Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program?

For municipalities that have completed a Digital Equity Plan by April 30, 2024 (under MBI or pre-existing) the deadline to apply is May 31, 2024. Please contact MBI (broadband@masstech.org) with further questions regarding this deadline.

2. Can I apply for the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program even if my municipality may not complete the MDEP planning process by the May deadline?

Yes, for municipalities enrolled in the MDEP Program anticipating they may not conclude their planning process by the end of April 2024, MassTech will execute a Reservation of Funds Agreement to reserve \$70,000 in digital equity implementation funding per municipality. This amount is subject to increase (not to exceed \$100,000 per municipality) or decrease based on MassTech's review and approval of the funding application and proposed budget.

Eligible municipalities will receive notification from MBI of this opportunity and the required process.

3. What is the process for requesting a Reservation of Funds?

MBI staff will contact eligible municipalities directly about this opportunity.

4. Can the qualified consultant that has been working with my municipality in the Municipal Digital Equity Planning (MDEP) Program help us apply for Implementation funding?

Municipalities enrolled in the MDEP Program are encouraged to work with their existing planning consultants to prepare their Implementation Funding application. However, a representative from the municipality must submit the final application via the [online form](#). Technical assistance from existing planning consultants is available for MDEP Program participants only.

5. When will applications for the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program be approved?

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and MassTech will execute an agreement directly with municipalities upon application approval.

6. What if my municipality isn't currently enrolled in the MDEP Program?

Municipalities not participating in the MDEP Program must include a document in the funding application that meets the following eligibility criteria:

- Underlying purpose to increase internet access and usage for disadvantaged populations
- Identification of the needs/barriers to digital inclusion among impacted populations

- Strategic recommendations for implementation

Municipalities that do not have a pre-existing plan that meets the above criteria must apply for the MDEP Program by April 12, 2024.

7. What are some ways funds received through the for Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program can be used?

Funds received through the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program can be used in alignment with six initiative areas: public space internet modernization; connectivity for economic hardship; wi-fi access; digital literacy; device distribution and refurbishment; and education, outreach, and adoption. Funds can also be used to increase staff capacity for digital equity. See the [program webpage](#) for more details on eligible expenses per focus area.

8. What is the timeline for the program's budgeting and reporting requirements?

This program will have a performance period of one year, with bi-annual reports and reimbursement.

9. What are some examples of public space internet modernization?

Public space internet modernization is defined as improvements to inadequate broadband infrastructure and digital use in public spaces. This may include libraries, senior centers, educational facilities, workforce training locations, and commercial corridors. Some eligible activities include the cost of network service to the public space being modernized or general equipment such as hardware or devices. In some instances, the improvement of furniture or other features that enable better broadband use may be allowable.

10. If municipalities plan to engage in projects in modernization of public spaces, do they need to solicit and submit quotes for contractor work?

MBI expects municipalities currently enrolled in the MDEP plan to work with pre-qualified consultants to identify actual costs or close estimates and project rationale as part of the application process. The municipality will then need to go through their own procurement process to gather official bids for projects.

11. What is the deadline for expending funds, and when is the latest end date of the one-year performance period?

The deadline for municipalities to expend funds is October 30, 2026. The 1-year period of performance timeline will be dependent upon each municipality's application approval and start date.

12. Can implementation funds have the flexibility be used to support planning around ACP wind-down?

Communities may work with their consultants to develop strategies to mitigate impacts of ACP wind-down as part of their Municipal Digital Equity Planning and implementation project development activities. However, additional planning work is not an eligible use of implementation funds.

Municipalities interested in using implementation funds to support ACP wind-down activities (i.e. direct outreach to residents, lifeline enrollment support, etc.) should plan to apply for digital navigation services under the education, outreach, and adoption initiative.

13. A significant need of some municipalities are private, off-site backup of important data. Might this be a potential type of work for this grant?

Unfortunately, this type of work would not be eligible under the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program as it does not have direct impact on digital equity for those in the community who may struggle with internet access or use.

The [Community Compact IT Grant Program](#) may be more applicable to this type of work. Please note that this program is not administered by MBI.

14. Could the municipality use these funds to administer a municipal internet subsidy similar to the ACP?

No, an internet subsidy program is not an eligible use of implementation funds.

15. For regional projects, how does MBI anticipate awarding funding?

While each individual municipality is eligible for up to \$100,000, MBI will evaluate applications for overall expected impact, effective use of funds, and effective collaboration with other entities. For regional applications, MBI does not anticipate awarding the maximum award for every participating municipality, but will evaluate applications on a case-by-case basis. MBI expects to see a sustainable approach to utilizing funds on a regional scale and will look favorably on regional collaborations that propose sharing resources and achieving economies of scale.

16. Would the cost of interpretation services for public meetings be an eligible use of Implementation Program funds?

MBI would need to evaluate how the services relate to the municipality's digital equity plan. Should there be a documented need within a municipality's digital equity plan that demonstrates the lack of interpretation at public meetings has an impact on a population group to access and utilize services, MBI would consider this if the project meets the grant requirements. The intent and/or reasoning for the project would need to be clearly stated in the application.

17. What would you say to municipalities who are concerned about advancing certain implementation strategies due to sustainability challenges once the grant has been expended? For example, navigation or one-on-one support.

MBI encourages municipalities applying for implementation funding to evaluate sustainability when strategizing. The goal of the Implementation Program is to “kickstart” projects and demonstrate proof of concept for community Digital Equity Activities.

MBI encourages municipalities to begin engaging in digital equity activities as soon as possible, as communities already engaged in the work are often well-positioned to secure additional funding. However, MBI discourages applicants from viewing MBI as the sole funding source for their projects.

18. Are municipalities that are recipients under MBI’s Digital Equity Partnership Program eligible to receive implementation funds?

Yes, municipalities are eligible for funding for projects not funded by another federal source.

19. If a municipality that did not participate in MDEP has a digital literacy plan, can it be submitted for consideration?

Yes, so long as it meets the following criteria for pre-existing plans:

- The purpose is to increase internet access and usage for disadvantage populations
- It identifies the needs/barriers to digital inclusion among impacted populations
- The plan contains strategic recommendations for implementation

20. Can municipalities use implementation funds for veterans or other populations to pay for the initial set up of internet service?

Implementation funds may not be used to directly pay for any residential internet service fees or subscription costs. However, funds may be used for digital navigation services to support target populations requiring assistance with subscribing to home internet services under the education, outreach, and adoption initiative area.