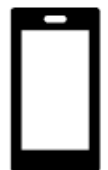


Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program:

Digital Equity Plan

Templeton, Massachusetts



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Town of Templeton Digital Equity Plan



This project was funded by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at the MassTech Collaborative under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. Technical assistance was provided by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission. Funding was provided by Massachusetts ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds.

Prepared by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission

for The Town of Templeton

December 2024



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1 AN INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING:

What is Digital Equity and Why is it important?

1.1 PLAN BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

The Town of Templeton received technical assistance from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, funded by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program, to draft a municipal digital equity plan.

The goal of achieving digital equity within a community is one that aims to ensure everyone has equitable access and opportunities to the digital information and technology needed for full participation in society, democracy, and the economy through a process known as digital inclusion. The focus is on bridging digital gaps associated with the availability of high-speed broadband internet service and digital devices, affordability of internet service and devices, and overall adoptability of those services and devices. Increasing access and removing barriers affecting digital inclusion and equity requires a fuller understanding of those barriers, and how they affect certain segments of the population, particularly within varying geographic areas such as urban centers, suburban neighborhoods, and rural regions.

In certain areas or among certain segments of the population, bridging the digital divide by increasing “access” may mean developing programs that address affordability issues or language barriers that limit access to services and devices. In other areas, it may focus on increasing “adoptability” among aging adults over 60, through digital literacy classes intended to build confidence, trust, and overall comfort-levels through lessons in basic computer use and online safety and security. In more rural areas, where residential internet services are limited and publicly accessible spaces with reliable connectivity are few and far between, it may focus on expanding service to remote locations, creating public workspaces, and increasing staffing and hours to those spaces, or, providing convenient, connected outdoor workspaces in places where hours or staffing are limited.

Regardless, increasing digital inclusion, or bridging the digital divide to achieve digital equity requires an understanding of the existing challenges and barriers that may be preventing inclusion, creating the divide, or limiting equity. Without a comprehensive understanding of the conditions, it is impossible to identify what is needed to address and overcome those conditions. The primary purpose of Digital Equity Planning is to evaluate the existing conditions around digital equity, define the community “needs” required to overcome any challenges or barriers contributing to digital inequities or limiting digital inclusion, and, finally, to develop strategies, goals, and actions required

to increase digital inclusion, bridge the digital divide, and achieve digital equity. Achieving Digital Equity is the vision and desired outcome of this planning process.

1.2 DIGITAL INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND EQUITY:

The Challenge, The Opportunity, and The Vision

The first two decades of the 21st century have been defined by the emergence of global economies, increasing private enterprise, wide-scale technological and tele-communications advancements, including an increase in personal, internet-enabled mobile computer devices (aka cell phones or smart-phones), the development of digital social media and “user-generated content”, the rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning, drastic climatic and ecological changes related to global warming, a global pandemic leading to the death of over 6-million people worldwide and causing major disruption to the global economy, and an increase in the world population from 6.1 billion to 8.2 billion people (as of October 2024). This seems like a lot of change in such a short time – and it is – but human knowledge, technology, and information, specifically *digital* information, is growing at an exponential rate like never before. Consider this: More than half the world’s population, approximately 4 billion people, now have access to the internet and own a cell phone. Further, in 2010 former Google CEO, Eric Schmidt, noted that the entire written works of humanity (in all languages) prior to 2003, was estimated to be about 5 exabytes of data. At that time, in 2010, it was estimated that an equivalent amount, 5 exabytes, of digital information was created every two days!^{1,2} Now, in 2024, only 14 years later, the amount of data created every day is estimated to be 400 exabytes! (That is equivalent to 400 million terabytes of data.)³

In 2020 alone, internet users generated 64.2 zettabytes of data, which is more than the number of stars in the universe.

Since 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, people rely more than they ever have before on broadband internet and online, web-based platforms for employment, education, healthcare, shopping, dining, business development, news and information, and everyday living. This reliance is now a dependency of necessity, rather than a matter of convenience or conscious choice as it may have been considered just a few short years ago. To put today’s daily internet usage and data creation into perspective, in 2024, there are 5 billion internet searches performed daily; Every minute of each day there are over 500,000 photos shared on Snapchat; Even more astoundingly, there are 156 million emails sent every minute of every day, an amount that equates to 250 billion or more emails sent per day, or over 91 trillion per year!

Broadband internet, digital information, and digital technologies are more important now than ever, and their importance in rural areas is perhaps even greater than in more developed, suburban, urban and metropolitan areas. Identifying challenges and barriers related to broadband access within underserved, rural communities, like Templeton, and understanding the needs of rural residents and

¹ "Digital in 2018: World's internet users pass the 4 billion mark". We Are Social. 30 January 2018.

² "Eric Schmidt: Every 2 Days We Create As Much Information As We Did Up To 2003". 4 August 2010.

³ <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/data-generated-per-day>

communities to overcome those challenges and barriers is critical, if not essential to achieving digital equity.

To understand the importance of digital equity and the purpose of this planning process, it is necessary to know the answer to two questions: “What is Digital Equity?”, and “Why is Digital Equity Important?”.

What is Digital Equity?

Digital equity efforts seek to ensure everyone has the same access and opportunities to the information technology needed for full participation in society, democracy, and the economy. The focus is on bridging the affordability of internet service and devices, building skills to use programs and equipment, increasing trust, and overcoming language or other barriers that keep individuals from fully participating.

Why is Digital Equity Important?

Access to broadband internet and digital devices through equitable availability, affordability, and adoptability is essential for people to participate in society, the economy, and democracy, and to receive essential services, education, and job opportunities. It is a necessity of everyday life and living.

Digital equity aims to address the digital divide, which is the gap in access to digital services and devices that poses certain barriers or challenges to some people more than others. Digital equity can be achieved or improved by:

- Ensuring equal access to technology, such as devices, software, and the internet
- Providing training for educators to help students of all ages use digital tools
- Developing digital literacy in schools and other public institutions
- Preparing all people, including lower-income households, aging adults, incarcerated individuals, Veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with language and literacy barriers, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and rural residents, for success in the digital age

Digital Equity Defined...

“The 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

Key components of digital equity include:



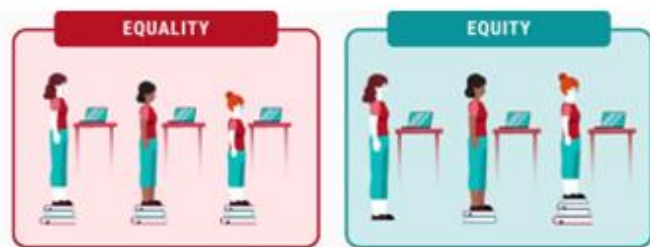
Internet Connection: Do all populations experience internet connection that is affordable, fast, and reliable? Can all populations access the internet?



Devices: Do all populations have devices that are adequate, needs-appropriate? Are devices affordable or otherwise accessible?



Literacy and Skills: Do all populations have the ability to use technology and the internet to achieve their needs? Do concerns around trust, privacy, and safety exist?



To achieve digital equity, or even to improve digital equitability, you must first understand the problem, otherwise known as the “Digital Divide”.

1.2.1 The Challenge: The Digital Divide

Inequitable access to the internet, sometimes referred to as the digital divide, is related to issues with internet supply (i.e., availability and affordability of broadband service connections), internet demand or adoptability (i.e., utilization or adoption of those services), and digital literacy and technology (access to and affordability of digital devices and technologies, and digital skills, confidence, and convenience, and comfort levels associated with use of such devices).⁴ This plan examines the existing conditions of the Town of Templeton, with a focus on social and economic demographics of populations or groups determined to be most susceptible to digital inequity.

The purpose of the plan is to better understand the “Digital Divide” that exists within the community and among its residents and neighborhoods, and particularly among certain populations or groups determined to be most susceptible to digital inequity. Overall, factors of internet availability, affordability, and adoptability, all play a role in determining an individual or group’s access to reliable high-speed broadband internet and digital devices and technologies. The purpose of this plan is to understand barriers and challenges to digital inclusion, and to develop strategies, goals, and actions capable of narrowing the digital divide by increasing inclusion and thereby enhancing digital equity.

1.2.2 The Opportunity: Digital Inclusion

The importance of the access to reliable broadband internet service and overall access thorough availability, affordability, and adoptability of digital technologies and devices has been recognized by local, state, and Federal officials as well as digital equity advocacy organizations. It has become clear that broadband connectivity and digital literacy are increasingly critical to how individuals—participate in the society, economy, and civic institutions of the United States, and access health care and essential services, especially for obtaining education and building careers. There are high societal and economic costs associated with digital inequality and exclusion. A person’s opportunity for economic success, educational achievement, health and wellness, social well-being, community involvement, and civic engagement are dependent upon access and proficiency related to broadband internet and digital technology, devices, and skills. Digital exclusion can materially, socially, and physically harm and hinder an individual’s personal and financial status and situation. Inequalities associated with other socio-economic, demographic factors can increase such exclusions and exacerbate existing wealth and income gaps and lead to further challenges and barriers to successfully accomplishing the necessary tasks of daily life in the pursuit of one’s own livelihood and inalienable rights of living.

Digital Equity Gaps Impact:

- Social Connectivity
- Workforce Readiness
- Civic Participation
- Healthcare Access
- Educational Opportunities
- Financial Resources

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, SEHSD Working Paper Number: 2019-15, *Deconstructing the Digital Divide: Identifying the Supply and Demand Factors That Drive Internet Subscription Rates*, Micheal J.R. Martin

<h2>Digital Equity</h2>		<p>The condition in which all individuals have the information technology capacity needed to fully participate in society, democracy, and the economy</p>
<h2>Digital Divide</h2>		<p>The gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not</p>
<h2>Digital Inclusion</h2>		<p>the activities necessary to ensure all individuals and communities, including the most marginalized, have access to and use of information technology</p>

Source: www.kansascommerce.gov

1.2.3 The Vision: Digital Equity

Sustained investment toward identifying and understanding the causes contributing to digital inequity is necessary to increase digital inclusion and achieve an equitable digital environment to prevent further exclusion and individual and societal degradation. Achieving Digital Equity is a matter of social and economic justice and is worthy of its pursuit.

The vision for broadband and digital equity in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was established within the [Massachusetts Internet for All Plan](#), and contends 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.”

Massachusetts Internet for All Plan

Read the ISAD Initial Proposal Volume II

Availability

Every location has high-speed internet **available**.

Adoption

Every resident can **utilize** and **afford** the internet.

Quality of Service

Every location has **reliable** service.





1.3 THE DIGITAL EQUITY ACT

The Digital Equity Act [47 USC 1721(8)] of 2021⁵ calls for the establishment of certain “covered programs” that focus on empowering those most impacted by the digital divide, referred to as “Covered Populations”. The term “covered programs” means the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program established under section 1723 of the Digital Equity Act and the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program established under section 1724 of the Act.

The primary intent and purpose of such programs is to increase internet access and the adoption of broadband among covered populations through activities such as those intended to:

- Develop and implement digital inclusion activities that benefit covered populations
- Facilitate the adoption of broadband by covered populations in order to provide educational and employment opportunities to those populations
- Implement digital literacy training programs for covered populations that cover basic, advanced, and applied skills other workforce development programs
- Make available equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, or digital network technology for broadband services to covered populations at low or no cost
- Construct, upgrade, expend, or operate new or existing public access computing centers for covered populations through community anchor institutions
- Undertake any other project and activity that the Assistant Secretary finds to be consistent with the purposes for which the Program is established



Align areas of interest and get leadership buy in



Build capacity and understanding of root issues



Prepare for State and Federal Funding

As an initial step in the development of such programs for digital equity improvements, like with most publicly funded planning initiatives, a community engagement and public involvement process was established and implemented to document existing conditions, identify challenges, barriers, or limitations contributing to digital exclusion or inequality among covered populations, assess related community needs, and develop meaningful, attainable goals and feasible, implementable actions or activities capable of reducing the digital gap, thereby increasing digital inclusion, and improving or achieving digital equity. The resulting Digital Equity Plan is intended to provide a strategy to enhance digital equity community-wide, and particularly among certain “covered populations” of the Digital Equity Act. Specific Covered Populations are described and defined below.

⁵ <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?hl=false&edition=prelim&req=granuleid%3AUSC-prelim-title47-chapter16-subchapter2>

1.3.1 Covered Populations of the Digital Equity Act – Definitions

The eight covered populations of the Digital Equity Act of 2021 listed above are defined in greater detail below⁶:

Individuals who live in Covered Households

The term “covered household” means a household, the taxable income of which for the most recently completed taxable year is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census.

Aging Individuals

The term “aging individual” has the meaning given the term “older individual” in section 102 of the Older Americans Act of 1965 ([42 U.S.C. 3002](#)), within which the term “older individual” means an individual who is 60 years of age or older.

Incarcerated Individuals

The term “incarcerated individuals” refers to inmates at state and county jails and correctional facilities, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility.

Veterans

The term “veteran” has the meaning given the term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

Individuals with Disabilities

The term “disability” has the meaning given the term in section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ([42 U.S.C. 12102](#)).

Individuals with a Language Barrier

The term “individuals with a language barrier” includes any individuals who are subject to a communication barrier among people who are unable to speak or write in a common language including those who are English learners and any individuals who have low levels of literacy regardless of whether or not their spoken language is English or another language and whether or not the barrier is due to spoken or written language.

Individuals who are Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group

The term “individuals who are members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group” includes all individuals who are members of any racial or ethnic minority group other than non-Hispanic Whites who constitute the majority (58.4%) in the United States.

Individuals who Primarily Reside in a Rural Area

The term “rural area” has the meaning given the term in section 601(b)(3) of the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 ([7 U.S.C. 950bb\(b\)\(3\)](#)).

⁶ Actual proportions of residents covered by each of the eight covered populations relative to Templeton’s total populations are provided within Section 5, Existing Conditions.

2 DIGITAL EQUITY VALUES AND BEST PRACTICES

The Purpose of Digital Equity Planning



2.1 DIGITAL EQUITY VALUES

Equitable access to broadband internet varies across demographic groups based on geographic location, race, age, income, education, and other related factors. Physical, geo-spatial, and socioeconomic challenges and barriers associated with these factors have resulted in noticeable gaps in equity related to broadband access, affordability, and adaptability at local, regional, and national scales. Similarly, broadband service and cost-based gaps also exist at each of these scales and often correlate to the same demographic factors specified above. These gaps, and their associated challenges and barriers are often exacerbated in rural communities and regions. The Town of Templeton and neighboring rural communities of northwestern Worcester County within the Montachusett Region and rural communities of the North Quabbin region of Franklin County are no exception. Templeton and nearby rural Towns provide a primary example of how Digital Equity gaps affect certain groups or segments of the population within rural areas of Massachusetts and the Nation.

With local and regional partners, in consultation with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, under the Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s Municipal Digital Equity Planning program, the Town of Templeton are undergoing a Digital Equity Planning process to better understand the needs of their rural communities and region. The outcome of the planning process will be a Digital Equity Action Plan that will identify a regional vision, and associated goals and implementable actions, to improve broadband internet access, enhance digital equity, and increase digital literacy among residents, businesses, and institutions.

As with many other rural areas, broadband internet accessibility and connectivity issues currently do exist and are related to various factors, including gaps in reliable internet availability, the rural location of the communities, local and regional socioeconomic demographics affecting income and opportunity, higher-than average services costs, affordability and convenient access to devices and technology, gaps in digital literacy training, accessibility issues, and the lack of digital resources and programs preclude access for many individuals. Further, the populations of these rural communities and surrounding region include a high proportion of individuals representing a covered population of the Digital Equity Act⁷.

The infographic consists of four vertical panels, each with a distinct background color and an icon at the top. The first panel is orange and features a globe icon, titled 'Internet'. The second is yellow and features a person at a whiteboard icon, titled 'Digital Skills & Tech Support'. The third is green and features icons of a laptop, smartphone, and tablet, titled 'Devices'. The fourth is blue and features a gear and document icon, titled 'Applications & Services'. Each panel contains a short paragraph of text describing the element.

- Internet**
Having access to internet that is **affordable, sufficient, and reliable** to obtain necessary resources and both download and contribute content online.
- Digital Skills & Tech Support**
The **knowledge and skills** required to use the equipment, applications, and internet effectively with training and support provided in **a culturally appropriate manner**.
- Devices**
The computers and accessories necessary to **be productive, create content, and participate** (homework, job application, reading, etc.).
- Applications & Services**
Including diverse users in the design and rollout of services while considering placement, outreach, training, user controls, privacy, universal design, and language.

Source: Elements of Digital Equity, City of Seattle: www.seattle.gov/tech

The overall purpose of Digital Equity Planning is to understand the existing conditions around internet access and digital technology, specifically those related to, availability, affordability, and adoptability of broadband internet and digital devices with a focus on certain covered populations of the Digital Equity Act.

⁷ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1841/text>

2.2 BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS:

Availability, Affordability, Adoptability (The “Three A’s” of Digital Equity)

The Three Components of Access— Availability, Affordability, Adoption

Availability: Is there sufficient infrastructure and coverage to deliver reliable, high-speed wired or wireless broadband service and technology tools for learning?

Affordability: Can learners and families/caregivers pay for the total cost of maintaining reliable, high-speed broadband service and technology tools for learning?

Adoption: Do learners and families/caregivers have the information, support, and skills to obtain regular, adequate access to reliable, high-speed broadband service and technology tools for learning?

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, *Advancing Digital Equity for All: Community-Based Recommendations for Developing Effective Digital Equity Plans to Close the Digital Divide and Enable Technology-Empowered Learning*, Washington, DC, 2022.

2.2.1 Broadband Internet Availability

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the digital divide was an omnipresent issue in 2018,⁸ continued to be an issue in 2019,⁹ and the factors disproportionately affecting certain segments of the population were exacerbated and highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020¹⁰, resulting in the passage of the Digital Equity Act in 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, most evaluations of internet access and use focused on survey data on internet subscriptions, however, these assessments often failed to consider availability, or whether Internet Service Providers (ISPs) actually provided service to a given area.

Since passage of the Digital Equity Act, research, evaluations, and investments have attempted to understand and address the digital divide in a more comprehensive and inclusive way, by considering not only internet subscription rates, but actual access to broadband internet services based on measures and metrics of availability, affordability, and adoptability (inclusive of knowledge, skills, abilities, and willingness to adopt internet services, technology, and devices).

While past and recent studies indicated that throughout the nation, most geographic areas had high-speed fixed broadband service available, that service was not universally or equitably available among all segments of the population or within certain areas. For example, there were noticeable differences in availability and quality of service (i.e., types of technology, and levels of reliability or speeds), particularly between urban and rural areas, and among factors related to income, race and ethnicity, language and literacy, and geographic areas where percentages of the population

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2018/demo/SEHSD-WP2018-12.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/sehds-wp2019-15.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/mapping-digital-equity-in-every-state.html>

represented by those factors were greater. Nationally, some states have high availability throughout, while regionally, availability varies from one county to the next. Locally, even greater variation exists at the Census Tract level, as shown within the U.S. Census Bureau’s Digital Equity Act Population Viewer Map, and that variation often correlates to the socio-economic demographic factors referenced above. Income is often an indicator of internet service availability and strongly correlated with affordability and adoptability of service types. However, geography cannot be overlooked when understanding and addressing the Digital Divide, as the rural location of an area is often one of the greatest predictors or limiting factors of internet availability.

Internet availability can be assessed in terms of the number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) serving and providing direct, connections to the internet at households, businesses, or institutions within a certain location or area. Further, it can be assessed based on the type of internet service provided (e.g., Fiber-optic, Cable, and Fixed Wireless Internet), and the average and maximum speed of that service (i.e., Digital Data Upload & Download Speeds measured in Megabytes per second [Mbps]).

A location, or more specifically, an address, that has “service” access to Broadband Internet service by an ISP is considered a **Serviceable** location. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as of March 14, 2024, the minimum “benchmark” for high-speed fixed broadband internet is now 100 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed – a four-fold increase from the 25/3 Mbps benchmark set by the FCC in 2015¹¹. This new minimum speed benchmark increase is now consistent with standards established by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program and multiple U.S. Universal Service Fund programs. Under these established standards, locations with fixed broadband internet service “that meets or exceeds 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed”, are considered “**Served**”. Alternatively, according to the standards set by the NTIA BEAD Program under their Internet for All initiative, addresses “with broadband service below 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed but higher than 25 Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed” are considered “**Underserved**”. And finally, again, according to the NTIA BEAD standards, any address location without access to any broadband service or “with broadband service below 25 Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed” is considered “**Unserved**”.¹²

2.2.2 Broadband Internet Affordability

Thirty-two percent of U.S. households are subscription vulnerable, meaning they are unable to afford and maintain an internet service subscription. This gap leads to differences in learning experiences, as 65 percent of families with income levels below the poverty threshold reported lack of access prevented their children from participating in school and completing schoolwork or that their child had no option other than to participate through a mobile device. Among families with income levels below the national median and with access to broadband, 56 percent stated the service was too

¹¹ FCC News, Office of Media Relations, Press Release dated March, 14, 2024:

<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-401205A1.pdf>

¹²NTIA BEAD Program, Program Documentation:

<https://www.ntia.gov/funding-programs/internet-all/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>

slow, and among families with home access to a computer, 59 percent stated their device runs too slowly or does not work. Sixty-five percent of families with incomes below the national poverty level, 66 percent of Hispanic parents, 75 percent of families headed by immigrant Hispanic parents, and 56 percent of Black parents with incomes below the national median reported technology-related disruptions to their children’s learning.¹³ Such figures may also be higher in reality due to underreporting. For example, Spanish-language-dominant Americans are less likely to report having high-speed internet at home.¹⁴

Perhaps the biggest loss to internet affordability was ending the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). To better understand the program’s impact, the FCC surveyed ACP recipients in December 2023. According to the survey, 77% of respondents say losing their ACP benefit would disrupt their critical aspects lives by making them change their plan or drop internet service entirely. Approximately three-fourths report using their internet service for work, health care appointments, job applications and schoolwork. Finally, when asked how losing their ACP benefit would affect them, many say they would need to cut other basic expenses such as food or gas if they had to pay \$30 more out of pocket for their internet. Others say they would drop their internet service.¹⁵

2.2.3 Broadband Internet Adoptability

Digital connectivity is a combined measure of people accessing and utilizing the internet (particularly broadband internet) and digital devices at home. Some factors that can be assessed to “measure” digital connectivity are: Average Household Size, Percentage of the Population Working from Home, Percentage of Households with Digital Computing Devices, Percentage of Households with Internet, Percentage of Households with Broadband Internet (defined as download/upload speeds above 100/20 Mbps, and Broadband Internet Usage vs. Availability (percentage of households which have a Broadband Internet connection to their home that actually subscribe to a Broadband Internet Service).

Of the estimated 15–16 million K-12 learners who have insufficient broadband access or access to devices to support learning at home, approximately 6 million face adoption barriers apart from availability and affordability. Learners who have immigrated to the U.S. and learners from multilingual homes face unique challenges in getting connected and engaging with learning once connected. Credit checks or deposits to get a subscription and digital literacy gaps further inhibit receiving low-cost coverage. Children with disabilities, who disproportionately live in low-income households, experience additional technology barriers, such as outdated equipment, inaccessible online platforms and course materials, and a lack of in-person support to engage with technology tools for learning.

¹³ Johnson, M., Bashay, M., Bergson-Shilcock, A., Richardson, M., & DeRenzi, B. (2019). *The roadmap for racial equity*. National Skills Coalition. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-roadmap-for-racial-equity/>






¹⁴ Johnson, M., Bashay, M., Bergson-Shilcock, A., Richardson, M., & DeRenzi, B. (2019). *The roadmap for racial equity*. National Skills Coalition. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-roadmap-for-racial-equity/>

¹⁵ <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/without-federal-program-whats-the-outlook-for-affordable-broadband>

Even with high technology usage in the classroom, few professional learning opportunities for effective technology use in instruction are provided to educators. The National Center for Education Statistics has found that on average, educators working with low-income and rural learners are the least likely to receive access to training on effective technology use in instruction. Combined, these barriers further contribute to the digital divide.¹⁶

2.3 ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING EFFORTS THROUGH STRATEGIC VISIONS

The Digital Equity Plan recognizes and will strive to align with existing local and regional efforts, goals, plans, and enhanced outcomes related to the following critical aspects of society:

	Economic and Development Workforce Development Goals, Plans, and Outcomes
	Educational Outcomes
	Health Outcomes
	Civic and Social Engagement
	Delivery of other Essential Services

The Plan also encourages continued and ongoing assessment of existing conditions using measurable objectives aimed at reducing the digital divide through the implementation of the strategies, goals, and actions identified within this Plan to further digital inclusion and equity relative to the following related categories or sectors:



Align areas of interest and get leadership buy in



Broadband Availability & Affordability



Online Privacy & Cybersecurity



Online Accessibility & Inclusivity



Device Availability & Affordability



Digital Literacy

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, Advancing Digital Equity for All: Community-Based Recommendations for Developing Effective Digital Equity Plans to Close the Digital Divide and Enable Technology-Empowered Learning, Washington, DC, 2022. (<https://tech.ed.gov/advancing-digital-equity-for-all/>)

2.4 BEST PRACTICES FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Below is a comprehensive list of “best practices” for Municipal Officials and Community Leaders, including Town Administrators, Select Board Members, Commission Members, Purchasing Agents, Grant Writers, Planners, Heath Agents, Parks & Recreation Departments, School Administrators and Teachers, and others:

Municipal Digital Equity Best Management Practices

- Promulgate policies and programs that facilitate digital access, through increased availability, affordability, and adoptability to broadband internet and digital devices through inclusion, digital literacy programs and education, and capital investment in deployment and adoption by residents to overcome challenges and barriers to achieving digital equity.
- Develop and adopt policies and measures to accelerate broadband deployment and adoption and increase access to reliable high-speed internet in public spaces to achieve Digital Equity.
- Request all Departments to identify and implement strategies that integrate Digital Inclusion into ongoing services and programs.
- Participate in a Regional Digital Equity Coalition or Leadership Group to coordinate plans and actions to achieve economies of scale and optimal impact.
- Post on Town website and distribute information to low-income residents about internet access, digital literacy, affordable home Internet service offers and lower-cost devices.
- Recognize remote workers and embrace the value of broadband access as workforce development strategy and climate resiliency measure.
- Incorporate Digital Equity Planning into Master Planning, and Land Use and Economic Development related plans to promote digital inclusion and improve quality of life for residents.
- Conduct ongoing community engagement to Aging Adults over 60, Veterans, lower income households, individuals with disabilities, ethnic and racial minority groups, individuals with language barriers, including lower levels of literacy, previously incarcerated individuals, and rural residents, to continue to understand their varying Digital Equity and broadband access needs.
- Maintain a map of unserved and underserved areas and households and digitally disadvantaged neighborhoods with preferred broadband strategic corridors and identified public assets to accelerate broadband deployment.
- Coordinate and Partner with MBI, ISPs and Regional and Statewide Partners, and Leadership Groups for middle- and Last-mile planning.
- Identify strategies, adopt policies, and seek funding to accelerate broadband deployment and adoption, including coordinating, negotiating, and partnering ISPs to connect unserved areas and assist low-income residents and other covered population groups.

- Continue to reference the Mass Broadband Map and Internet for All Plan as guidance and pursue funding to implement goals, strategies, and actions identified within the Municipal Digital Equity Plan.
- Adopt implementing ordinances for policies and plans that promote and facilitate investment and development for digital infrastructure, digital equipment and technology, digital literacy programs and services, and other digital equity measures.
- Maintain enrollment (or enroll) in the E-Rate Program for all Public Schools and Libraries
- Enact procedures to streamline broadband project approvals and permitting, including priority focus for partnerships with ISPs.
- Incorporate high-speed Internet infrastructure into all public projects, especially major transportation, affordable housing, parks & recreation, and public utility projects.
- Purchase and utilize technology which can enable residents to access public information and services.
- Develop a robust “green technology ecosystem” to refurbish and reallocate retired computing devices and for donation to unconnected low-income households participating in adoption programs. Encourage all public departments and local businesses and larger employers to participate in the program and donate retired devices.
- Purchase computing devices and hotspots in bulk to be loaned and/or sold at a discounted price for residents in device adoption programs.
- Provide information and services online through broadband that increases the relevance of the technology to consumers, which encourages adoption and reduces impacts on the environment.
- Provide online access to all policies, plans, ordinances, and services information, including remote participation in public meetings.
- Deliver online as many public services as possible “online” to reduce vehicle trips and improve efficiency, productivity, and convenience.
- Encourage and support schools to implement effective technology and Digital Inclusions programs.
- Coordinate with state and Federal legislators to ensure that funding mechanisms for Community Cable Access T.V. providers evolve and advance in conjunction with the evolution and advancement of the provision and consumption of streaming media and digital services and in the face of declining cable T.V. subscriptions.
- Develop and continue to support digital literacy programs and digital navigation services to residents at public facilities, particularly libraries, senior centers, Veterans services centers, community centers, maker spaces, digital labs, internet cafes and third space/remote work hubs.

2.5 A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO DIGITAL EQUITY & INCLUSION

To pursue and uphold the Best Management Practices outlined above aimed at enhancing digital equity and inclusion throughout a community and among its covered population groups, it is important to develop overarching strategies for key sectors or components of digital equity and inclusion. Below are common, overarching strategies related to six primary sectors or components of Digital Equity and Inclusion. Consideration of these recommended strategies relative to the six identified sectors, or components of Digital Equity and Inclusion will help to provide context and an organizational framework to assess the associated challenges, barriers, and needs evaluated and assessed within Sections 4, (Existing Conditions) and Section 5 (Community Needs) of this plan, and will ultimately provide a set of guiding principles for establishing meaningful Goals and Actions (Section 6) to address those challenges, barriers, and needs, which is the primary purpose of this Plan.

2.5.1 Leadership (Champions)

The first step in pursuing enhancements to digital equity and inclusion is to establish a team of digital equity leaders, or champions within the Templeton community. These leaders, many of whom were



Identify a core team of digital equity champions, pursue increased funding, and become a leader in digital equity.

likely involved in the development of this Plan, will continue to assess and evaluate the existing conditions and community needs around broadband internet access and digital literacy and inclusion in the short-term and over time. The group should meet regularly to advance the goals of the Digital Equity Plan and guide the Plan's evolution over time.

It will be critical to ensure that the Town's grant-writer is informed of the Digital Equity Plan's key goals and objectives, and that seeking and acquiring funding for digital equity initiatives is treated as a top priority.

Leaders should stay coordinated with regional, state, and federal stakeholders in digital equity, including the Massachusetts Broadband Institute. They should continue to track and monitor development of the statewide BEAD initiative and other funding and engagement opportunities and seek recognition through programs like the Digital Inclusion Trailblazers award program. In addition to their ongoing pursuit of digital equity and inclusion, they should also recognize and celebrate Digital Inclusion Week, in October of each year, through hosting local events or by promoting and joining statewide or national events.

Further, Digital Equity Leaders should coordinate with state and Federal legislators to ensure that funding mechanisms for Community Cable Access T.V. providers are preserved and that they evolve and advance in conjunction with the evolution and advancement of the provision and consumption of streaming media and digital services and in the face of declining cable T.V. subscriptions.

2.5.2 Community Engagement & Partnerships

Templeton should continue to improve upon the Town's process for engaging with the community and building digital equity and inclusion partnerships. This should be considered when disseminating information (physically and virtually), collecting feedback, and announcing public events, especially relative to digital equity and inclusion. When disseminating information or

promoting events around digital literacy, it is often overlooked, that a primary segment of the population you are intending to serve either does not have a computer or internet subscription or is not comfortable receiving information digitally. For this reason, the Town should consider existing alternative methods of outreach and engagement such as physical postings, yard-boards, digital notification displays, posting in the Senior Center Calendar/Newsletter, and in water and sewer bills. Digital methods of outreach, such as social media and new, innovative methods like video “shorts” or other digital media content created by TCTV/Digital Lab should also be used, but these should not be the sole method of communicating with the public. Hybrid methods of engaging with the community to deliver important information or notices, such as though automated “code-red” calls or text messages should also be used but should not be the primary or sole means of communication.



Leaders, particularly those who are Town staff or appointed and elected officials, should evaluate municipal websites, media, and communications to ensure that they are accessible to all users, and 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) and strive to meet the standards for information and communication technology (ICT) under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 255 of the communications Act.

Leaders should create a Digital Equity & Inclusion Webpage and draft a one-pager identifying Templeton’s digital equity goals and providing access to the full Digital Equity Plan and other digital equity and inclusion resources, such as digital literacy and skills building opportunities. Finally, the webpage should provide contact information for local and regional digital equity leaders (champions) and trainers (navigators).

Finally, Templeton’s Digital Equity Leaders should maintain and improve relationships with community partners dedicated to increasing digital equity throughout Templeton and the Montachusett Region. Such partners, or stakeholders may include the library, local boards and committees, local/regional non-profits, civic organizations, business owners, other social services organizations, TCTV, the Digital Lab at Scout Hall, and other digital equity and inclusion champions and navigators, especially those providing improved access broadband internet, affordable device, and digital literacy training.

2.5.3 Access to Broadband Internet and Digital Devices

Templeton should strive to expand access to broadband internet and affordable devices. One way to accomplish this goal is to improve access to internet and internet connected workstations and devices in public spaces like the library and senior center. Another way is to continue to offer hotspots and provide additional hotspots through an enhanced loaner program. Such a program can be facilitated by the library but may also offer hotspots reservable through the senior center and Digital Lab. The inventory of hotspots publicly available (outside of schools) should be at least 20 units. Similarly, access to digital devices and workstations like laptops, computers, printers, video-conferencing stations, and other technology and equipment (such as music, art, audio, and video,

equipment and programs should be acquired and made available at the Digital Lab, library, and Senior Center.



Promote access to affordable devices and broadband internet.

The Town should continue to support, promote, and enhance the library, senior center, and Digital Lab’s as digital resources and “digital inclusion hubs”, where computers and reliable high-speed internet and digital devices, services, and programs can be accessed by the public. These spaces should feature modern, well-maintained laptops, computers, copiers, scanners, printers, and audio-video equipment in line with community needs.

The Narragansett Regional School Department should continue to identify and address inequities, and other challenges and barriers experienced by students by continuing to provide free access to hotspots for students who request them, to the greatest extent possible so that access to broadband internet and digital devices exists at a level greater than pre-Covid-19 levels.

Finally, the Town and its digital equity partners should aim to strengthen connections with groups who facilitate device donation programs and provide free or discount refurbished devices to households who need them. The Digital Lab at Scout Hall could provide opportunities for training on refurbishing devices and could be a partner in device refurbishment and distribution.

2.5.4 Digital Literacy Training & Opportunities

Templeton should continue to create, strengthen, and expand digital literacy opportunities throughout the community. The Town should engage a qualified Digital Navigator or qualified digital literacy trainer, or build upon the capacity and capabilities of existing staff to develop and teach digital literacy courses at the Public Library, Senior Center, and Scout Hall Community Center/Digital Lab. There is strong demand for increased digital literacy class offerings and an expanded curriculum focused on thematic trainings, tech-help, and general skill-building related to various applications. Many of the most pressing and desired needs of the community for digital literacy training topics will be identified within this Plan and through the results of its public survey.



Strengthen digital literacy throughout the community

The Town should establish a local digital navigation training team and framework (potentially engaging college students or staff and participants at the Digital Lab) and an evaluation system to coordinate, track, and optimize the team’s work. Such a framework of partners and team members should align with or build upon the National Digital Inclusion Alliance’s (NDIA) Digital Navigator Model, a proven method of digital literacy training, skills-building, and inclusion.

As part of the Town’s Digital Equity & Inclusion webpage described within subsection 5.2.1, above, a Digital Literacy Resources subpage should be created, highlighting related training resources, and opportunities.

Through the TCTV and Digital Lab, the Town should develop and distribute digital literacy resources and guidance documents on the Town website and at Scout Hall Community Center/Digital Lab. These resources should also be made available at the Public Library, Town Hall, and Senior Center.

2.5.5 Addressing the Needs of Covered Populations

The Town of Templeton should provide targeted support for vulnerable segments of the community, including lower income households, individuals with disabilities, individuals with language barriers and lower levels of literacy, students, young adults, adults seeking jobs, aging adults over 60, and Veterans.



Provide targeted support for vulnerable segments of the community, including students, adults seeking jobs, and seniors.

The community should prepare covered populations to avoid and remain safe from common online risks, such as hackers, identity thieves, and (increasingly common) scams by providing dedicated training to aging adults over 60, students, and other community members. Further, the community should provide the greatest degree of training and information possible to mitigate consumer vulnerability regarding government records and health care records, particularly for residents receiving Social Security or Veterans Affairs benefits.

The Narragansett Regional School District, in coordination with the Town should work to strengthen digital skills training for students in Templeton’s Public Schools, tracking and improving methods for identifying needs and developing improved curriculum, courses, and training programs, both for teachers and students.

The Town of Templeton, in partnership with TCTV and the Digital Lab, should develop an online and call-in system to log tech help questions and offer intermittent on-site tech help sessions/office hours at Library, Senior Center, and Digital Lab.

2.5.6 Commercial & Economic Community Development

The Town of Templeton should create and enhance local economic development opportunities, commerce, and consumerism for tech- and web-based jobs and encourage digital/internet-focused entrepreneurship, professional development, and journalism. In partnership with the Digital Lab, the Town should identify and promote job opportunities in tracking, developing, designing, and deploying broadband infrastructure locally. Similarly, they should encourage jobseekers of all ages



Track the local broadband market to advocate for consumers and promote job opportunities locally.

and backgrounds to become qualified Digital Navigators, or digital literacy trainers. Such efforts can be supported through enhanced vocational tech education, and as part of the ongoing community-based mission of the Digital Lab.

The Town should offer and expand upon digital literacy courses through the Digital Lab based on the needs of specific covered populations, such as Veterans and Aging Adults.

The Town in partnership with TCTV, the Digital Lab, and other regional digital equity and inclusion leaders and partners should provide courses, workshops, workspaces, and access to technology and equipment at the Digital Lab to foster online creativity and content creation as a form of expression, as an interest or hobby, and, as a professional endeavor. As part of these trainings, the Digital Lab should highlight opportunities for professional development, self-employment, business-ownership, and entrepreneurship using the internet and digital technology and should offer training and volunteer practical, experiential teaching and learning opportunities based on the creation and broadcasting of digital media news content, and other journalistic endeavors, with a focus on the reporting of local news stories.

3 THE PLANNING PROCESS

Digital Equity Planning & Community Engagement

Community engagement was an essential component of the development of the Town of Templeton’s Digital Equity Plan. Answers to a comprehensive stakeholder questionnaire, input from stakeholder interviews, feedback from Core Team members, information gathered at focus group meetings, responses to the statewide public survey (and a local survey), and comments and feedback provided by the public at various community engagement events informed the existing conditions evaluation and community needs assessment as well as helped to define the visions, goals, actions and strategies documented within this Plan.

3.1 CORE TEAM WORKING GROUP

To develop an effective community engagement strategy, provide information about potential stakeholders, local resources, and community assets, a Core Team of municipal officials was formed. This Core Team also played a primary role in guiding the planning process and informing the development of meaningful goals and actions. In addition, they offered insights on key stakeholders to engage and provided guidance and input on the development of the Plan over the course of several meetings, interviews, and inquiries.

Templeton Digital Equity Planning Core Team Members	
Name	Organization/Role
Steve Castle	Town of Templeton, Templeton TCTV
Jackie Prime	Town of Templeton, Director of Community Services
Gracelyn Currie	Town of Templeton, Grant Writer/Administrator
Adam Lamontagne	Town of Templeton, Town Administrator
Gage Pacier	TCTV – Templeton TV Advisory Committee
Pat Gale	Templeton Cultural Council
John Columbus	Templeton Housing Authority & TCTV – Board Member
Shawn Lampert	TCTV – Templeton TV Advisory Committee

Members of the Core Team met on:

- February 1, 2024
- March 7, 2024
- July 25, 2024
- September 5, 2024



3.2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

MRPC staff conducted a diverse range of community engagement activities and attended multiple community pop-up events. A particular goal of this planning process was to engage individuals and organizations representing covered populations within the community who are particularly impacted by the digital divide. Key community engagement activities included:

- Survey Distribution
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Community Pop-up Events
- Focus Group Meetings/Round Table Discussions
- Community Workshops/Digital Literacy Forums
- Digital Equity Core Team Working Group Meetings

A public presentation of the Plan was made to the Templeton Select Board at their meeting on November 20th, 2024. A 14-day public review and comment period was also announced in conjunction with the public presentation and ended on Friday, December 6, 2024. The Templeton Select Board voted to approve the Plan on January 8, 2025.



3.2.1 Statewide and Local Digital Equity Surveys

Community outreach was conducted at regular intervals in 2023 and 2024 to promote the Statewide Digital Equity Survey. Outreach emails were distributed, and announcements were made at MRPC meetings and events to encourage everyone in our region to fill out the Statewide Digital Equity Survey. In addition, paper surveys and collection boxes were provided in the following locations in Templeton:

- Town Hall
- Library
- Senior Center
- Scout Hall Community Center/Digital Lab

During the Planning Process, MRPC received some feedback that the statewide survey was too long, asked too many personal demographics questions, and appeared not to be locally relevant. So, in the Fall of 2024, a local survey was also distributed to address low response rates to the statewide survey and provide additional local input.

Survey results are discussed in greater detail and presented within Section 5 of this plan.

TEMPLETON'S DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING HAS BEGUN

Follow the link or scan the QR code to take the statewide digital equity survey:

<https://bit.ly/48idwVL>

Broadband Internet
Accessibility
Affordability
Adoption

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

MBI MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE | **at the MassTech Collaborative**

MRPC

The overall purpose of Digital Equity Planning is to understand the existing conditions around internet access and digital technology, specifically those related to, availability, affordability, and adoptability of broadband internet and digital devices with a focus on certain covered populations of the Digital Equity Act.

3.2.2 Community Events and Pop-ups

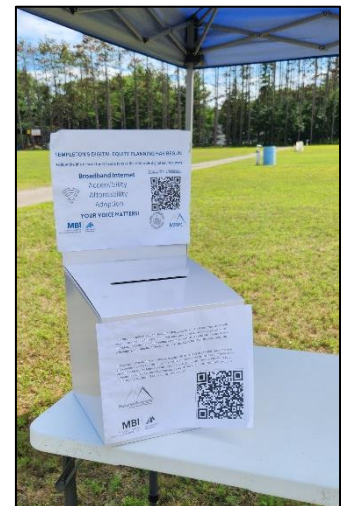
MRPC attended several community events to promote the Digital Equity Planning project and gather public input to the Plan, by promoting the Digital Equity survey.

Community Events		
Event (Location)	Date	Activity
Templeton National Play Outside Day & Craft Fair (Gilman-Waite Park)	8/3/2024	Tent/Table – promote survey and project and provided family internet safety outreach materials
Boyscout Registrations (Scout Hall)	9/10 & 9/12/2024	Provided fliers and leaflets to promote the survey & project and family internet safety outreach materials
Narraganset Warrior Fest (NRSD)	9/14/2024	Tent/Table – promote survey and project and provided family internet safety outreach materials

3.3 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

3.3.1 Stakeholder Questionnaires & Interviews

MRPC staff implemented a two-step stakeholder engagement process that included a questionnaire and follow-up interview. The MRPC Team distributed stakeholder questionnaires and facilitated follow-up interviews with identified digital equity stakeholders. The questionnaire and interviews focused on digital services and programs (including public internet, workstations, and digital literacy programs) offered by each stakeholder-organization, department or facility, and any key challenges and opportunities related to their day-to-day work. It also aimed to identify critical needs of the clients that they served, particularly as they pertained to specific covered populations.



Stakeholder Questionnaires & Interviews			
Organization/Department/Board	Date Completed	Interviewee	Questionnaire Completed
Templeton Public Library	6/24/2024	J. Prime	Y
Narragansett Regional School District	7/3/2024	J. Perrine	Y
Templeton Housing Authority	6/14/2024	D. Connor	Y
Templeton Senior Center/COA	8/13/2024	A. LaBollita	Y
Templeton CATV	6/24/2024	S. Castle	Y
Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center	6/12/2024	S. Marchetti	Y
Clear Path for New England Veterans	5/31/2024	J. Vance	Y
Luk, LLC	8/19/2024	E McMillian	Y

3.4 FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS & ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

The MRPC team conducted focus group meetings to discuss the needs of specific covered populations served by the respective stakeholder organization or entity.

Focus Group Meetings		
Location/Entity	Date	Covered Population or Focus Group
Templeton Senior Center	5/1/2024	Aging Adults and Residents of Rural Areas, Veterans, Covered Households, Individuals with a Language Barrier, and Individuals with a Disability
Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center	6/12/2024	Veterans, and Aging Adults, Covered Households, Racial & Ethnic Minority Groups, Individuals with a Language Barrier, Individuals with a Disability, and Residents of Rural Areas
Templeton Senior Center (Phillipston and Royalston Seniors/CoA patrons invited to attend)	8/13/2024	Aging Adults and Residents of Rural Areas, Veterans, Covered Households, Individuals with a Language Barrier, and Individuals with a Disability



4 EXISTING CONDITIONS EVALUATION

Templeton, Massachusetts

4.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS OVERVIEW

The overall purpose of this evaluation was to understand the existing conditions around digital equity and digital technology, specifically broadband internet and internet-based computing devices, and the local levels of access, affordability, and adoptability of those services and technologies, particularly for covered populations, so that they may be best served by the recommendations of this Digital Equity Plan. In addition to providing information about available broadband internet services and devices, the analysis also aims to identify and evaluate the personal barriers and challenges experienced by people, especially covered populations, relative to broadband internet service accessibility or availability, adoption, and affordability. Further, it assesses not only those people *with* access to, or using such services or devices, but also those portions of the populations *without* access or use of, or otherwise lacking fixed broadband, lacking computer or other devices. It aims to better understand the barriers and challenges of populations not using the internet, and populations not using a device. Sometimes those challenges or barriers extend beyond access or affordability, and at times are related to a person’s willingness to adopt such technology (services and devices, alike), rather than their ability or accessibility.

Establishing comprehensive and inclusive existing conditions, through a robust community outreach and stakeholder engagement process, allows for the development of a Digital Equity Plan that includes a set of meaningful, community guided recommendations that will best address the needs of those it is intended to serve.

The following Existing Conditions Evaluation and proceeding Community Needs Assessment (presented within Section 5) evaluates certain aspects of the Town of Templeton’s population demographics with specific regard to the eight (8) Covered Populations of the Digital Equity Act. The evaluation highlights vulnerabilities and inequities regarding internet access relative to availability, affordability, and adoptability – the three pillars of digital equitability and broadband internet accessibility.

Much of the data for this analysis was obtained from input from the Digital Equity Planning Core Team members, stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings, digital literacy assessments and tech-help sessions, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) survey results, FCC Data, other local and regional data and information, including the Massachusetts Division of Local Services’ Data Analytics and Resources Bureau, and US Census data.

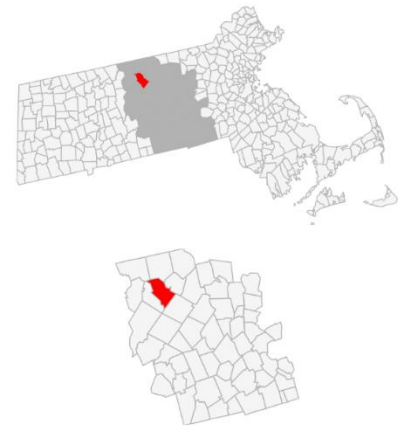
4.2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Demographic trends in a community can impact local internet accessibility (i.e., availability, affordability, and adoptability) and affect service demand and technology support needs. Understanding the demographic profile of Templeton, and its neighboring towns and other rural towns of the Montachusett Region, and the socioeconomic indicators and distribution and proportion of covered populations is essential to understanding and evaluating the digital equity condition and needs of the region and community, particularly regarding certain Digital Equity “indicators” and their relationship to covered populations of the Digital Equity Act.

Understanding target population demographics is a critical component of any planning process that aims to identify strategies and actions for addressing community needs, especially when a primary focus of the Plan is achieving equitable outcomes as it is for Digital Equity Planning.

4.2.1 Templeton Town

Templeton, located in North Worcester County and bordering the City of Gardner, and the towns of Hubbardston, Phillipston, Royalston, and Winchendon, is home to 8,261 residents with a population per square mile of 255.6, less than the county (570.7) and statewide (901.2) population densities. The median household income in Templeton is \$101,768 which is above the Worcester County median income of \$88,524 and Massachusetts median income of \$96,505. Only 4.9% of residents in the town live below the poverty line, which is lower than the Worcester County average of 10.6% and statewide average of 10.4%. 96.4% of all residents report as white alone. Of those over the age of 25, 91.3% have completed a high school education and 29.0% have obtained bachelor’s degrees or higher.



Computer and internet use in Templeton is comparable to the county and statewide averages with 94.6% of all households having a computer and 89.2% of households having a broadband internet subscription.¹⁷ **Figure 4-1**, below is a summary of Digital Equity Indicators for the Town of Templeton.¹⁸

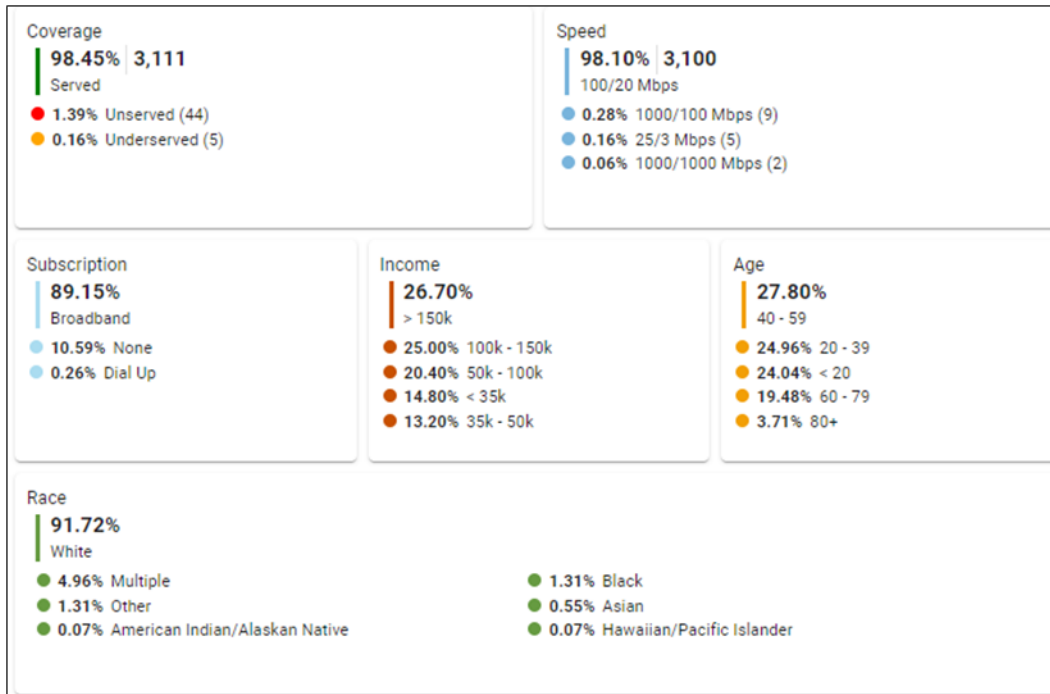


Figure 4-1. Broadband and Digital Equity Indicators, Templeton, MA.

4.3 INTERNET AVAILABILITY & DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Internet Availability can be assessed in terms of the number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) serving and providing direct, connections to the internet at households, businesses, or institutions within a certain location or area. Further, it can be assessed based on the type of internet service provided (e.g., Fiber-optic, Cable, and Fixed Wireless Internet), and the average and maximum speed of that service (i.e., Digital Data Upload & Download Speeds measured in Megabytes per second [Mbps]).

A location, or more specifically, an address, that has “service” access to Broadband Internet service by an ISP is considered a **Serviceable** location. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as of March 14, 2024, the minimum “benchmark” for high-speed fixed broadband internet is now 100 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed – a four-fold increase from the 25/3 Mbps benchmark set by the FCC in 2015¹⁹. This

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. *Quick Facts*, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/worcestercountymassachusetts,MA,templetontownworcestercountymassachusetts/BP_S030223 (Accessed June 28, 2024.)

¹⁸ Massachusetts Broadband Map: <https://mapping.massbroadband.org/map> (Accessed June 28, 2024.)

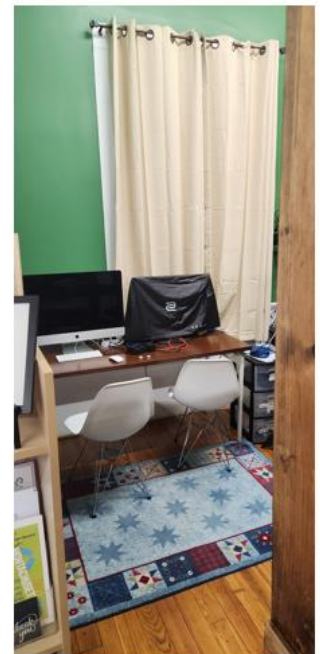
¹⁹ FCC News, Office of Media Relations, Press Release dated March, 14, 2024: <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-401205A1.pdf>

Section Town of

04 Templeton

new minimum speed benchmark increase is now consistent with standards established by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program and multiple U.S. Universal Service Fund programs. Under these established standards, locations with fixed broadband internet service “that meets or exceeds 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed”, are considered “**Served**”. Alternatively, according to the standards set by the NTIA BEAD Program under their Internet for All initiative, addresses “with broadband service below 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed but higher than 25 Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed” are considered “**Underserved**”. And finally, again, according to the NTIA BEAD standards, any address location without access to any broadband service or “with broadband service below 25 Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed” is considered “**Unservd**”.²⁰

Digital Connectivity is a combined measure of people accessing and utilizing the internet (particularly broadband internet) and digital devices at home. Some factors that can be assessed to “measure” digital connectivity are: Average Household Size, Percentage of the Population Working from Home, Percentage of Households with Digital Computing Devices, Percentage of Households with Internet, Percentage of Households with Broadband Internet (defined as download/upload speeds above 100/20 Mbps), and Broadband Internet Usage vs. Availability (percentage of households which have a Broadband Internet connection to their home that actually subscribe to a Broadband Internet Service).



The Digital Lab at Scout Hall Community Center, Templeton, MA

²⁰NTIA BEAD Program, Program Documentation: <https://www.ntia.gov/funding-programs/internet-all/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>

4.3.1 Internet Availability in Templeton

According to the Massachusetts Broadband Map the Town of Templeton (which includes the villages of Templeton, East Templeton, and Baldwinville, as well as Otter River) has 3,160 Serviceable Locations, of which 3,111 (98.4%) are classified as “Served”, five (5; 1.3%) are classified as “Underserved”, and 44 (3.2%) are classified as “Unserved”. **Figure 4-2** below shows the total distribution of serviceable locations, relative to their status as Served, Underserved, or Unserved.

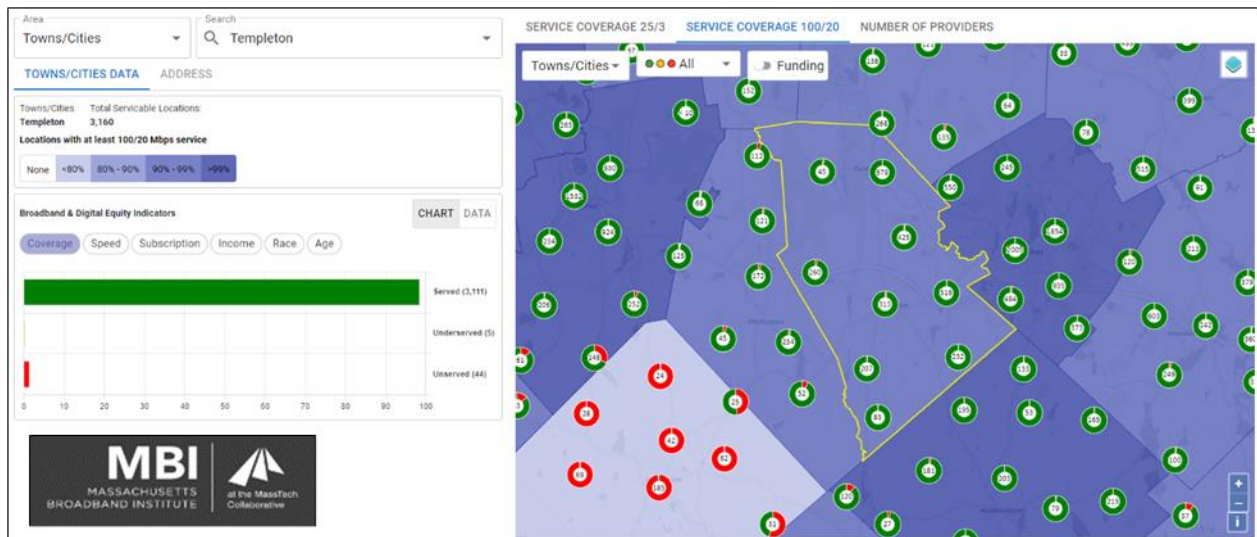


Figure 4-2. Broadband Coverage Map, Templeton, MA.

4.3.1.1 Templeton (01468):

With regard to **Internet Availability**, **Templeton** has less than five Internet Service Providers (ISP) with Xfinity/Comcast being the primary provider of broadband internet. Fixed Wireless internet options are available through T-Mobile Home Internet or Verizon. Satellite internet may also be available from various providers such as Dish, DirectTV, HughesNet, Viasat, and Starlink.

Regarding **Digital Connectivity**, Templeton is comparable to statewide and national averages with slightly more households with internet and broadband, working from home, and using devices, as shown within **Table 4-1**, below. One major variation from statewide and national averages is the availability of Fiber-optic infrastructure. Fiber-optic, which can handle greater bandwidth and provide higher speeds, does not exist in Templeton Center, despite higher-than-average broadband internet and device adoption and usage.

Given the proportion of the population working from home, and the high numbers of households with devices using the internet, the lack of fiber-optic infrastructure could be a limiting factor for the access of higher speeds as digital data bandwidth needs increase over time.

Table 4-1. Digital Connectivity in Templeton.

Templeton Digital Connectivity			
Metric or Measure of Connectivity	01468	Massachusetts	USA
Average Household Size	2.5	2.5	2.7
Work from Home Percent	14%	15%	12%
Households with Devices	96%	95%	94%
Households with Internet	95%	91%	89%
Households with Broadband Internet	88%	81%	73%
Broadband Internet Usage vs. Availability	88%	82%	74%
Fiber-optic Availability	0.00%	55.92%	58.45%
Source: ISP Reports (https://ispreports.org/) accessed June 25, 2024.			

4.3.1.2 East Templeton (01438):

With regard to **Internet Availability**, East Templeton has less than five Internet Services Providers (ISP) with Xfinity/Comcast being the primary provider of broadband internet. Fixed Wireless internet options are available through T-Mobile Home Internet and Verizon. Satellite internet may also be available from various providers such as Dish, DirectTV, HughesNet, Viasat, and Starlink.

With regard to **Digital Connectivity**, East Templeton is comparable to statewide and national averages with relatively high levels of adoption and usage, as shown within **Table 4-2**, below. However, despite relatively high usage and adoption rates, East Templeton is below the statewide average number of internet service providers and Fiber-optic infrastructure does not exist within this area.

Table 4-2. Digital Connectivity in East Templeton.

Templeton (East Templeton) Digital Connectivity			
Metric or Measure of Connectivity	01438	Massachusetts	USA
Average Household Size	2.2	2.5	2.7
Work from Home Percent	23%	15%	12%
Households with Devices	91%	95%	94%
Households with Internet	91%	91%	89%
Households with Broadband Internet	80%	81%	73%
Broadband Internet Usage vs. Availability	80%	82%	74%
Fiber-optic Availability	0.00%	55.92%	58.45%
Source: ISP Reports (https://ispreports.org/) accessed June 25, 2024.			

The limited number of providers and lack of fiber-optic infrastructure could be a limiting factor for the access of higher speeds as digital data bandwidth needs increase over time. Given that usage and adoption rates are consistent with statewide and national averages, and that a considerably higher proportion of people work from home, the lack of fiber-optic infrastructure is a significant inequity and could pose substantial challenges to this rural location in the future.

4.3.1.3 Baldwinville:

With regard to **Internet Availability**, Baldwinville, has less than five Internet Service Providers (ISP) with Xfinity/Comcast being the primary provider of broadband internet. Fixed Wireless internet options are available through T-Mobile Home Internet and Verizon. Satellite internet may also be available from various providers such as Dish, DirectTV, HughesNet, Viasat, and Starlink.

With regard to **Digital Connectivity**, Baldwinville is comparable to statewide and national averages with a slightly lower proportion of households with internet, but relatively high levels of adoption and usage, as shown within **Table 4-3**, below. However, despite relatively high usage and adoption rates, **Baldwinville** is below the statewide average number of internet service providers and Fiber-optic infrastructure does not exist within this area.

Table 4-3. Digital Connectivity in Baldwinville.

Templeton (Baldwinville) Digital Connectivity			
Metric or Measure of Connectivity	01436	Massachusetts	USA
Average Household Size	2.7	2.5	2.7
Work from Home Percent	10%	15%	12%
Households with Devices	93%	95%	94%
Households with Internet	83%	91%	89%
Households with Broadband Internet	79%	81%	73%
Broadband Internet Usage vs. Availability	79%	82%	74%
Fiber-optic Availability	0.00%	55.92%	58.45%

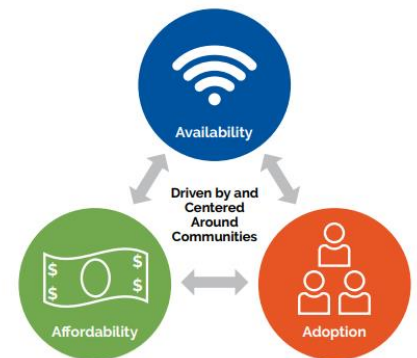
Source: ISP Reports (<https://ispreports.org/>) accessed June 25, 2024.

As with other parts of Templeton, the limited number of providers and lack of fiber-optic infrastructure in Baldwinville could be a limiting factor for the access of higher speeds as digital data bandwidth needs increase over time. Given that usage and adoption rates are consistent with statewide and national averages, and that a considerable proportion of people work from home, the lack of fiber-optic infrastructure is a significant inequity and could pose substantial challenges to this rural location in the future.

4.3.2 Summary of Internet Access

The Digital Equity Planning process aims to provide communities with greater access to broadband internet, with access meaning equitable availability, affordability, and adoptability. Through enhanced and equitable access, it is the intent of the Digital Equity Act to bridge the digital divide, increase digital inclusion, and through access and education, deliver and build the digital literacy skills needed to work, learn, and participate fully in everyday life.

A thorough evaluation of **Internet Availability** in Templeton was conducted above and is summarized within **Figure 4-3** below.



Section 04

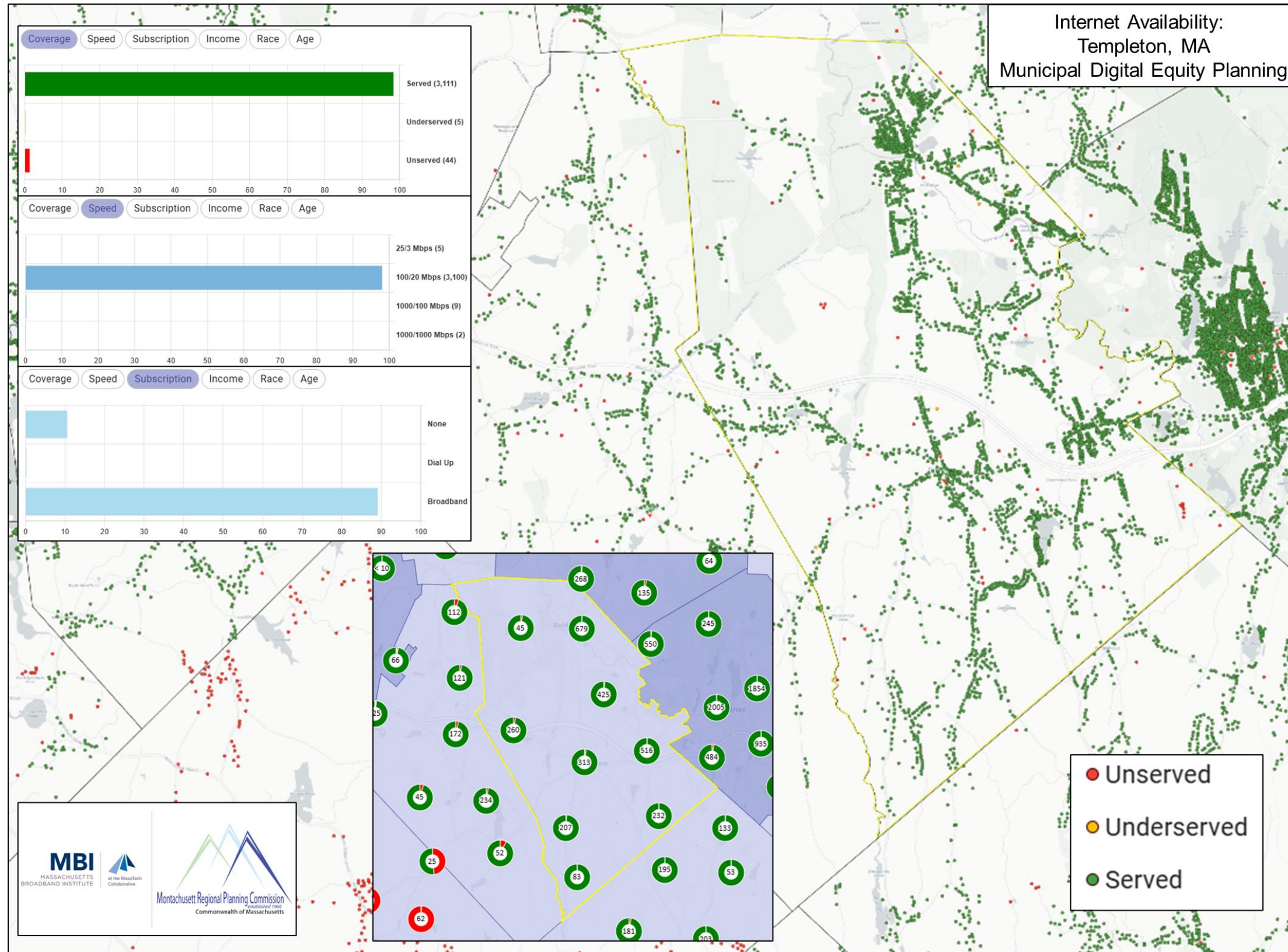


Figure 4-3. Summary Map of Internet Availability in Templeton, MA.

As for **Internet Affordability**, broadband prices vary by region, with areas with more ISPs exhibiting lower prices. There are less than five (<5) Internet Services Providers (ISP) available to any part of Templeton, and realistically there is typically only one available provider of wired, broadband internet. It should be noted that the national average of available ISP providers five (5) to six (6). According to **Figure 4-4** below, which shows the average for the lowest broadband price by region, Templeton and other parts of Central Massachusetts have the 4th highest internet service cost statewide and neighboring rural communities of the North Quabbin and Connecticut River Valley regions have even higher costs 2nd only to the Cape Code region, statewide.

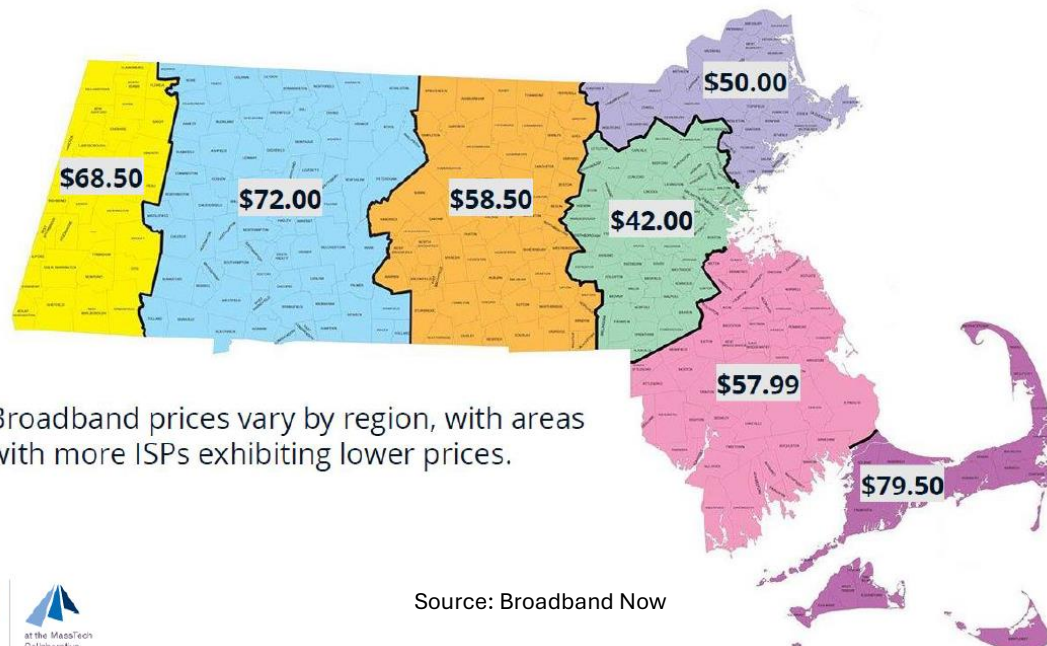


Figure 4-4. Statewide average broadband prices by region.

The **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** was an FCC program which provided an internet cost reduction or subsidy to qualified households following the Covid-19 Pandemic. Unfortunately, the Federally funded program has since ended leaving many former participants with higher internet costs than what they had become familiar with and budgeted for over the past few years. In Templeton, 251 households (15.5%) were eligible for enrollment in the ACP. Of those eligible households, 42.2% (106 households) were enrolled in the ACP. In Templeton, 9% of those households who were enrolled in ACP are considered “Rent Burdened” and 17% are 65+ years of age, and another 5% have an income under \$15,000.

While ACP was one available internet affordability program available to a considerable number of eligible households, there are other programs such as the Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) **LifeLine Support for Affordable Communications (LifeLine Program)**²¹, Comcast/Xfinity’s **Internet Essentials** Program²², or **Xfinity NOW Internet**²³, and Spectrum’s Internet for Low-Income

²¹ <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>

²² <https://www.xfinity.com/learn/internet-service/internet-essentials>

²³ <https://www.xfinity.com/now>

Households option, **Spectrum Internet Assist**²⁴. Regardless of the various affordability programs and “affordable” internet service subscription options available, it is important to note that a minimum standard of 100 megabits per second download speed, and 20 megabits per second upload speed is the new benchmark of “reliable”, “high-speed” internet for both subscribers and internet service providers. In the interest of Digital Inclusion and Equity, affordable internet programs should not only be affordable but should also meet that minimum standard benchmark for utility and function for all users across all programs and subscription rates.

4.4 DEMOGRAPHICS OF COVERED POPULATIONS

Definitions of covered populations of the Digital Equity Act of 2021 were provided within **Section 1** of this Plan. It is important to note that an individual may be a member of more than one of the covered populations. If an individual belonged to at least one of these populations, the individual was counted as part of the covered population; therefore, the percentages for the eight covered populations do not sum to the percentage of total covered population.

4.4.1 Individuals who live in Covered Households

The term “covered household” means a household, the taxable income of which for the most recently completed taxable year is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census. According to recent estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 3,125 households in Templeton. **Figure 4-5** below provides a summary of income-based demographics for Templeton’s households.

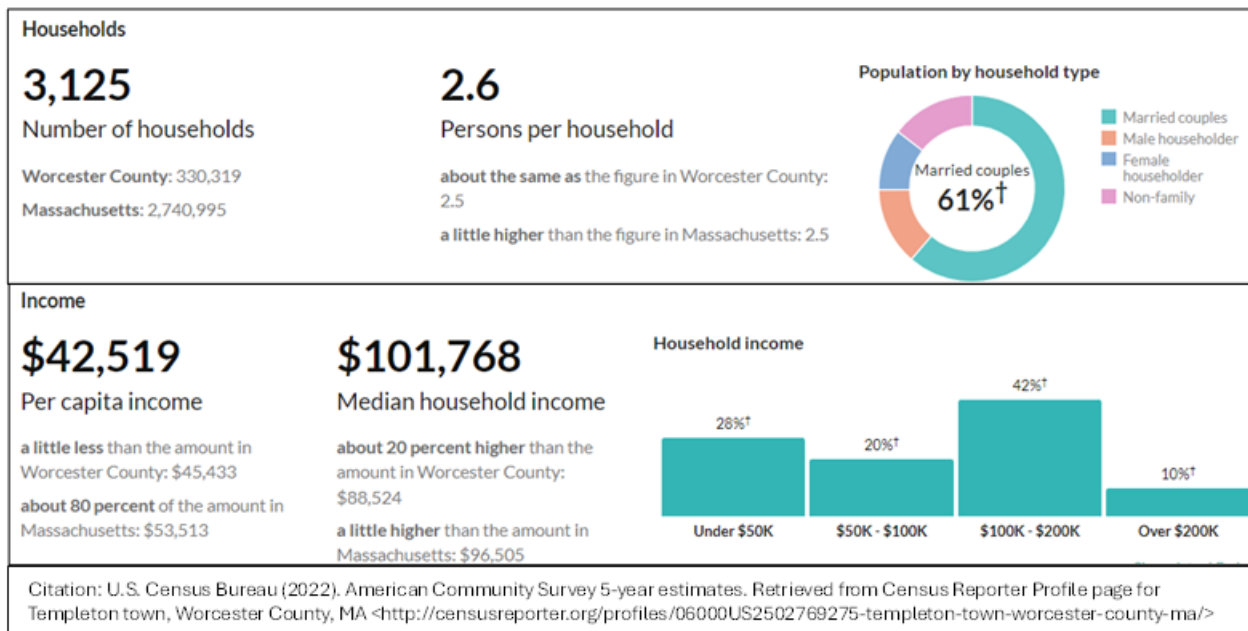


Figure 4-5. Income-based population demographics for Templeton, MA.

²⁴ <https://www.spectrum.com/internet/spectrum-internet-assist>

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For a family of four, the annual household income equivalent to one and a half times (150%) the poverty level is \$46,800. While most households in Templeton are above that amount, 28% of household incomes are below \$50,000 and 15.8% of all households are at or below 150% of the poverty level and of those, at least, 10.3% are “covered” populations of the Digital Equity Act as covered “households”.²⁵

4.4.2 Aging Individuals

Aging individuals 60 years or older is one of the more significant “covered populations” within Templeton. The term “aging individual” has the meaning given the term “older individual” in section 102 of the Older Americans Act of 1965 ([42 U.S.C. 3002](#)), within which the term “older individual” means an individual who is 60 years of age or older.

The population of residents over 60 years of age is increasing nationally, statewide, and within the Montachusett Region. In Templeton, approximately 23% of the population is 60 years of age or older (**Figure 4-6**). Therefore, nearly a quarter of the Town’s population are part of the “Aging Individuals” covered population group of the Digital Equity Act, and as such are an important focus of this Plan.

Outreach conducted through regional stakeholders, including Councils on Aging and Senior Centers indicate for digital literacy training, “tech help” sessions, and internet safety and cyber security education, as well as expanded advocacy, programs, and services for the region’s aging adults in areas such as device usage, navigation of common software platforms, general computer skills, and comfort and trust of digital devices and technology.

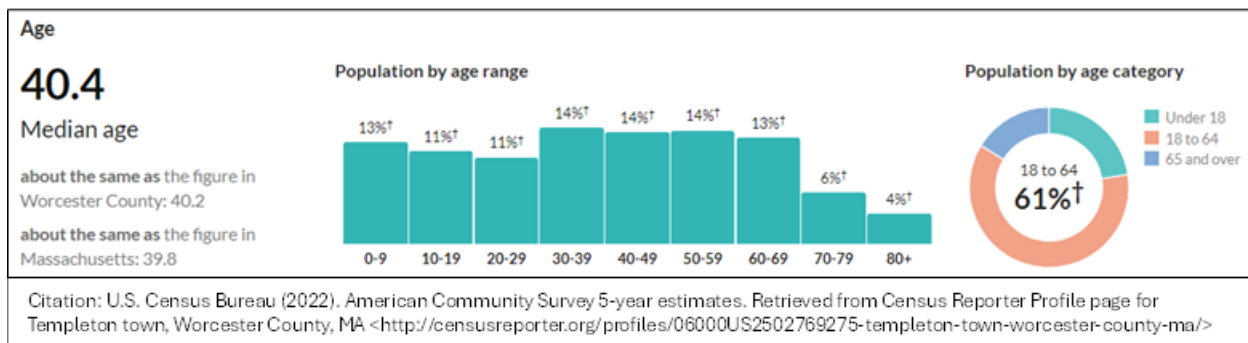


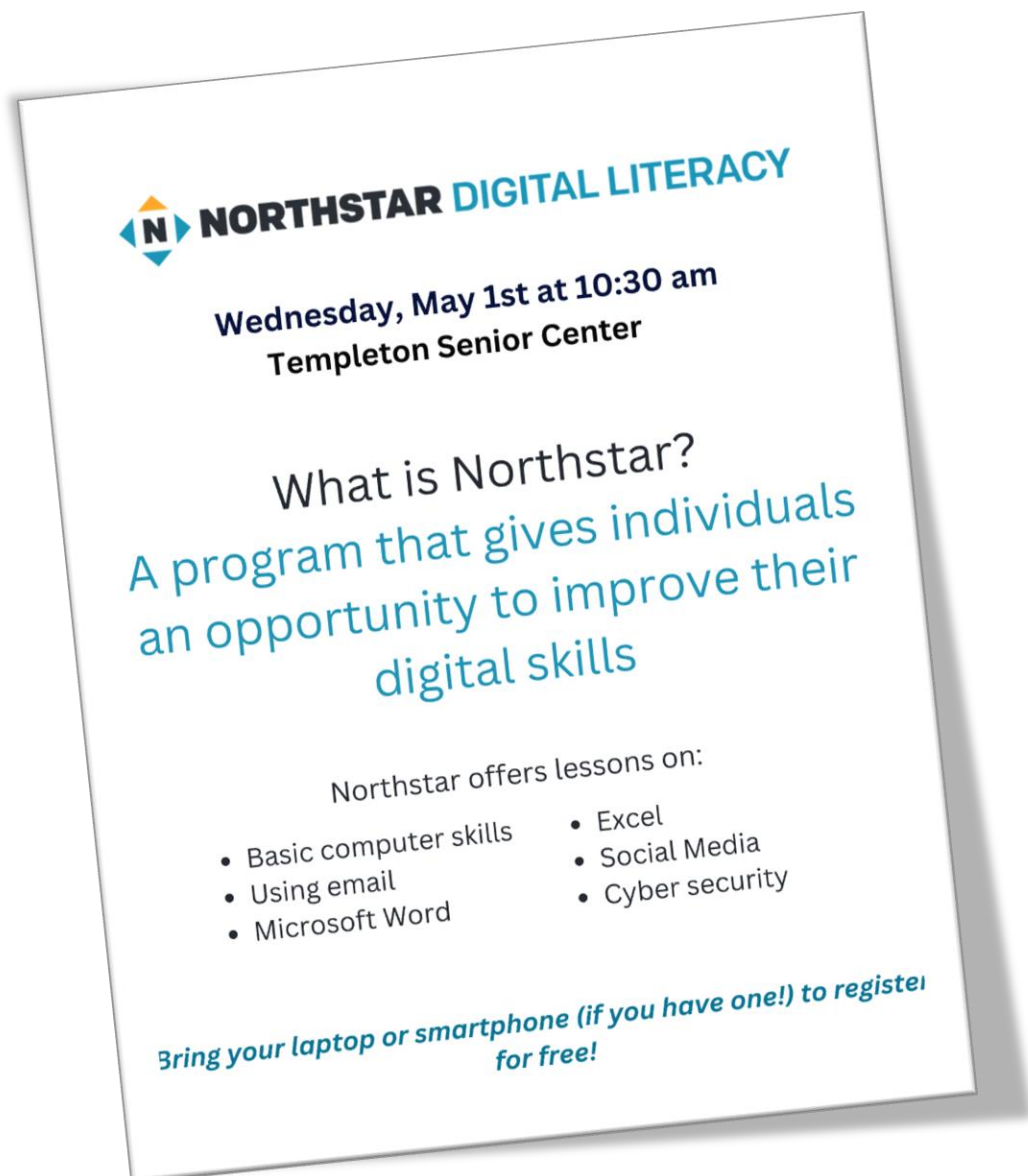
Figure 4-6. Population by age range in the Town of Templeton, MA.

It was noted in several interviews that internet and device access are crucial for seniors to access telemedicine, financial services and banking, and other online services that are now part of daily life. For medical patients and persons of all ages with disabilities, but especially for persons represented by multiple covered populations, such as aging adults with disabilities, aging adults who are veterans, or aging veterans who have one or more disabilities, etc., digital equity through enhanced digital literacy and advocacy is essential to successful and comfortable living. Further, older adults who have mobility or transportation limitations that make it difficult for them to visit healthcare providers' offices, telemedicine—the provision of healthcare remotely using ICTs—offers a convenient means of accessing healthcare services, but only if they are knowledgeable and

²⁵ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Modeled Total Covered Population Estimates. Digital Equity Act Population Viewer: <https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42>

comfortable using such technologies. There are currently barriers to healthcare access in the region that affect residents of all ages. More advocacy and equity in digital access through affordability, availability, and adoptability, and therefore better digital access to healthcare for aging adults is of utmost importance, especially considering the growing popularity of web-based platforms for provider communication, medical records, scheduling, and receiving test results.

Vulnerable populations, such as aging adults, are adversely impacted by barriers to healthcare access because they lack consistent access to suitable devices and internet services, as well as the knowledge and comfort-level necessary to use these digital resources.



How COVID-19 Changed Older Adults' Work and Lifestyle

Older adulthood is often associated with economic and social transitions, including retirement, becoming a grandparent, and changes to health. And this decade, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about even more pronounced societal transformations.

A new U.S. Census Bureau data visualization explores changes across different social characteristics of older adults from 2019 to 2022, a year before the pandemic emergency officially ended, including: computer and internet use; living arrangements; employment; and working from home.



In 2022, 15.6% of employed adults ages 55 to 74 worked from home, compared to just 7.7% in 2019. This rate exceeded 20% in Washington, D.C. (32.7%); Colorado (23.3%), Washington (21.8%), and Arizona (21.5%).

Rates of working from home also varied by social characteristics among employed adults ages 55 to 74.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024

Older Adults in the United States: 2019 and 2022

Home Page

Characteristic Profile

Computer and Internet Use

Living Arrangements

Employment

Work From Home

Older Americans (aged 65+) represent a growing and diverse segment of the U.S. population. **Click on a tab above to explore data on older adults.**

Highlights from 2022 in this visualization include:

Characteristic Profile

22.3

percent of older adults were 80 and over.

Computer and Internet Use

91.8

percent of older adults lived in households with a desktop or laptop computer.

Living Arrangements

25.8

percent of older adults lived alone.

Employment

18.1

percent of older adults were employed.

Work From Home

17.7

percent of those employed worked from home.

The Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product (Data Management System (DMS) number: P-7533841, Disclosure Review Board (DRB) approval number: CBDRB-FY24-POP001-0092).

U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
census.gov

Source: 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates
<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

4.4.3 Incarcerated Individuals

Inmates at state and county jails and correctional facilities, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility. The closest correctional facilities to Fitchburg are the North Central Correctional Institution in Gardner, MA, and the nearby Souza Bankowski Correctional Center and MCI-Shirley, located in Shirley, MA.

The Worcester County Sherriff’s Office, Fitchburg Community Support Center (Re-Entry Program) is a local and regional community resource and support center for recently released, formerly incarcerated individuals, located in nearby Fitchburg, MA. As part of the stakeholder outreach for this plan, staff from that office noted the barriers and challenges faced by former inmates related upon release and re-entry into society. Of the many challenges they face, some are related to broadband internet accessibility and digital literacy relative to the availability, affordability, and adoptability (use) of the internet and internet-connected digital devices. Many inmates are not familiar with the internet or digital devices as the related technologies and current uses either did not exist or were far less advanced or common before they entered prison. Now, these technologies could be of great benefit to their current re-entry needs, however, targeted training is needed to develop skills and build comfort and trust of the use of these technologies as part of their daily lives.

Inmates make up zero percent of Templeton’s population at the time of this planning process and are not a primary focus of the Plan.

4.4.4 Veterans

Veterans make up approximately 8-10% of Templeton’s population over 18 (**Figure 4-7**) and a considerable portion of the Montachusett Region’s population. Veterans are valued within the region and honored for their service. However, many veterans lack financial resource to afford internet, and, despite the presence of Veterans local and regional organizations and service programs, most do not currently offer any digital literacy resources, and veteran-specific digital equity, literacy, and affordability programs are unknown or non-existent.

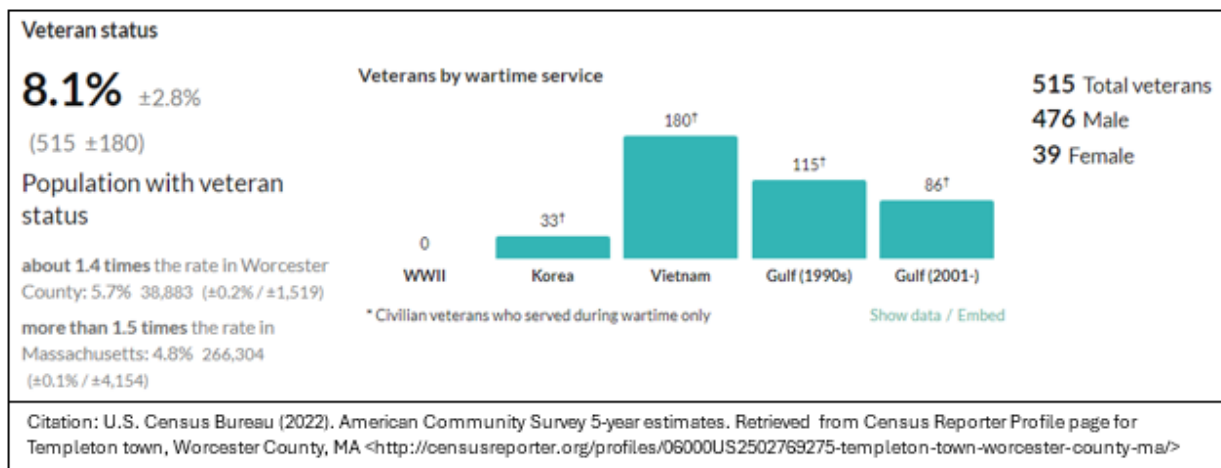
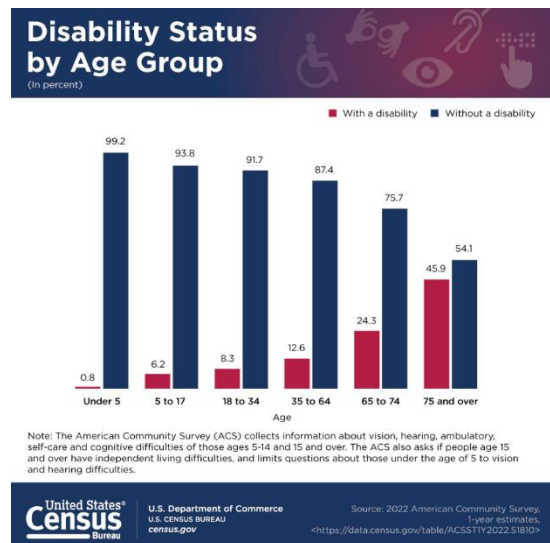


Figure 4-7. Population with Veteran status in Templeton, MA.

There are several Veteran’s organizations serving the Montachusett Region, including the one-of-a-kind Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center. The Montachusett Veteran’s Outreach Center (MVOC) services over 700 Veteran’s annually, most of whom reside in the Montachusett Region including veterans housing. In addition to their many services, MVOC offers free WiFi access for veterans at their Gardner office. Internet service is also available (free) to some residents and digital literacy classes are offered, however increased digital literacy programming is needed and desired by the organization and those they serve. A recent Digital Equity Veterans Focus Group meeting for the Montachusett Region was convened by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission as part of this planning process. The meeting was hosted by the MVOC and Veteran’s Services Officers from all Montachusett communities were invited to share their stories, ideas, needs, and visions for increased digital equity for the region’s veterans.

4.4.5 Individuals with Disabilities

Many residents of the northwest Montachusett Region have one or more disabilities. According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Office on Disability, Templeton has 1,078 individuals (13.7%) with one or more disabilities. More recent estimates indicate that 10% of the population are persons with a Disability. So, approximately 10-14% of Templeton’s population are covered as “Individuals with Disabilities” under the Digital Equity Act, and as such are a focus of this Plan.²⁶



4.4.6 Individuals with a Language Barrier

The Montachusett region has many individuals who are English learners and/or who have lower levels of literacy. Both of these groups of people are covered populations as individuals with a language barrier. Within Templeton, 17.7% of the population are persons covered by the Digital Equity Act as “Individuals with a Language Barrier”.

Many people born outside of the US, some non-English speaking, have immigrated to the Montachusett Region over the course of many generations. More recently, an influx of non-English speakers including those who speak Haitian-Creole, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese have come to the Montachusett Region. These individuals and their families are also covered as “individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group”, and some who earn lower levels of income are also covered as “covered households”. Templeton’s population consist mostly of white, English-speaking residents with only 1.6% of the population classified as English “learners”. However, the presence of a broad diversity of ethnicities and languages within the Montachusett Region make this an important population to consider, even in more rural English-speaking areas. Further, lower levels of education and, hence, literacy, are also more prevalent within the rural communities of the

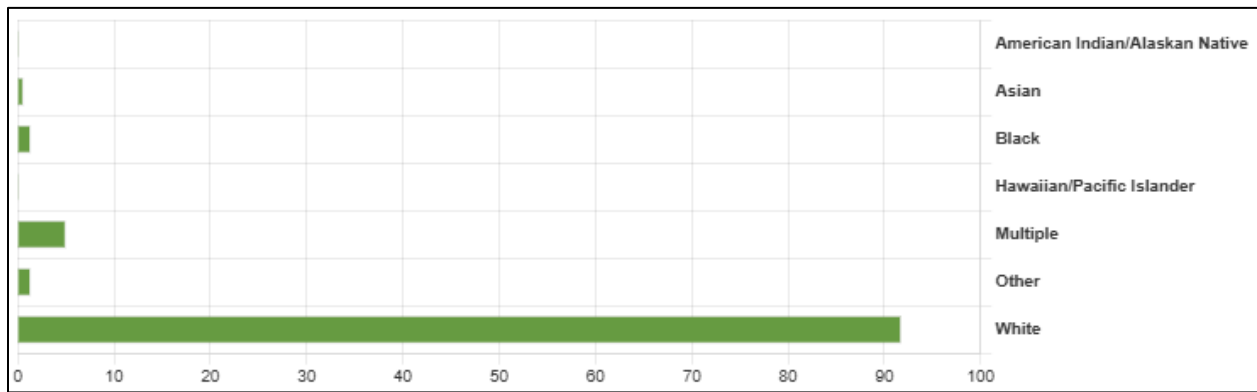
²⁶ Under the Digital Equity Act, and for the purposes of this Plan, the term “disability” has the meaning given the term in section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12102).

Montachusett Region, again, illustrating the importance of recognizing and considering the needs of this covered population.

4.4.7 Individuals who are Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group

Most of the resident population of Templeton primarily identify as white and white alone. However, 5.4% of Templeton’s population are covered populations of the Digital Equity Act as “Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group”.

Proportions of the population within an ethnic or racial minority group can be an important indicator of digital equity; **Figure 4-8** below provides a graph of Templeton’s population by race.



Source: Mass MBI Broadband Map, Digital Equity Indicators

Figure 4-8. Templeton’s population by race.

Many people born outside of the US, some non-English speaking, and some of multiple ethnicities, have immigrated to the Montachusett Region over the course of many generations. Recently, there has been an increase of immigration of individuals and families of ethnic and racial minority groups to nearby communities like Athol, Winchendon, Gardner, Leominster, and Fitchburg, including those who speak Haitian-Creole, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese. The diverse ethnic make-up of the greater region of the Montachusett area makes this covered population an important one to consider, even in more rural areas with predominantly white residents.

4.4.8 Individuals who Primarily Reside in a Rural Area

Templeton is classified as a “Rural Area” and therefore, all (100%) of residents in Templeton are part of a “covered population” group under the Digital Equity Act as “individuals who primarily reside in rural areas”²⁷. In fact, most areas of western Massachusetts, including the northwest portion of Worcester County and the Montachusett Region, including Templeton, exhibit between 90-100% coverage as “covered populations”, which can be attributed to the rural designation of most communities within this area, in addition to other socio-economic factors related to other designated populations covered under the Digital Equity Act, and often coinciding with the “ruralness” of a place or region.

²⁷ The term “rural area” has the meaning given the term in section 601(b)(3) of the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C. 950bb(b)(3)).

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The U.S. Census Bureau’s *Digital Equity Act Population Viewer* is an online interactive map application that displays proportions of the population covered by the Digital Equity Act. **Figure 4-9** below, provides a visual representation of covered populations throughout Massachusetts and demonstrates the high degree of covered people within rural areas of western Massachusetts, including the Town of Templeton, and neighboring Towns within the Montachusett region.

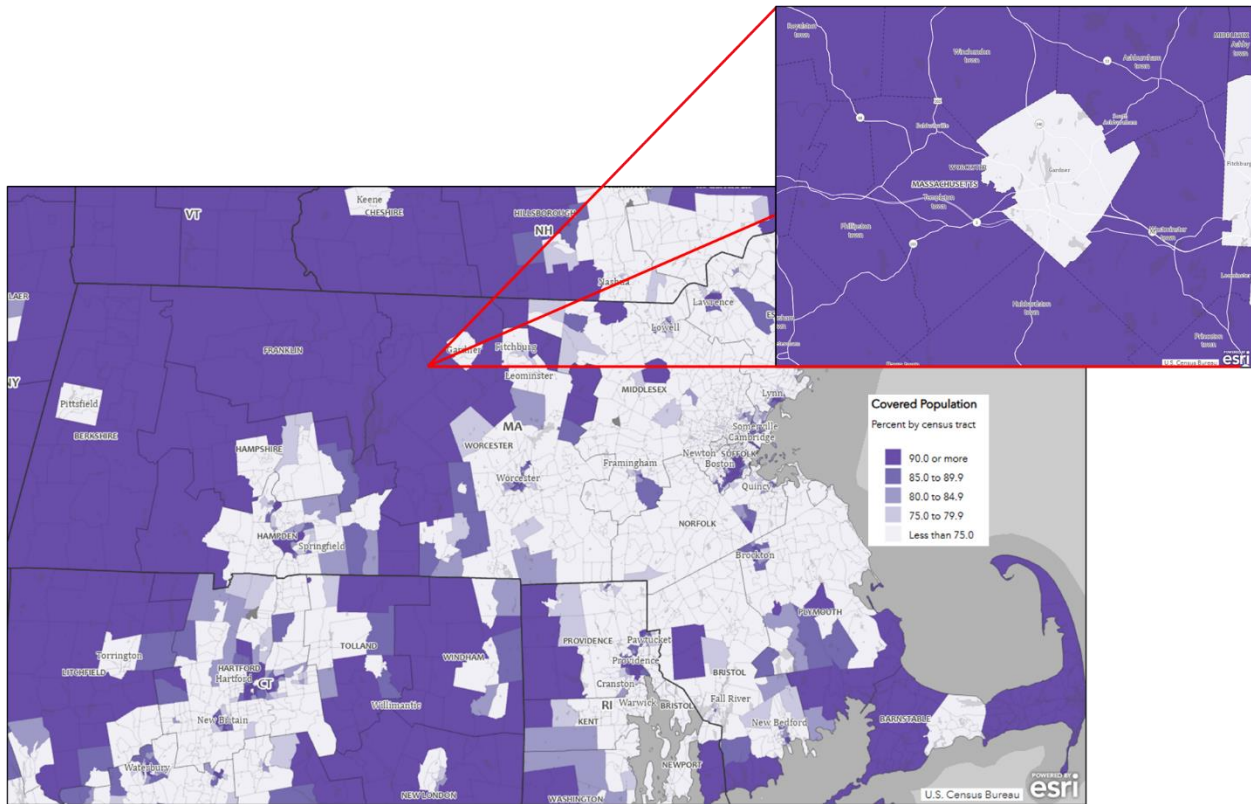


Figure 4-9. Percentages of Covered Populations in Massachusetts, with emphasis on Templeton (100%) and the surrounding rural areas the Montachusett Region.

4.5 CRITICAL DIGITAL ASSETS & COMMUNITY ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

Critical Digital Assets and Community Anchor Institutions are critical public resources for emergency personnel, residents, students, workers, and visitors to access internet services and devices outside their homes and for the effective and efficient administration of government and civic life. The following outlines the communities’ digital assets and institutions and their current role in the availability of digital equity resources and the provision of public internet and digital literacy programs and services.

4.5.1 Critical Digital Assets

The term “Critical Digital Asset” means a digital computer, communication system, or network that is a component of a critical Information System, including assets that perform Safety-Sensitive and/or Emergency Planning (SSEP) functions. Such assets (facilities- and systems-based infrastructure) are often critical to emergency response and public safety and provide support to

protect, serve, or administer important government and public safety functions. Critical Digital Assets sometimes provide a pathway to other critical systems or a support system asset whose failure or compromise could result in a threat to public safety. Critical Digital Assets are often at risk of cyber-attacks and proper digital network security and access is crucial to their protection and function.

Table 4-4 below provides a summary list of the primary Critical Digital Assets located within Templeton:

Table 4-4: Templeton’s Critical Digital Assets.

Critical Digital Assets - Templeton		
Facility Type	Organization	Location
Other Government Facility	Templeton Highway Dept.	381 Baldwinville Rd.
Other Government Buildings	Templeton Municipal Light & Water	86 Bridge Street
Public Safety	Templeton Fire Department Station #2	2 School Street
Post Office	Templeton Post Office	449 Patriots Road
Post Office	Baldwinville Post Office	38 Elm Street
Post Office	East Templeton Post Office	132 Patriots Road
Public Safety	Police Station Dispatch Center	33 South Road
Other Government Buildings	Templeton Wastewater Treatment Facility	33 Reservoir Rd
Other Government Buildings	Gardner Wastewater Treatment Facility	52 Plant Road
Public Safety	Templeton- Center Fire Station	18 - 22 South Road
Public Safety	Templeton Emergency Management	1 - 3 Elm Street

4.5.2 Community Anchor Institutions

The term “Community Anchor Institution” as defined within the Digital Equity Act of 2021 means a public school, a library, a medical or healthcare provider, a community college or other institution of higher education, a state library agency, and any other nonprofit or governmental community support organization.

Table 4-5 below provides a summary list of the primary Community Anchor Institutions located within Templeton:

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Table 4-5: Templeton’s Community Anchor Institutions.

Community Anchor Institutions - Templeton		
Facility Type	Organization	Location
Town Hall	Templeton Town Hall	160 Patriots Road
Clinics	Mountain View Family Practice	570 Baldwinville Road
Senior Center	Templeton Senior Community Center	16 Senior Drive
Church	Holy Cross Church	26 Lake Avenue
Church	First Church	1 Wellington Street
Church	St. Vincent de Paul	18 Pleasant Street
Church	Memorial Congregational Church	4 Memorial Street
Church	St. Martin's Rectory	248 State Road
Library	Boynton Public Library	27 Boynton Road
School	Templeton Elementary School	17 South Road
School	Narragansett Regional Middle School	460 Baldwinville Road
School	Narragansett High School	464 Baldwinville Road



In summary, and for visualization of locations relative to each other and Town boundaries, **Figure 4-10** below is a map showing the locations of all Critical Digital Assets and Community Anchor Institutions located within Templeton as listed in the tables above.

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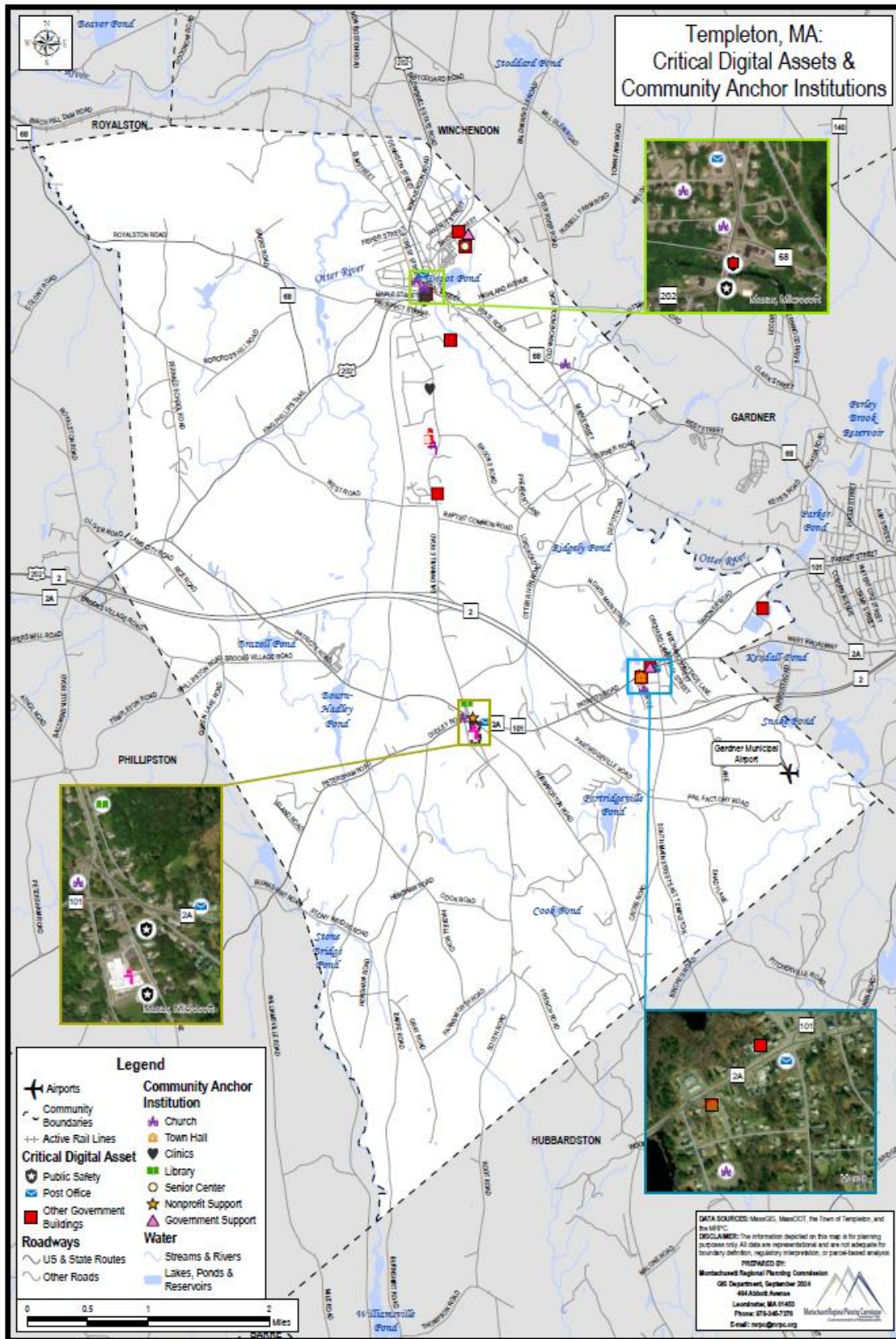
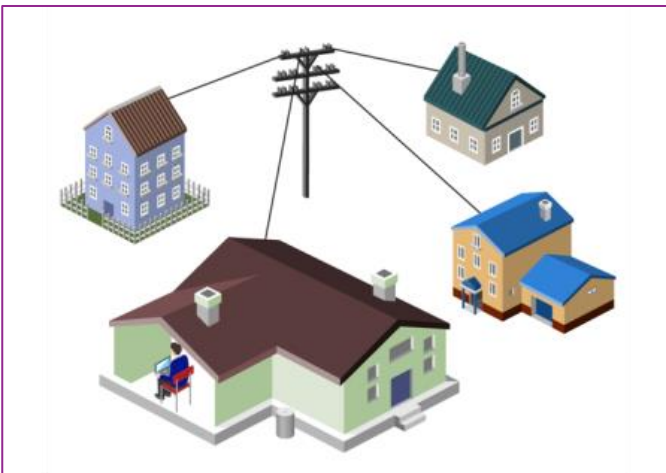


Figure 4-10. Critical Digital Assets & Community Anchor Institutions.

4.6 PUBLIC BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

4.6.1 MBI Last Mile Broadband Infrastructure

The Last Mile Program is a broadband internet infrastructure initiative and funding program aimed at providing residential broadband access in 53 Last Mile Towns, including 44 unserved Western and Central Massachusetts towns that lacked any residential broadband service and an additional 9 underserved Western and Central Massachusetts towns that were partially served by cable. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the support of the Massachusetts Legislature, appropriated funds to support the MBI's mission to develop access to broadband service throughout the Commonwealth through public and private partnerships.



Last Mile is an industry term that describes the local network infrastructure closest to the end-users (e.g., the residents, businesses and community facilities). They are typically built off of middle mile networks.

The two maps presented below as **Figure 4-11** and **Figure 4-12** illustrate Last Mile Project Partners and Pathways and Last Mile Project Status, respectively.

MBI Last Mile Programs

broadband.masstech.org/last-mile-programs

In May 2016, then-Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito met with legislative leaders, MBI officials, and local representatives from unserved municipalities to discuss a [strategic pathway forward](#) for the Last Mile program, an effort designed to accelerate progress. A new Last Mile project [leadership team](#) was also announced to guide the MBI's high-speed internet accessibility efforts and appropriately disperse state capital Last Mile funds to approved projects. [View the complete Program Policy.](#)

The MBI, Commonwealth, and Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development (EOHED) built a flexible framework that would help all Last Mile towns achieve broadband access, allowing for a range of project models, including multi-town collaborations, locally-owned networks, and industry partnerships. Project models allowed for many technology and operational choices, as long as they meet core speed, affordability, and sustainability standards.

The Commonwealth and EOHED launched the [Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program](#) for Last Mile towns that seek to build a municipally-owned broadband network. MBI administers the [Flexible Grant Program](#) that provides grants to private providers to build, own and operate broadband networks in Last Mile Towns. MBI also administered the [Broadband Extension Program](#) for partially served cable towns, which was completed in September 2018.

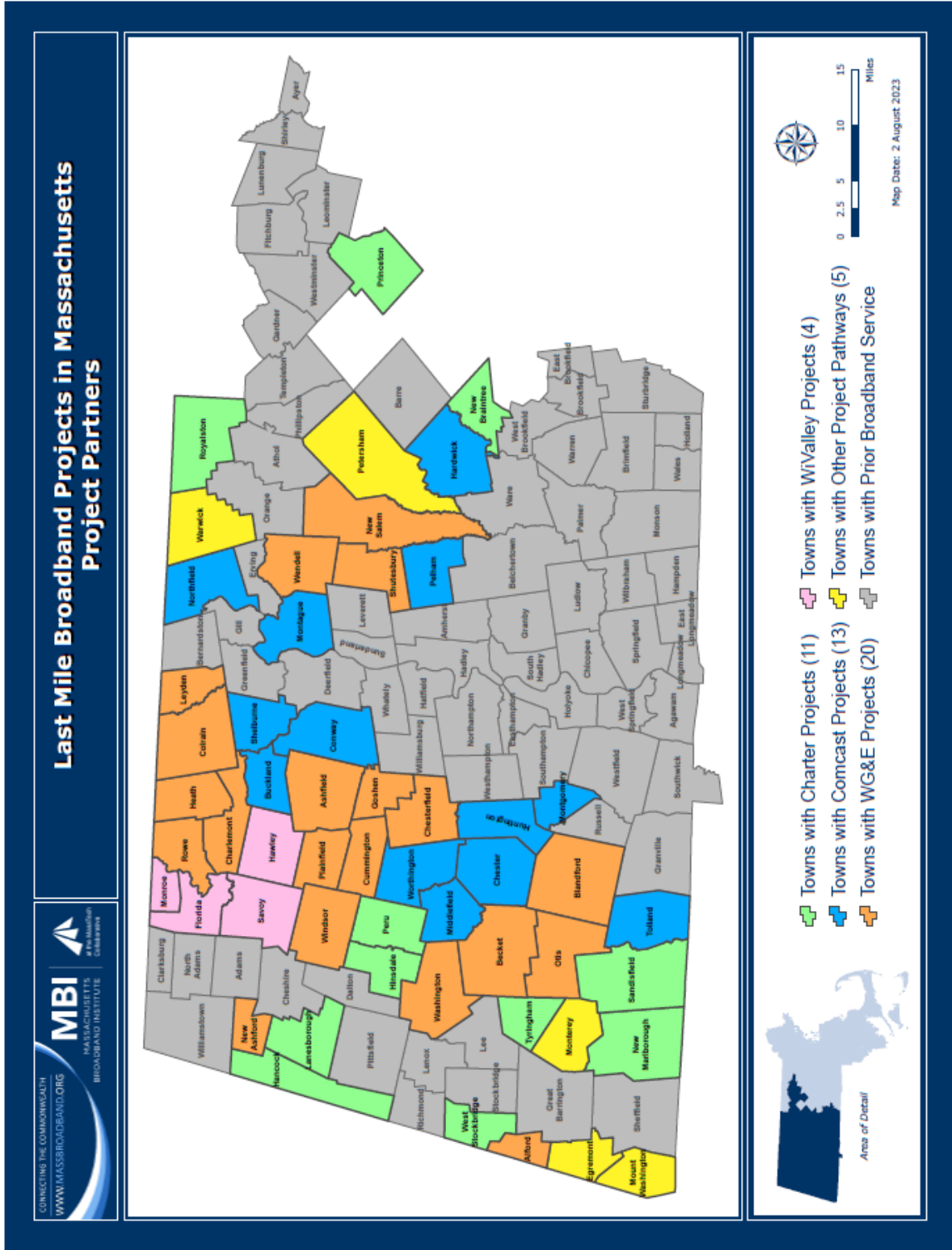


Figure 4-11: Last Mile Project Partners .

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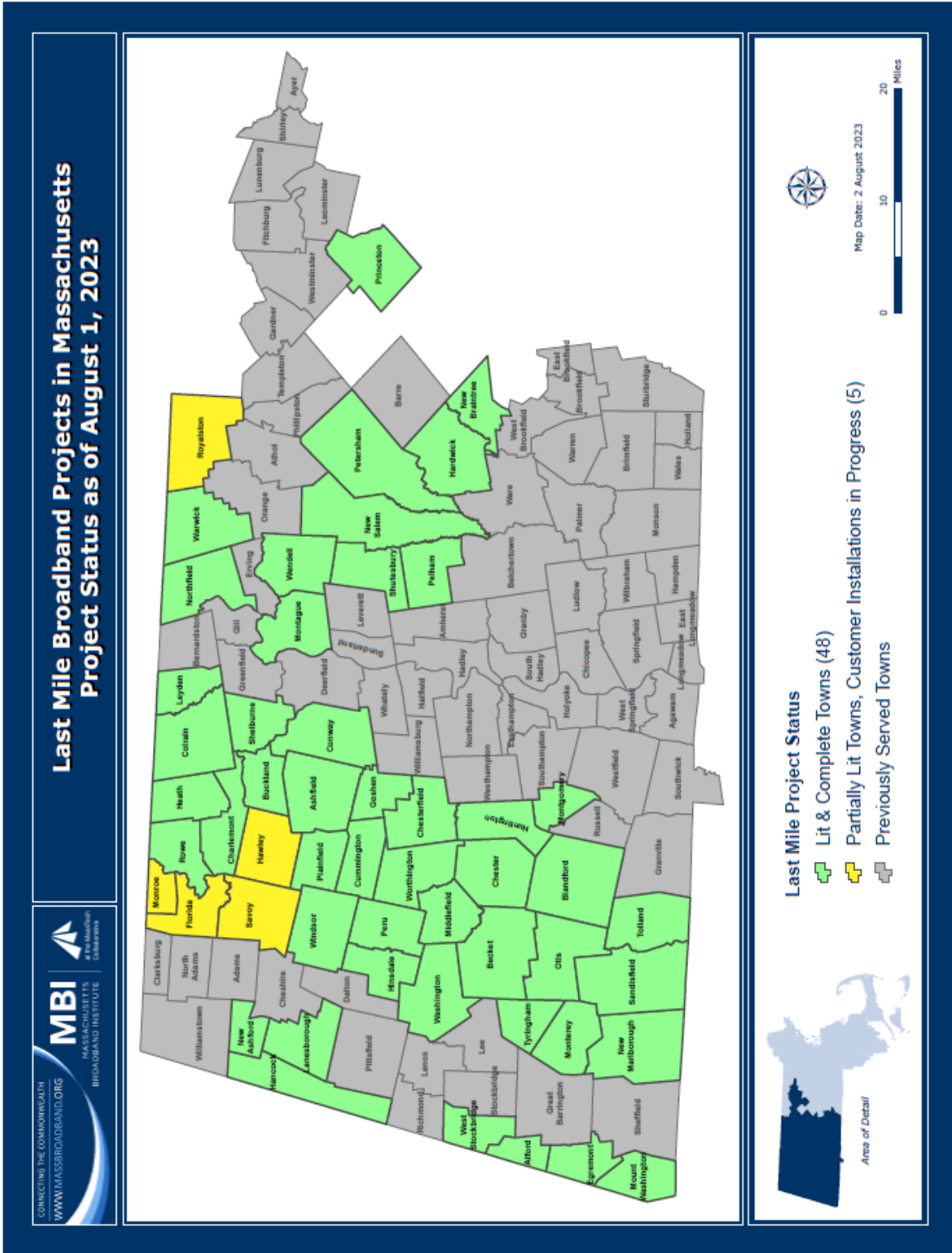
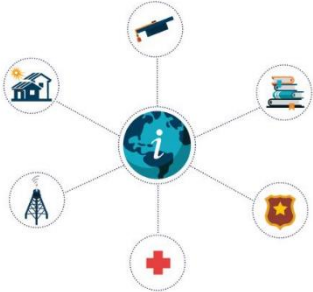


Figure 4-12: Last Mile Project Status.

4.6.2 MassBroadband 123

MassBroadband 123 is an open access, fiber-optic “middle mile” network in western and north central Massachusetts, designed, built, and operated by MBI in early 2014.



Middle Mile is an industry term that describes the network infrastructure that connects last mile (i.e., local) networks to other network service providers, major telecommunications carriers, and the greater internet. It does not typically connect the majority of end-users.

broadband.masstech.org/massbroadband-123

MassBroadband 123 is an open-access, *middle mile* fiber-optic network that stretches across 120+ western and central Massachusetts communities (**Figure 4-13**). It was the first step in bringing high-speed internet to all parts of the state and is now used as a building block to design and build last mile connections to residents and businesses in areas that still lack high-speed internet services, such as Templeton (**Figure 4-14**).

About the MassBroadband 123 Network

- Designed, built, and owned by Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI)
- Operated by [Local Linx](#) (formerly KCST USA)
- Consists of approximately 1,200 miles of fiber, connecting 120+ communities in western and north central Massachusetts
- Provides direct connectivity to hundreds of public facilities in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties and parts of Worcester County
- Covers more than one-third of the geographic area of Massachusetts, which has more than 400,000 households and businesses and more than one million residents

About the MassBroadband 123 Network

Local Linx provides wholesale services on the network to local retail Internet Service Providers (ISP) that may offer consumer services in the region.

- ISPs use the network to offer broadband services to public safety entities, schools, libraries, medical facilities, town halls, and other Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) already connected to the network.
- ISPs may request quotes from Local Linx to build new extensions to connect additional CAIs and businesses in the region.
- ISPs can purchase dark fiber connections, high speed lit services to facilitate backhaul for Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) networks, and collocation services to house equipment within MassBroadband 123 facilities.

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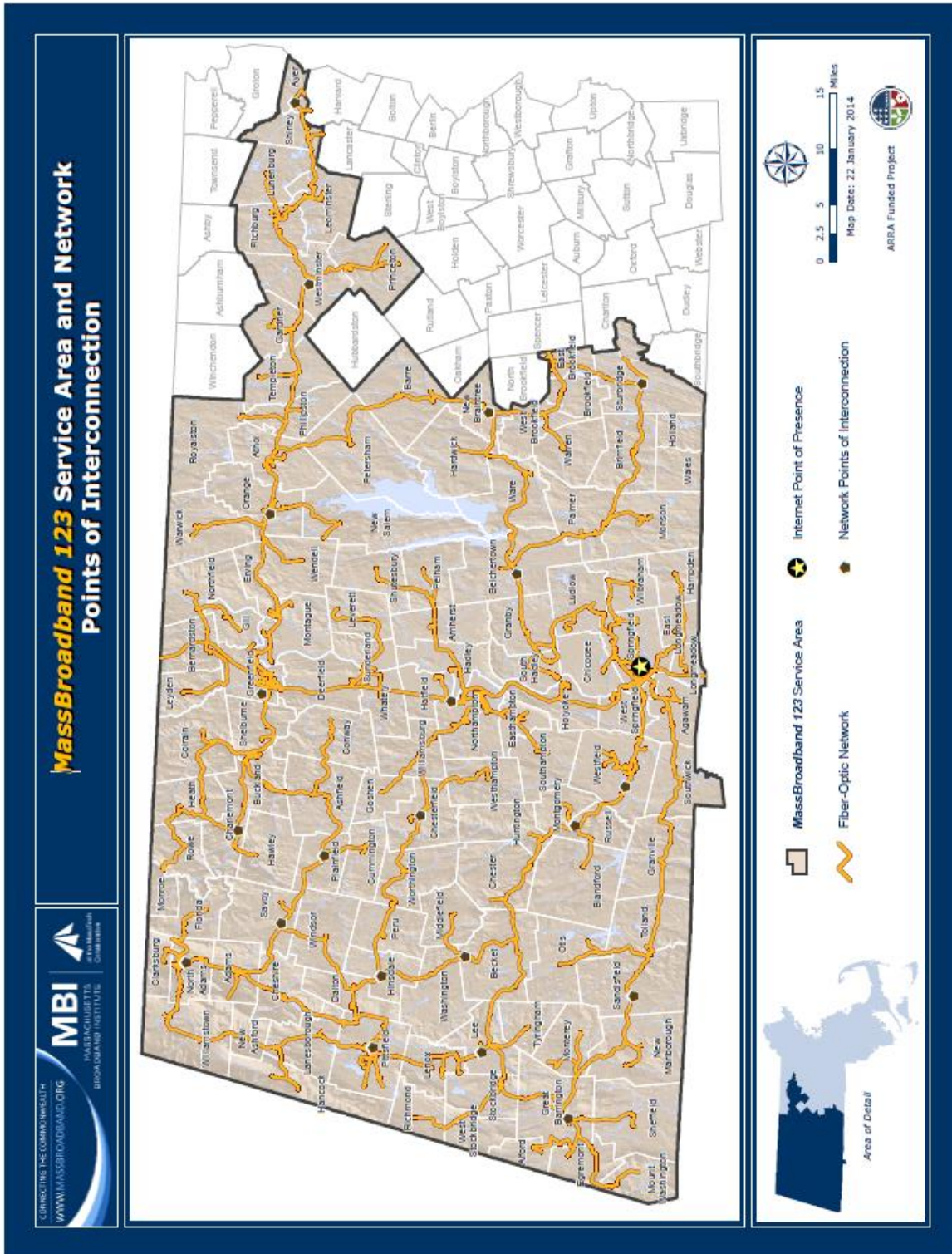


Figure 4-13: MassBroadband 123 Service Area & network.

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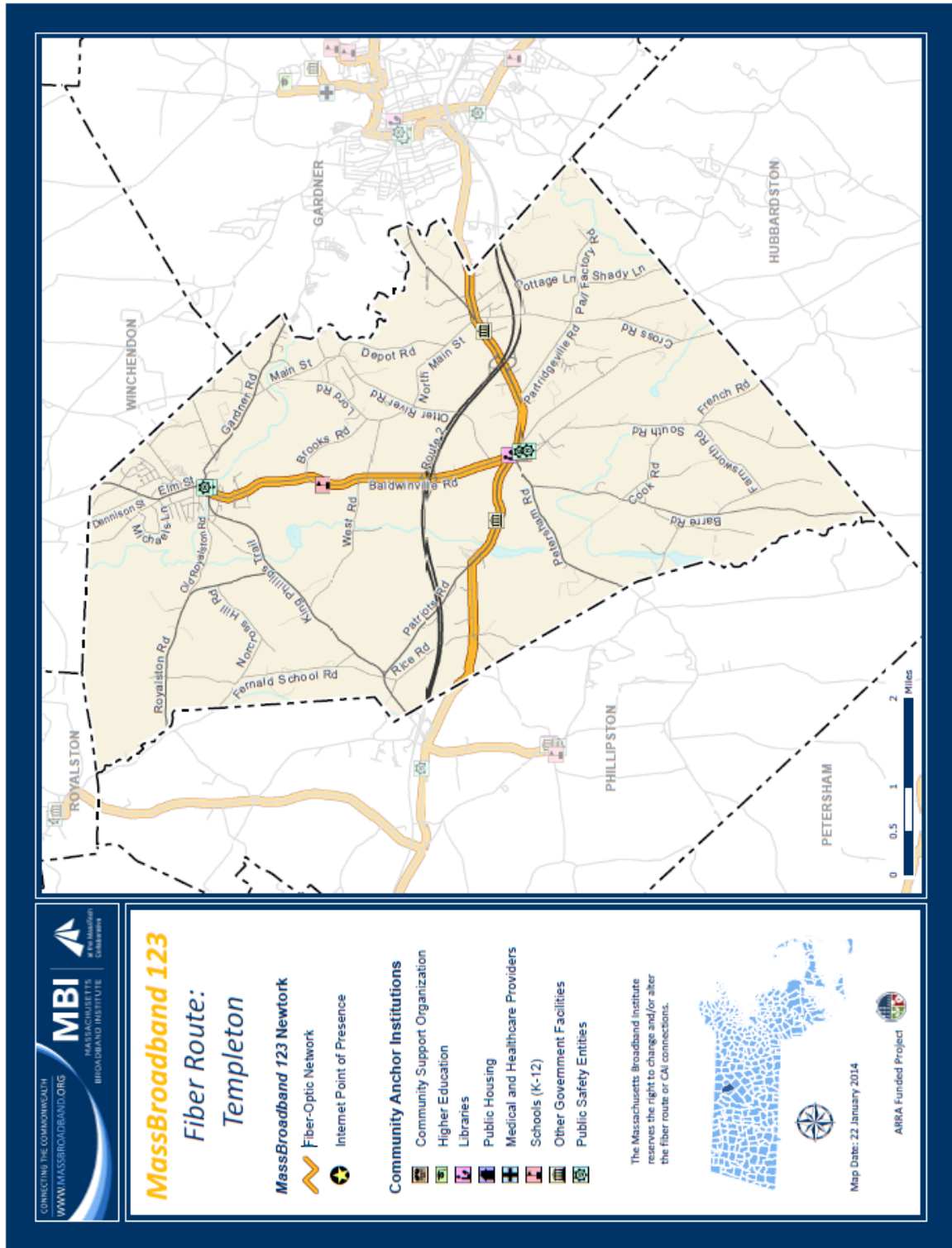


Figure 4-14: MassBroadband 123 Service Area & network – Templeton.

5 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Town of Templeton

In addition to the Existing Conditions Evaluation presented within Section 4 of the Plan, the Digital Equity Planning Process also includes an assessment of “Community Needs”. Location-specific Community Needs are established as part of the public outreach and engagement portion of the planning process through information gathered during targeted outreach to interested stakeholders, covered populations, and local digital equity champions, including core team meetings, focus group meetings, stakeholder questionnaires and interviews, and local and regional responses to the Statewide Digital Equity Survey. The assessment of community needs was not limited only to internet accessibility, but also included an evaluation of the region’s digital literacy opportunities, and the communities’ level of digital literacy or knowledge, skills, abilities, and importantly, comfort levels, and willingness to adopt broadband internet and digital technologies. Community needs were assessed generally, but with specific regard to the status and needs of covered populations.

5.1 THE PATH TO DIGITAL EQUITY

The Existing Conditions Evaluation presented within Section 4 assessed the digital assets of the community and demonstrated of the challenges the community faces concerning availability, affordability, and adoption. However, Templeton also has many existing strengths and opportunities to begin to bridge the digital divide.

STRENGTHS

- A Digital Equity and Digital Literacy “Champion” advocate in Steve Castle/TCTV
- A Digital Lab/Community Center facility now exists at Scout Hall with considerable equipment and a framework and vision for a full-on digital lab serving the community’s digital literacy and professional and economic development needs with a particular focus on youth and young adults, and with an emphasis on personal achievement and workforce development
- A new Digital Equity Plan establishing the community’s awareness of the Digital Gap and the importance of “making broadband internet available and affordable to all town residents
- Narragansett School District and Boynton Public Library currently enrolled in the E-Rate program, saving tens of thousands of dollars annually
- Highly engaged Senior Center and Library staff committed to serving the needs of covered populations of the Digital Equity Act

Section Town of

05 Templeton

- A Senior Community Center facility that has existing framework for high-tech, multi-media technology (pending necessary update/modernization of older technology)
- Established Municipal Light (and Water) Department that is engaged with the Town and Community

WEAKNESSES

- Budgetary and staffing constraints
- Lack of competitive internet providers
- Localized lack of availability to adequate and reliable internet services
- Town webpage does not currently meet all ADA compliance requirements
- Town Hall is not currently equipped with a public computer or kiosk for online bill payment or filing of permits/applications

OPPORTUNITIES

- Engage with youth, particularly young adults not enrolled in college to promote and develop innovation, personal & professional development, community development, and encourage civic engagement and community leadership
- Build a program through the Digital Lab where youth innovators serve the community as digital equity champions/digital navigators promoting and serving as advocates and trainers of digital literacy programs for covered populations
- Promote inter-generational and multi-cultural relationships through digital literacy programs at the Digital Lab/Scout Hall Community Center
- Interest in Digital Literacy programming at the Senior Center, and the potential for upgraded/modernized digital technology at that location
- Recent and planned infrastructure improvements related to transportation, housing, recreation, and hazard mitigation will provide opportunities for enhanced digital equity infrastructure, services, and programs
- Potential for the Public Library to enroll in the E-Rate Program
- Increased potential for future municipal public broadband projects at site-specific locations under the existing Municipal Light Department framework

THREATS

- Rural location and lack of common ISP provider in all bordering communities
- Single ISP provider model may limit competition and could potentially lead to higher costs of broadband internet service
- Location on the western “edge” Central Mass and at the cusp of more rural areas to the west in the North Quabbin and Connecticut River Valley
- Affordability/High cost of internet service and devices
- Lower levels of digital literacy among aging adults and some rural residents
- Lack of digital literacy navigator organizations or businesses locally (TCTV/Digital Lab may be able to fill this gap)
- Decreasing cable T.V. subscriptions resulting in decreased funding for TCTV

5.2 PUBLIC SURVEYS

5.2.1 Statewide Digital Equity Survey Results and Local Digital Equity Surveys

There were only 14 responses to the Statewide Digital Equity Survey from residents of the Town of Templeton. According to 9 out of 14 respondents who answered the question, the average cost of internet in Templeton is \$142. Of the 11 respondents who answered the follow-up question, 2 found that it was “very hard” to pay for an internet subscription, 4 thought that it was “somewhat hard”, 4 thought that it was “not too hard”, and 1 thought that it was “not at all hard”, and 3 did not answer the question. 11 of 13 respondents indicated that their broadband internet provider was Xfinity/Comcast. The few responses yielded limited variation, and the representativeness of the data is uncertain. Given this a local survey was conducted, the results of which are summarized below.

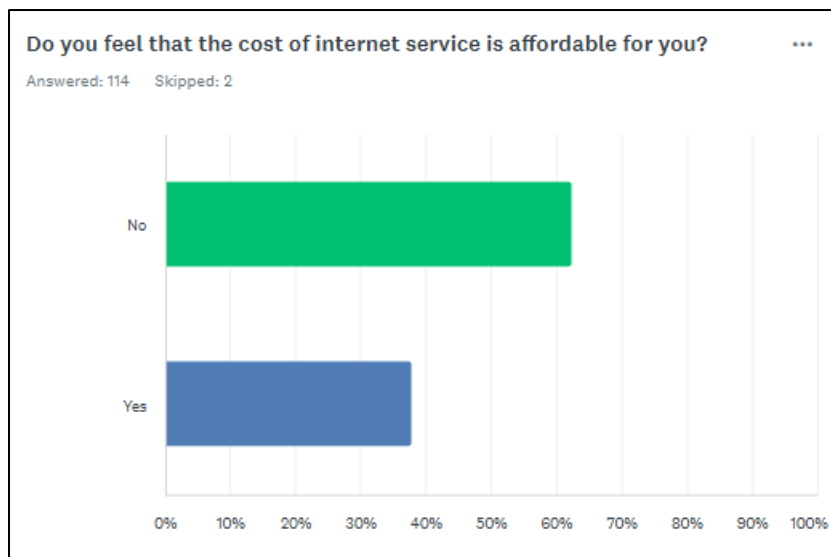
5.2.2 Local Digital Equity Survey Results

There were 122 responses to the Local Digital Equity Survey from residents of the Town of Templeton. Of those, 93.4% indicated that their “home internet service provider” was Xfinity/Comcast, with Verizon (4.1 %), T-Mobile Home Internet (1.7%), and AT&T (1%) being listed as the other providers. Of those who responded to the question of “How satisfied are you with your current home internet service?”, 38 were ‘Neutral’ (31.7%), 33 were ‘Dissatisfied’ (27.5%), 28 were ‘Satisfied’ (23.3%), 13, were ‘Very Satisfied’ (10.8%), 7 were ‘Very Dissatisfied’ (5.8%), and 1 did not have home internet service.

When asked “How often do you experience home internet connectivity issues?”, 45.08% responded ‘Sometimes’, 37.70% responded ‘Rarely’, 12.30% responded ‘Often’, 2.46% responded ‘Always’, 1.64% responded ‘Never’, and 0.82% responded ‘I do not have home internet service’.

Only 35.83% (43) of respondents felt that the cost of their internet service was “affordable”, while 64.17% (77) felt that it was “not affordable”.

When asked “What challenges do you face when accessing or using the internet?”, 47.12% of respondents indicated that internet service was too expensive, or unaffordable, 36.54% of respondents indicated that internet service speeds are too slow or unreliable, another 36.54% of respondents were concerned about online safety or privacy, 18.27% listed other challenges, only having one provider to choose from, 9.62% indicated that their own internet-connected equipment or devices were out-of-date or of too low quality to function properly.



Two respondents indicated that internet service is not available where they live, and one indicated that they could not afford a computer or internet-connected device to access the internet. Five out of 104 respondents indicated that they had experienced no challenges.

Most respondents used a smartphone (93.44%) or laptop (78.69%) to access the internet, while 68.85% use a smart T.V., 59.02% use a tablet, 48.36% use a desktop computer, and 20.49% use a gaming console.

The greatest majority of respondents listed “Shopping” (85.12%) and “Financial/Banking” (83.47%) as the main reasons they use the internet, followed by “Entertainment/Hobbies” (76.03%), “News” (71.9%), “Social Media” (61.98%), “Work” (59.5%), “Healthcare” (52.07%), “Education” (39.67%), other responses included “keeping in touch with family in far away places”, “everything”, and “email”.

68.6% of respondents indicated that they have internet at home but still sometimes use internet at other locations, while 24.79% said they do not usually use the internet in places other than their home. For people who sometimes use internet in places other than at home, when asked “where do you go to use the internet?”, the top places selected were Workplace (47.93%), a friend or family members home (38.02%), a business such as a restaurant, café, bookstore, pub, etc. (29.75%), a public facility such as a park or government building (9.92%), a public library (9.09%), on public transit or at a public transit station (4.96%), at a school, college, or university (3.31%), at a Community Center (2.48%), or other places (5.79%) such as waiting rooms, hotels, or summer homes.

When asked “How confident are you in your digital skills?”, 46.28% of respondents were “Confident”, meaning they had some digital skills and confidence, 33.06% of respondents were “Very Confident” meaning they had a very high degree of digital skills and confidence, 19.01% of respondents were “Neutral” meaning they have some digital skills but a low level of confidence, 1.65% were “Not confident” meaning they had few digital skills and a low level of confidence, and none possessed no digital skills and no confidence (i.e., “Not confident at all”).

When asked “What types of digital skills training would benefit you?”, respondents indicated that Cyber security (44.58%) and Online Safety (37.35%) training would benefit the greatest number of people, followed by Software usage (31.33%), Internet navigation (21.69%), Digital art, photo editing, or graphic design (20.48%). These were followed by Basic computer skills, Coding, Online license and registration renewals, Creating online video content or podcasts, Email basics, Telehealth, Online Shopping/Purchasing.

Survey respondents ages ranged from 25 to 75+ years of age, with many respondents being between 60 to 74 years old (43.44%), followed by 45 to 59 years old (23.77%), and 35 to 44 years old (18.03%). Respondents’ levels of education ranged were well represented from High School graduates (16.39%) to Advanced College Graduate Degrees (16.39%) and included individuals with “some” college (17.21%), Associate’s Degrees (26.23%), and Bachelor’s Degrees (23.77%).

Regarding the eight “Covered Populations of the Digital Equity Act”, respondents represented seven out of eight “covered” groups with only incarcerated individuals lacking representation. Some

groups were strongly represented and accounted for a large proportion of the respondents including Aging adults over 60 (57.38%), Individuals who reside in Rural Areas (40.98%, reported – Actual = 100%), Individuals with Disabilities (16.39%), Veterans (13.93%), and Covered Households (10.66%). A lesser proportion of respondents indicated that they are Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group (3.28%), Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English-learners or who have lower levels of literacy (0.82%). Finally, 16.39% of respondents indicated that they are not a member of any covered population group even though all residents are actually “individuals who reside in rural areas”.

When asked for suggestions on “improvements for enhanced internet access or digital inclusion and equity” in the community, respondents listed items such as:

- Better customer services
- Service improvements (speed, reliability)
- Fiber optic service
- Increased competition through increased number of Internet Service Providers
- Municipal internet service provider option
- Affordability
- Affordability programs for “covered populations”
- Equipment and infrastructure improvements, repairs, maintenance, upkeep, and routine updates of provided/leased equipment (e.g., modems/routers)
- Improved/reduced cost (no more than \$50/month by one suggestion)
- Improved cellular service

5.3 COMMUNITY NEEDS – STAKEHOLDER INPUT

5.3.1 Veterans Focus Group Meeting

According to input provided by local Veterans Services Officers at a Regional Veterans Focus Group Meeting held at the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center in June 2024, many Veterans in the Montachusett Region, including 8-10% of Templeton’s population, lack internet access due to affordability, trust, and digital literacy barriers. Additionally, although most veterans have mobile data, many are concerned about online scams and internet privacy and security. The lack of “feeling secure” online discourages many Veterans from accessing the internet at home. Approximately 75% of the region’s veterans have some form of internet access, however many struggle with the cost of service and a lack of digital skills needed to navigate the online world. There is an emphasis on the need for accessible digital literacy programs held in familiar, comfortable locations (such as Veterans Community Centers), ideally promoted through Veteran services networks. Locations such as libraries are crucial public access points to get Wi-Fi and digital help for many people, however, many libraries are busy, lack privacy, or require sign-ups, reservations, appointments, or other personally identifying information or requirements that, sometimes, or often, act as barriers for Veterans trying to access digital resources. Furthermore, Veterans primarily use the internet for access to their Department of Veterans’ Affairs benefits and related online programs and administrative (digital) applications, and Librarians are not trained or familiar with these programs,

like Veteran’s Services Officer or Coordinator at a Veteran’s Center would be. Veterans, like other segments of the population also use the internet for social connections, job-searches, health care services, financial services and banking, hobbies and entertainment, and all other aspects of everyday life and living. Therefore, it is not only important for Veterans to have equitable, affordable access to reliable internet, it is essential that it be available to them at home, or in a public space that is “less public” than traditional public spaces, and geared specifically toward Veterans and their needs and staffed by Veterans Services specialists.

Key actions to improve Digital Equity:

1. Workspaces are needed to provide access to the internet for various services where privacy and comfort can be maintained.
2. Cyber-Security training is imperative as many Veterans do not utilize the internet for fear of safety and cyber security concerns.
3. Affordable internet options and devices are needed as many Veterans cannot afford to pay for internet services, nor can they afford a device. This is vital as many Veteran’s programs and benefits are accessible only through the internet.

Addressing digital barriers, such as **affordability**, **lack of digital security**, and **digital literacy** is crucial to ensuring equitable access to the internet for veterans. Creating accessible, comfortable, stress-free digital workspaces, offering cybersecurity training, and providing affordable internet options and devices are all necessary steps to ensure Veterans have access to broadband internet critical digital resources.

5.3.2 Aging Adults Focus Group Meeting

According to input received by aging adult patrons and Senior Center Staff at a Focus Group meeting and two tech help/digital literacy forums held at the Templeton Senior Center in May and August 2024, aging adults reported using the internet regularly for home business or personal business activities. In addition, many aging adults use the internet for communicating with family and friends over social media or video call apps, for conducting research on hobbies or other interests, for medical appointments and records, for registrations and applications, and for banking and bill paying. However, many residents expressed concerns that they do not have the skill necessary to do these things, so they still do it the traditional way, or have to ask for help from family, friends, or senior center staff. Of real concern was the fact that many people stated that they are increasingly feeling “forced” to use the internet to accomplish daily tasks and that, in some cases, there is no longer an alternative.

Many aging adults do not have internet service at home because it is not affordable. Moreover, when aging adult residents of Templeton do not have access to the internet at home they go to the Templeton Library, Templeton Senior Center, and even the Gardner Library or other regional libraries. It was noted that some aging adults were familiar with the schedules of several local libraries because Templeton, and other local rural communities have part-time hours. So, to get access to a computer and internet at a public library in this rural region, it often requires people to visit to multiple different libraries depending on the day of week. Individuals with internet at home described their experiences with internet connectivity/reliability as sometimes intermittent, but

mostly reliable. Because affordability is a factor and local libraries have limited, part-time hours, it is key to pursue affordable internet options for aging adults to enhance digital equity for this covered population, which accounts for nearly a quarter (23%) of Templeton’s total population.

Thus, an affordable, stable, or fixed cost is needed to make the internet accessible and equitable for aging adult residents. Many of the aging adults in attendance at the Focus Group meeting and Tech Help workshop were confident in their internet skills and had access to a computer or handheld device. However, some aging adults indicated the need for additional tech-help or digital literacy training to better navigate the internet or other online services. They specifically indicated the need for help navigating sites like Facebook, operating and setting up their hand-held devices, cyber-security and scam avoidance, and storing or archiving information to the cloud.

The Templeton Library also provides some services to Templeton’s aging adults, but grant funding is needed to support digital literacy programs, services, equipment, and staffing. However, it is unlikely that full-time hours would be financially feasible, so it will be important to ensure continued and future collaboration between the Senior Center, and other area libraries related to digital literacy programs and services. Currently, the Boynton Libraries internet service extends outside of the building, and it is possible that a future outdoor workstation could be developed to support internet access outside of library hours if grant funding and resources are available for such a measure.

5.3.3 Covered Households & Families

In Templeton, and all rural areas affordable internet is one of the greatest barriers to digital equity, as shown within Section 4.3.2 above. With as many as 10% of Templeton’s households falling below 150% of the poverty line, and as such, considered a “covered household” under the Digital Equity Act, it is important to consider affordability when assessing the needs of Templeton’s 3,000+ households.

For households made up of families with children who are in school, affordability is especially important. According to the Nashoba Regional School District (NRSD), approximately 30 hotspots were needed during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that all students had access to the internet at home. Further, since Covid-19, much of the learning done in school (and at home) is done “online” on a computer or Chromebook device. NRSD’s pre-k to 4th grade students have access to a computing device (Chromebook) in school, but not for take-home. Students in 5th to 12th grade do all have a take-home device (Chromebook), but it is necessary to have access to affordable, reliable broadband internet to use that device to complete assigned work and projects.

Affordability is the biggest barrier when it comes to improving or providing digital services for schools and households in the region. Therefore, it is important that schools have less costly options to improving online provisions. NRSD students no longer have access to hot spots as some did during Covid-19. Since that time, many homes (106 households in Templeton) signed up for internet the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), an internet affordability program, however, that program is no longer available, and those families are now paying higher rates (as before) or seeking alternative programs or options. Regardless of savings or increases in internet costs, the need remains the same.

As for the cost of providing reliable internet services in schools, it can be expensive, but like in the home, and perhaps more so, it is a necessity and responsibility to provide reliable service to the students and teachers to meet their teaching and learning needs. NRSD participates in the E-Rate program, an FCC program providing internet service and technology cost savings to public schools and libraries. Templeton (NRSD) schools are eligible for a 70% cost-match savings rate through the E-Rate program which saves the schools approximately \$60,000 to \$70,000 per year on internet service and required technology to provide wireless connections to that service such as switches, access points, and a firewall.

The Templeton Housing Authority (THA) provides affordable housing for lower-income residents and seniors, who are often on a fixed income. However, the THA does not offer people free or discounted access to the internet to any of its residents. It is known that affordability is a barrier to many of the THA's residents (and other non-THA residents living in private properties) and that being unable to afford internet, prevents many households from accessing service. The housing authority oversees a population that is majority elderly individuals and younger disabled persons. Of this population, THA estimates that only 20% to 30% of residents are digitally literate. It is believed that this high percentage of digital illiteracy can mostly be attributed to aging adults over 60, which account for the majority of THA's residents.

As for broadband internet availability in Templeton's households, the Templeton Community Access Television (TCTV) acknowledges that close to 99% of homes have available internet coverage/service, with just a few houses that are not covered, there are noticeable variations in internet reliability with regard to bandwidth or speeds, particularly in certain locations or at certain times of the day, such as mid- to late-afternoon when children come home from school. During that time there is noticeable negative effect on the town's internet speeds which drop drastically due to over-stressed bandwidth.

Improving **affordable access to the internet**, ensuring **reliable bandwidth**, and providing **digital literacy training** are critical to enhancing and achieving equitable access to broadband internet and digital technologies and services.

5.3.4 Persons with Disabilities

A primary digital "equity" issue for many individuals with disabilities, particularly for individuals who experience challenges to hearing or seeing, is the accessibility of digital media, particularly webpages. This can be especially important for a municipal government who serves the entire population of a community. Hence, one of the most critical needs, and important first steps for any municipality toward achieving digital equity is improving the accessibility and achieving ADA compliance of the Town website. Likewise, creating more private internet spaces where someone could sit down and if they needed get help with their digital needs, or conduct a virtual medical or other health and well-being appointment, would be a huge help to improving the digital equity for individuals with disabilities in Templeton. Due to a lack of affordable options at home particularly for "covered population" groups, and a lack of public internet accessibility in public spaces and with full-time operating hours, such as the library and Town Hall, more public spaces with internet and ADA accessible features are needed. One option would be to create an ADA-compliant digital workspace at the Digital Lab in the Scout Hall Community Center. Funding for full disability

accessible internet spaces, with the option for privacy, if needed, and a fully accessible municipal website gives residents the opportunity to engage and use the internet and is a first step toward community digital equity. The Municipal Digital Equity Planning program and Implementation Grant, provides the tools and resources to understand such a need and implement the necessary solutions. When individuals with disabilities do not have equitable access to broadband internet and accessible digital devices and technologies at home, they will depend on public spaces like a library, senior center, or community center/digital lab to get the services they need. Ensuring that those services are available is not only a primary purpose of this plan, but also a realistic possibility under the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Plan and therefore identified as a priority. It should be noted that transportation is also often a barrier to gaining access to public services, and broadband internet and digital equipment, services, and programs, are no exception. Often, individuals with disabilities, aging adults, and lower-income households have access to transportation and transit programs and services that could alleviate this challenge, but it should be recognized when planning for and appropriately siting public digital equity resources.

According to input from another stakeholder, MassAbility, interviewed as part of this planning process, one of the greatest digital equity challenges for individuals with disabilities is access to accessible technology and devices. For this reason, MassAbility partners with other organizations, such as EasterSeals, to provide affordable options to accessible digital resources (technology, equipment, and devices). In addition to providing products and guiding clients to affordable services, MassAbility also acts as a vocational rehabilitation center for persons with disabilities. EasterSeals is an accessible technology partner that provides systems covering a range of disabilities. As part of the implementation of this Plan and continued ongoing efforts toward enhancing and achieving digital equity in Templeton, MassAbility and partnerships with organizations serving individuals with disabilities should be considered and consulted to ensure that the needs of this important covered population comprising approximately 10-14% of Templeton’s population are fully considered and met.

5.3.5 Ethnic or Racial Minority Groups and Individuals with a Language Barrier

While only 5% of Templeton’s population are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, as many as 17% of the population are individuals with a language barrier, including individuals with lower levels of literacy, therefore it is important to consider the needs of both covered population groups. To better connect with and meet the digital equity needs of racial and ethnic minority groups and individuals with language and literacy barriers, it is necessary to develop partnerships for coordination efforts and sharing of resources. Maintaining diverse partnerships is critical to connecting with and serving diverse populations. One such partner within the Montachusett Region is LUK, inc. who serves many different ethnic groups throughout the region and has established partnerships among many other social services organizations, including the Spanish American Center of Leominster. Digital Literacy training is an essential need for individuals from ethnic or racial minority groups and individuals with language barriers.

5.3.6 Incarcerated or Previously Incarcerated Individuals

Incarcerated individuals do not make up an identifiable proportion of the population of Templeton and therefore the needs of that “covered” group are not assessed as a primary community need at

this time. However, it should be noted that the Worcester County Sherriff's Office in Fitchburg provides transitional support for formerly incarcerated individuals and would be a good resource to consult if such a need arises.

5.3.7 Residents of Rural Areas

Several of Templeton's Digital Equity "weaknesses" and "threats" listed in Section 5.1 above, are related to the Town's rural location. Therefore, consideration should be given to Templeton's rural disposition, and the fact that all of Templeton's residents (100%) are considered a "Covered Population" of the Digital Equity Act, as individuals who primarily reside in rural areas. Equitable and convenient access to services is known to be affected by the "rural-ness" of a given location. This is particularly true for broadband internet access (availability, affordability, adoptability) and digital connectivity and inclusion. In particular, broadband internet is notably less accessible and more expensive in rural areas of Massachusetts.

Further, rates of adoption and access to digital literacy resources are affected by rural-ness. In such areas, especially here in Templeton, local Community Cable Access Television (CATV) stations play an important and expanded role in things like provision of digital services, access to digital media and news, and provision of digital literacy and skills building programs, services, and opportunities. However, despite TCTV's increasing importance in creating and distributing digital media, funding for Cable Access Television, and TCTV, is declining due to declining cable T.V. subscriptions, which directly fund local Cable Access Television programs. Given the important and increasing role that Cable Access Television stations play in providing digital services in rural areas (such as the critical role of TCTV here in Templeton), and the decreasing availability of funding revenue due to declining cable T.V. subscriptions, it is necessary to coordinate with state and Federal legislators to ensure that funding mechanisms for Community Cable Access Television remain available now and into the future. Given the decline in traditional cable television subscriptions funding mechanisms for Cable Access Television programming will need to be addressed and re-tooled to evolve and advance in conjunction with the evolution and advancement of the current and future provision and consumption of streaming digital media and other digital services over traditional cable television subscriptions.

Continued funding and local support of CATV and the Digital Lab will be critical to the future success and enhancement of Digital Equity, Digital Literacy, Digital Inclusion, and Broadband Internet Access for the residents of Templeton and its surrounding rural communities. With adequate and dependable funding TCTV and the Digital Lab are positioned to be a driving force for digital inclusion and economic development in Templeton and throughout the surrounding rural area and Montachusett Region.

6 DIGITAL EQUITY VISION, GOALS, ACTIONS, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Town of Templeton

Broadband internet accessibility and connectivity issues in Templeton are related to various factors, including gaps in reliable internet service, diverse socioeconomic demographics affecting income and opportunity, higher-than-average services costs limiting access and affecting affordability, limited access to public internet and digital workspaces, affordable devices and technology, and digital literacy training and tech help. However, as outlined in the SWOT analysis, the Town of Templeton has potential to develop a framework to better support digital inclusion and enhance digital equity. Through the information provided by this Plan and upon its eventual implementation, these rural communities have the tools necessary to enhance digital equity and inclusion to bridge the digital gap.



6.1 DIGITAL EQUITY COMMUNITY VISION

The Town of Templeton will work toward enhancing digital equity for all people to bridge the digital divide and address challenges and barriers to availability, affordability, and adoptability of reliable, high-speed internet, by increasing inclusion and access to digital devices, digital literacy training, and digital technologies, services, program Townwide.

6.2 DIGITAL EQUITY GOALS

Town of Templeton Digital Equity Plan: Goals








1. Enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of local digital equity initiatives that promote digital literacy and access to close the digital gap and support and empower the community.
2. Increase access to affordable fast, reliable internet.
3. Expand internet access and digital literacy through community engagement and inclusion to bridge the digital divide and empower the community.
4. Further develop the municipality’s technological resources and public digital workspaces.
5. Increase access to digital, internet connected devices within homes and public spaces.
6. Seek and secure funding opportunities for investment and long-term support of digital equity programs and services.
7. Become a municipal leader in digital equity through collaboration, inclusion, education, programming.
8. Support and provide digital equity services and opportunities to covered populations, other vulnerable groups, and interested stakeholders and community members.
9. Promote and support community well-being and economic development for residents and businesses through improved digital inclusion and access (availability, affordability, adoptability).
10. Provide digital literacy training and skill building opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

6.3 DIGITAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN


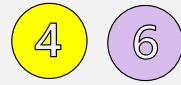





Templeton’s Digital Equity Action Plan is presented on pages 70-72, below. The Plan identifies 26 community specific actions aimed at achieving the Town of Templeton’s 10 proposed Digital Equity Goals. The infographic below demonstrates the project focus areas of the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Grant program administered by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute and provides a color-coded, infographic key to the representative project focus area categories of each separate action identified within the Action Plan:

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Key to Digital Equity Action Plan Project Focus Area Categories	
1	 <p>Staff Capacity for Digital Equity A full- or part-time staff person to oversee, project manage, and execute municipal digital equity activities in coordination with municipal leadership, various municipal departments, stakeholders, and residents.</p>
2	 <p>Wi-Fi Access and Innovative Connectivity Technology Assessment, design, and establishment of an appropriate technology solution to provide in-unit access to the internet for residents living in affordable housing and/or low-income neighborhoods.</p>
3	 <p>Public Space Modernization Improvements to inadequate broadband infrastructure and digital use in public spaces, such as libraries, community centers, senior centers, educational facilities, workforce training locations, and commercial corridors.</p>
4	 <p>Connectivity for Economic Hardship Provision of Wi-Fi cellular hot spots to individuals lacking stable housing where they are unable to have a fixed broadband internet subscription.</p>
5	 <p>Digital Literacy Provision of training programs to improve digital literacy and skills to use devices, online resources, and other digital tools. Literacy program curricula and models may vary based on learner needs and familiarity with devices and the internet, such as in-person group instruction, asynchronous online instruction, or one-on-one training.</p>
6	 <p>Device Distribution and Refurbishment Provision of new or used internet-connected devices, such as laptops, tablets, and smart phones, to distribute to target populations.</p>
7	 <p>Education, Outreach, and Adoption Enrollment of eligible residents in discounted options for broadband, devices, and digital skills. Outreach may include workshops, call center phone banking, door-to-door outreach, online/printed communications, and public service announcements.</p>

Town of Templeton Digital Equity Plan: Implementation Action Plan

Goal	Action	Champion	Potential Funding Program	Project Focus Area Categories* *See color-numeric coded categories “Key” on page 62 above and 66 below.
1. Enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of local digital equity initiatives that promote digital literacy and access to close the digital gap and support and empower the community.	1.1 Continue to support Digital Lab at Scout Hall to allow TCTV to oversee and execute digital initiatives.	TCTV/Digital Lab	Cable Access Funding; Digital Equity Implementation Grant; Town Funding	
2. Increase access to affordable fast, reliable internet.	2.1 Promote discounts, affordability and provide equipment through TCTV	TCTV	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	
	2.2 Upgrade broadband/ Wi-Fi/ internet capabilities in Town Hall, Senior Center, Scout Hall, and Library	TCTV	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	
3. Expand internet access and digital literacy through community engagement and inclusion to bridge the digital divide and empower the community.	3.1 Host open houses at Scout Hall Digital Lab to showcase and promote use of technology and equipment (V.R. Goggles, Digital Music Transfer/Conversion Equipment, Karaoke, 360 Cam, etc.)	TCTV/Digital Lab	TCTV budget	
	3.2 Produce short videos, host classes, and create a comment box, online form, and voicemail box for tech-help questions	TCTV	Digital Equity Implementation Grant/TCTV budget	
	3.3 Increase staff support to provide digital literacy education	TCTV/Digital Lab	Digital Equity Implementation Grant; NDIA	
	3.4 Create digital media outreach & education materials on internet safety & security	TCTV/Digital Lab	TCTV budget	








	3.5 Create a map and brochure of public digital spaces and resources in Templeton	TCTV/Digital Lab	Digital Equity Implementation Grant; MRPC Annual Town GIS Allocation	7
4. Further develop the municipality's technological resources and public digital workspaces.	4.1 TCTV will test and utilize new and latest digital technologies to make available and provide services to residents	TCTV	TCTV existing budget; Community Compact Grant	3
	4.2 Purchase 2 desktop computers (1 Mac, 1 PC) and 1 Laptop for Scout Hall and equipment to create 2 separate, networked workstations, including 1 printer/scanner, 2 webcams, 2 microphones.	TCTV/TA	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	3
	4.3 Purchase 1 desktop and 1 laptop for Senior Center and equipment to create 2 separate, networked workstations, including 1 printer/scanner, 2 webcams, 2 microphones.	COA/TA	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	3
	4.4 Purchase 2 desktop computers for Library and equipment to create 2 separate, networked workstations, including 1 printer/scanner, 2 webcams, 2 microphones.	Library/TA	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	3
	4.5 Evaluate the need for, and if needed purchase a computer or digital kiosk for Town Hall to be used for bill paying, permits, applications, etc.	TA	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	3
5. Increase access to digital, internet connected devices within homes and public spaces.	5.1 Purchase public Chromebooks (6) and tablets (4) to loan out.	Library/TCTV	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	4 6
	5.2 Purchase 10 hotspots and internet service subscriptions to loan out through library and/or Digital Lab	Library/TCTV	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	4 6

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	5.3 Expand the number of available public workspaces at Scout Hall, Library, and Senior Center, and potentially Town Hall (See 4.2 to 4.5)	TA/Library/COA/TCTV	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	3
	5.4 Purchase equipment and technology to create solar powered, Wi-fi enabled outdoor workstations (with charging ports) at Town Hall and Library	TA/Library	Community Compact Grant;	3 4
6. Seek and secure funding opportunities for investment and long-term support of digital equity programs and services.	6.1 Seek grants, funding, and partnerships to further Digital Lab for Workforce Development and personal and professional development for young adults	Digital Lab	MassHire Central Mass Career Center Partnership	5 7
	6.2 Seek funding for training and content creation and curation for local news, reporting, digital media journalism, event coverage, and collaboration to enhance local economic development and career opportunities.	TCTV/Digital Lab	Community Compact IT Grant	1 5 7
7. Become a municipal leader in digital equity through collaboration, inclusion, education, programming.	7.1 Leverage TCTV's good standing in our community to host events and initiatives that engage and inform the public	TCTV	TCTV budget	7
	7.2 Build a community of digital equity ambassadors and navigators	TCTV/Digital Lab/NRSD/Library	Laura Bush 21st Century Library Program; National Leadership Grants for Libraries; NDIA	1 5 7
8. Support and provide digital equity services and opportunities to covered populations, other vulnerable groups, and interested stakeholders and community members.	8.1 Provide Tech-Help at Senior Center	TCTV/Digital Navigator	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	5 7
	8.2 Provide training, resources, devices, and engagement	TCTV/Digital Navigator	Digital Equity Implementation	5 7

	opportunities for youth and others interested in digital tech at Scout Hall & Library		Grant; National Leadership Grants for Libraries; NDIA	
	8.3 TCTV can provide digital literacy services to Phillipston and Royalston	TCTV/Digital Navigator	Digital Equity Implementation Grant (Phillipston & Royalston)	5
9. Advocate for residents and businesses alike to grow the local economy through digital inclusion.	9.1 Open promotional advertising opportunities through TCTV and Montachusett.TV digital platforms that reach an audience of 100,000-plus people!	TCTV/ Montachusett.TV	TCTV budget and generated advertising revenue (proposed); Montachusett.TV budget and potential advertising revenue (proposed)	7
10. Provide digital literacy training and skills building workshops.	10.1 Develop Digital Literacy Program for Tech Help; Workshops/Classes; Guidance & Tech Tips Documents	TCTV/Digital Lab/MWCC	Digital Equity Implementation Grant	1 5

* Project Focus Area Categories (Key):

<p>1 </p> <p>Staff Capacity for Digital Equity</p> <p>A full- or part-time staff person to oversee, project manage, and execute municipal digital equity activities in coordination with municipal leadership, various municipal departments, stakeholders, and residents.</p>	<p>2 </p> <p>Wi-Fi Access and Innovative Connectivity Technology</p> <p>Assessment, design, and establishment of an appropriate technology solution to provide in-unit access to the internet for residents living in affordable housing and/or low-income neighborhoods.</p>	<p>3 </p> <p>Public Space Modernization</p> <p>Improvements to inadequate broadband infrastructure and digital use in public spaces, such as libraries, community centers, senior centers, educational facilities, workforce training locations, and commercial corridors.</p>	<p>4 </p> <p>Connectivity for Economic Hardship</p> <p>Provision of Wi-Fi cellular hot spots to individuals lacking stable housing where they are unable to have a fixed broadband internet subscription.</p>	<p>5 </p> <p>Digital Literacy</p> <p>Provision of training programs to improve digital literacy and skills to use devices, online resources, and other digital tools. Literacy program curricula and models may vary based on learner needs and familiarity with devices and the internet, such as in-person group instruction, asynchronous online instruction, or one-on-one training.</p>	<p>6 </p> <p>Device Distribution and Refurbishment</p> <p>Provision of new or used internet-connected devices, such as laptops, tablets, and smart phones, to distribute to target populations.</p>	<p>7 </p> <p>Education, Outreach, and Adoption</p> <p>Enrollment of eligible residents in discounted options for broadband, devices, and digital skills. Outreach may include workshops, call center phone banking, door-to-door outreach, online/printed communications, and public service announcements.</p>
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Source: Massachusetts Broadband Institute, Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Grant Program: <https://broadband.masstech.org/digital-equity-implementation>

6.4 DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN: IMPLEMENTATION

Templeton can and should leverage numerous state and federal funding opportunities to support digital equity initiatives to bridge the Towns' digital divide, increase digital inclusion, and enhance digital equity. These funding programs target critical implementation areas of digital equity planning, including workforce development, digital literacy education, device distribution, broadband adoption, infrastructure, and community outreach & engagement.

6.4.1 Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program

Municipalities participating in the Municipal Digital Equity Planning program (the program associated with the development of this Plan) are directly eligible for another funding program administered by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Grant program. Municipalities that have completed a Digital Equity Plan may select and apply for funding to implement one or more activities or "actions" identified as priorities within the Plan. The funding program allows for projects related to several project focus areas relevant to achieving or enhancing digital equity and providing services or programs supporting digital inclusion.

As with some related planning activities in the economic development field, it may be beneficial to adopt a regional approach to digital equity implementation. Such an approach would enable resource sharing that could reduce staff time and costs through coordinated efforts and support thereby increasing efficiency and likely offering mutual, joint benefits, and increased success. At present, MBI has set aside a total **\$56,603.77** in implementation funds for the Town of Templeton. Both municipalities are eligible to submit an application to receive those funds for the implementation of actions identified within this Plan. However, it should be noted that, under the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Grant Program, each Town is eligible to apply for project costs of up to \$100,000, and, pending review and approval, could receive up to that amount.

The intent of the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program is to enable municipalities who need 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 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.

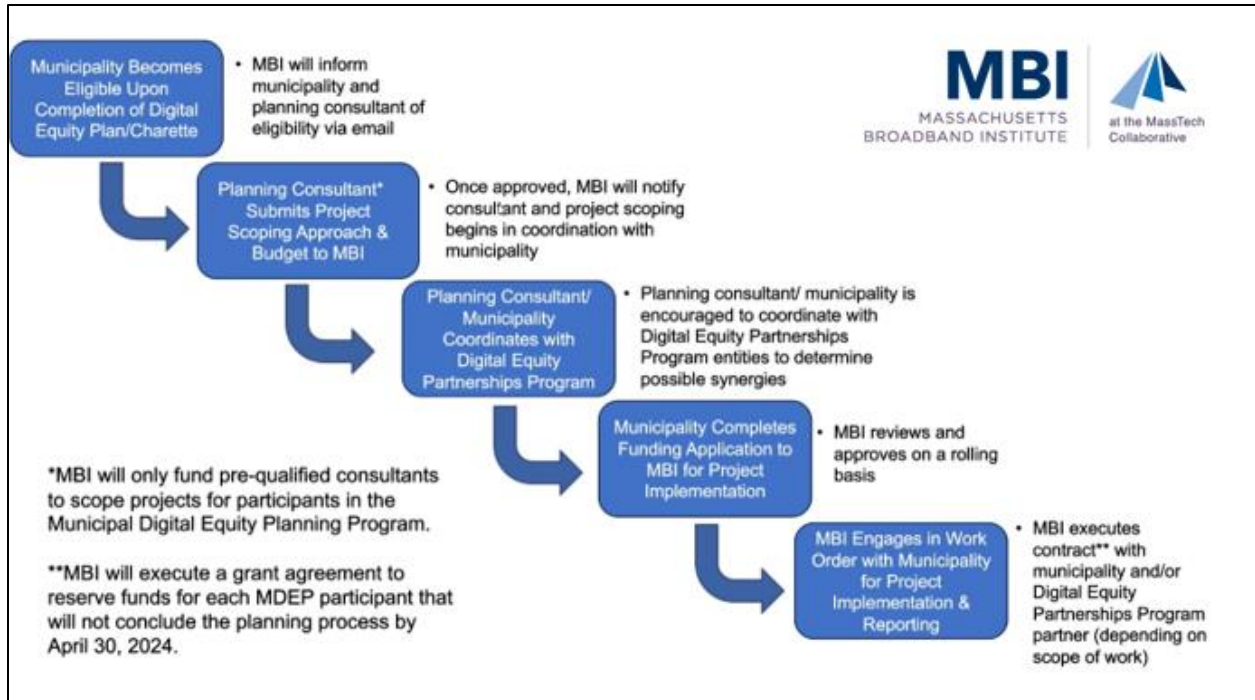
Municipalities are strongly encouraged to utilize their planning consultants from the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program to define a project (or set of projects) scope and budget for implementation. Upon approval from MBI, municipalities may start project implementation and will be accountable to MBI's reporting requirements, which vary by proposed focus area(s).

Specifically, the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program will accomplish three goals:

1. Enable municipalities to make local digital equity investments that will increase access, adoption, and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Transition municipalities from the planning to implementation phase by providing funds to execute a project (or projects) indicated in their Digital Equity Plan, Digital Equity Planning

- Encourage collaboration and synergy with the Digital Equity Partnerships Program, which includes statewide and regional grantees with high capacity for digital equity work. Charette, or pre-existing plan deemed sufficient by MBI.

MBI will administer the grant following the process outlined below:



6.4.2 Digital Equity Funding Sources

State Digital Equity & Inclusion Grant Programs:

[Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program](https://broadband.masstech.org/digital-equity-implementation)

<https://broadband.masstech.org/digital-equity-implementation>

In January 2024, Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) announced the new Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, through which municipalities who have created Digital Equity Plans through Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program are automatically eligible to receive up to \$100,000 in state funding to implement projects or programs that support the community’s digital equity goals.

Municipalities, alone or partnered with other CAI’s, are eligible to apply for implementation funding to pursue one or more programs or projects outlined above within the Implementation Action Plan Matrix of this Plan.

[Lead for America American Connection Corps](https://broadband.masstech.org/massachusetts-digital-equity-opportunity)

<https://broadband.masstech.org/massachusetts-digital-equity-opportunity>

The Lead for America American Connection Corp (ACC) is a service membership focused on advancing economic prosperity and bridging the digital divide. The ACC supports broadband

development, digital inclusion, and civic leadership in communities through a network of ACC Members. Organizations currently engaging in digital equity and inclusion work that want to expand their initiatives and impact can apply to host a digital equity practitioner directly through the Lead for America American Connection Corps (ACC) program. MBI and Lead for America have committed to placing a cohort of practitioners to ensure a broad range of organizations can take advantage of this program. Individuals will be recruited in partnership with selected host sites from the communities that they will serve.

[Digital Equity Partnerships Program](https://broadband.masstech.org/partnerships)

<https://broadband.masstech.org/partnerships>

The Digital Equity Partnerships Program [launched in September 2022](#) to support organizations across the state in implementing projects that meet the digital equity goals outlined in the Commonwealth's [2021 ARPA COVID recovery legislation](#). The Program is comprised of six initiatives that applicants can focus on within proposals:

1. Wi-Fi Access: Implementing Wi-Fi in affordable housing and/or low-income neighborhoods.
2. Public Space Internet Modernization: Improving infrastructure and resources in public.
3. Connectivity for Economic Hardship: Providing “hot spots” to low-income/housing insecure individuals.
4. Digital Literacy: Establishing digital literacy programs to train populations on devices, resources, and digital tools.
5. Device Distribution and Refurbishment: Securing new and/or refurbished devices for distribution.
6. Education, Outreach, and Adoption Support Initiative: Conducting outreach to increase the success of digital equity programs like the [Federal Communications Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (ACP).

In December 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) at MassTech announced \$20 million in new grants through the state's [Digital Equity Partnerships Program](#), which supports high-impact and scalable initiatives that reach residents most affected by the digital divide.

As part of this funding announcement, the University of Massachusetts Lowell was awarded \$4 Million to spearhead a Digital Equity Partnership project covering the Gateway Cities of Leominster, Fitchburg, Lowell, Haverhill, and Lawrence, and more broadly across the many communities of the Merrimack Valley, Northern Worcester County and the North Shore. Through the funded partnership the UMass Lowell team will offer technical skills, a student digital navigators' model, project management resources, and procurement expertise. Specific outcomes will include deploying three neighborhood-scale mesh Wi-Fi networks, improving six public facilities with broadband service, creating a multi-tiered digital literacy and navigation initiative that establishes a regional help desk at UMass Lowell and advances new digital literacy programs, distributing 1,200 new or refurbished

devices; and finally, providing outreach at six community-based organizations to promote individual adoption the Federal Communication Commission's, Affordable Connectivity Program.

Several aspects of the UMass Lowell Digital Equity Partnership Program including, Wi-Fi Access Initiative, Public Space Modernization Initiative, Digital Literacy Initiative, Device Distribution and Refurbishment Program, and Education, Outreach & Adoption Program are aimed to serve several Gateway Cities including Fitchburg and Leominster, as well as other parts Northern Worcester County within the Montachusett Region.

[Gap Networks Grant Program](#)

<https://broadband.masstech.org/gap-networks-grant-program>

The \$145 million Gap Networks Grant Program, administered by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) 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. Specifically, the Program will fund the deployment of broadband infrastructure in those areas that currently lack access to sufficient broadband internet service, defined as service offering download speeds of at least 100 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 20 Mbps.

While prior investment of public funds has substantially reduced the number of unserved and underserved locations remaining in the state, there are still pockets of locations throughout the state that lack access to reliable and affordable broadband service. This Program is intended to address those remaining gaps in broadband availability.

Projects funded through this Program must be designed to deliver broadband service that meets or exceeds 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds. Locations that will be covered through a binding funding commitment from other federal or state funding sources are not eligible for funding under this Program. Grant applicants are required to provide a minimum matching contribution of at least 20%, subject to limited waivers for certain municipally-owned broadband infrastructure projects.

This Program will score more favorably proposed projects in economically challenged areas, specifically Gateway Municipalities and those areas identified by HUD's Qualified Census Tract program. Furthermore, awardees will be required in the Federal Communications Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program, that provide low-income consumers with subsidies on internet services.

[Metropolitan Area Planning Council Apartment Wi-Fi and MBI Residential Retrofit Program](#)

<https://www.mapc.org/our-work/expertise/digital-equity/apartment-wi-fi/>

<https://broadband.masstech.org/retrofit>

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) [Apartment Wi-Fi Program](#) works with municipalities, public housing authorities, and affordable housing developers to build Wi-Fi networks for residents. The Apartment Wi-Fi Program provides funding, project management, and procurement support to fund the construction of Wi-Fi networks, providing residents with equal or superior service to what is available from commercial ISPs at no cost to residents. Program funding covers all capital costs associated with network design, construction, equipment, and the first year of ongoing operating expenses.

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MBI's [Residential Retrofit Program](#) (funded through the federal Capital Projects Fund) works in tandem with MAPC's apartment Wi-Fi Program, utilizing the same expression of interest form for housing operators.

Housing Authorities and Redevelopment Authorities involved in affordable public housing projects should connect with representatives from MBI and/or MAPC to learn about the Apartment Wi-Fi Program and Residential Retrofit Program to find out if there are any opportunities to leverage these resources for existing and planned affordable housing buildings and properties.

[Community Compact Cabinet Municipal Fiber Grant Program](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/municipal-fiber-grant-program>

The Massachusetts Division of Local Services Municipal Fiber Grant Program assists municipalities with the construction and completion of municipal fiber networks. A cohesive municipal network “allows for centralized management of IT infrastructure, including an enterprise approach to network monitoring, cyber security, records management, and backup and recovery.” All municipalities that are not previous grantees of the program are eligible.

Eligible communities can leverage Municipal Fiber Grant Program funds toward developing a municipal wireless mesh network to provide free public internet outdoors. These funds can also support the promotion of job opportunities within the local broadband economy and workforce training opportunities.

[Community Compact Cabinet IT Grant Program](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/community-compact-it-grant-program>

The Massachusetts Community Compact IT Grant Program, administered by the Division of Local Services, provides grants of up to \$200,000 to support the implementation of local innovative IT projects, including one-time capital needs related to planning, design, installation, implementation, and initial training.

Eligible communities can leverage the IT Grant Program funds toward developing a municipal wireless mesh network to provide free public internet outdoors.

[Community Compact Cabinet Efficiency and Regionalization Grant Program](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/efficiency-regionalization-grant-program>

The Community Compact Efficiency and Regionalization (E&R) Grant Program, administered by the Division of Local Services, is a competitive grant program provides financial support for government bodies interested in regionalization and other efficiency strategies. Funds may be administered by government entities, regional school districts, regional planning agencies, and councils of governments. Example eligible expenses include equipment or software, technical assistance, or transition or project management costs for one year.

Eligible communities can use E&R funding to secure software packages needed by municipal offices, including but not limited to permitting software for the Public Health Department. Communities can also partner with adjacent communities to secure a shared resource, like a Resident Engagement Coordinator.

[Enhancing Digital Literacy for Older Adults Grant](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/enhancing-digital-literacy-for-older-adults-grant>

The Enhancing Digital Literacy for Older Adults Grant is a \$1.5 million program funded by American Rescue Plan Act Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) that is designed to help councils on Aging (COAs) improve the digital literacy of older adults. Grants of up to \$100,000 per COA are available for COAs in Massachusetts to:

- Purchase devices, software, or broadband for older adults; technology purchases for the COA are also allowed if they facilitate the goal of increasing the digital literacy of older adults
- Provide training, education, or support to enhance digital literacy for older adults in a COA's service area or older adults who access the COA

Overall, the goal of the grant is to help older adults use technology in a way that strengthens, enhances and expands HCBS. This may include helping older adults engage in telehealth, access medical information, connect with family or caregivers, participate in preventive health courses, participate in healthy aging programming, or find and access supports to age in the community.

[Hybrid Programming for Councils on Aging Grant](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/hybrid-programming-for-councils-on-aging-grant>

The Hybrid Programming for Councils on Aging Grant is a new \$1.45 million program from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA). Funds are available to help Massachusetts Councils on Aging (COAs) expand access to high-quality hybrid (i.e., both in-person and virtual) programs for Massachusetts residents who are 60 years of age and older. That way, the same programming is available, accessible, and enjoyable for Older Adults who attend in person or virtually.

Each COA may be awarded up to \$100,000. Two COAs applying together can request up to \$200,000. Three or more COAs applying together can request up to \$300,000.

Applicants should use funds to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- Deliver high-quality virtual and in-person programming in which Older Adults attending in-person and virtually both have their needs met.
- Enhance programming to reach previously unserved or underserved Older Adults in their service area.
- Ensure the sustainability of the program after the grant period ends (March 2025).

The grant round for 2024 is closed but more funds are expected to be available in 2025.

[Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Grant](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/municipal-ada-improvement-grant-program>

The Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Grant program is aimed to support capital improvements specifically dedicated to improving programmatic access and/or removing barriers encountered by persons with disabilities in applicant facilities throughout the Commonwealth. Grants will be awarded to successful applicants to remove barriers and create and improve accessible features and programmatic access including, but not limited to, Limited Use/Limited Application (LULAs) signage, and communication access devices.

[Determination of Need \(DoN\)](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/determination-of-need-don>

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Determination of Need (DoN) program was established to “encourage competition with a public health focus; to promote population health; to support the development of innovative health delivery methods and population health strategies within the healthcare delivery system; and to ensure that resources will be made reasonably and equitably available to every person within the Commonwealth at the lowest reasonable aggregate cost.”

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) created the Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds initiative in partnership with the Massachusetts DPH in 2017 as a revision to the DoN program. This program aims “to enhance the capacity of multi-sector collaboratives to authentically engage residents and work together” to remove barriers to health.”

Communities can leverage funding through the DoN program to establish training opportunities for local consumers regarding tracking medical records.

[Commonwealth Corporation \(CommCorp\) YouthWorks Funding](#)

<https://commcorp.org/program/youthworks/>

Commonwealth Corporation’s YouthWorks is a state-funded youth employment program that supports skills training for youth up to age 25 from households earning less than 200% of the federal poverty rate.

YouthWorks funding could be leveraged to support workforce training in North Central Massachusetts and throughout the Montachusett Region to enhance digital literacy & inclusion and support the local broadband economy. YouthWorks participants can also benefit from a statewide network of digital navigators through past program participants, and established MassHire Workforce Development programs, Job Boards, and Career Centers.

[Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Digital Literacy Now Grant](#)

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2022/147-2/>

The purpose of this trust continuation grant is to establish and promote rigorous, engaging, and standards-aligned digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) education in public schools from kindergarten through grade 12. This grant will continue the DLCS implementation work from FY21 Digital Literacy Now Grant Part 1 (FC152 and FC152A) and FY22 Digital Literacy Now Grant Part 2 (FC147).

School districts are the unit of change toward creating rigorous, inclusive, and sustainable K–12 digital literacy and computer science education.

Federal Digital Equity & Inclusion Funding Sources:

[Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment \(BEAD\) Program](#)

<https://www.ntia.gov/funding-programs/internet-all/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>

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The BEAD Program, created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and administered through the NTIA, is a \$42 billion dollar program with the goal of increasing access and affordability of broadband, creating jobs, increasing access to healthcare services, improving educational experiences of students, and improving quality of life for residents. Funds can be used for broadband deployment activities (e.g. construction and deployment of broadband infrastructure, personnel costs, leasing of infrastructure, etc.) and non-deployment activities (e.g. multi-lingual outreach to support adoption and digital literacy, direct subsidies for broadband subscriptions, costs associated with stakeholder engagement, etc.). The BEAD program prioritizes broadband serviceable locations that are unserved (below a 25/3 mpbs threshold), and underserved (below a 100/20 mbps threshold).

Deployment of the [BEAD program in Massachusetts](#) is being administered by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute. MBI is committed to achieving universal service in Massachusetts by bringing affordable, reliable high-speed internet to every home in the state.

The BEAD program will primarily fund infrastructure projects through the Deployment phase which will connect the remaining unserved and underserved locations in the State. Once universal service is achieved, any remaining BEAD funds will be invested to enhance Community Anchor Institute connectivity and support digital equity initiatives.

To unlock BEAD funding MBI has completed the following administrative process:

- [Massachusetts Initial Proposal Volume I](#) - Approved by NTIA April 2024
- [Massachusetts Initial Proposal Volume II](#) – Approved by NTIA July 2024
- [Massachusetts BEAD Challenge Process](#) (Summer of 2024)

MBI administered a pre-qualification process for the BEAD Program. This process supported the review and approval of subgrantee applications to certify that potential applicants meet the minimum necessary qualification requirements. Potential BEAD applicants were strongly encouraged, but not required to prequalify now for BEAD deployment grant eligibility. Applicants that elected not to participate in the initial, standalone prequalification process will still be subject to a full review of qualifications during the funding round(s) that they participate in.

The pre-qualification process opened on September 26, 2024, and was conducted in accordance with the procedures set forth in [Volume II of the BEAD Initial Proposal for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#), as approved by NTIA. The process closed on October 28, 2024.

[Office of Secondary and Elementary Education, Title II, Part A Grant Program](#)

<https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/formula-grants/school-improvement/supporting-effective-instruction-state-grantstitle-ii-part-a>

The U.S. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) Title II, Part A grant program provides grants to state educational agencies and subgrants to local educational agencies to increase student achievement consistent with challenging state academic standards and improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers. Eligible activities under Title II, Part A, include providing support and professional development for teachers.

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The OESE's Title III, Part A grant program was established to improve the education of English Learner (EL) children and youth by helping them learn English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards.

Eligible School Districts should apply for OESE Title II, Part A funds for professional development to empower teachers to adopt BLENDED teaching methods, leveraging technology while protecting students against unproductive online behavior. Districts should also apply for funds from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education: Title III, Part A Funds to improve instruction for English Learners, including those with a disability, through enhanced curricula and programs.

[Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\)](#)

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/cdbg

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) CDBG program provides annual grants on a formula basis to states and local governments. Communities use CDBG funds to address local needs with eligible activities including public facilities, infrastructure, housing, economic development, and planning. The projects should also accomplish a National Objective of either: 1) benefitting low- and moderate-income persons; 2) eliminating slums or blight; or 3) addressing urgent needs for community health and safety.

Eligible communities can apply for federal CDBG funding to assess existing broadband infrastructure and make additions or improvements where necessary. Eligible activities include the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, or installation of public facilities and improvements (which include infrastructure improvements), digital literacy classes, and internet subsidies for low-income households.

Local, municipal CDBG funds are administered at the statewide level by the [Massachusetts Office of Housing and Livable Communities, CDBG Program](#) and, in most municipalities, by CDBG Coordinator, City or Town Planner, or another member of a municipal planning department.

Additional Digital Equity & Inclusion Funding & Resources by Covered Population or Organization:

Affordable Housing & Covered Households:

[Affordable Housing & Digital Literacy: Partnerships and Strategies](#)

<https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/4.3.3-Field-Report-Harris-Judge-and-Burger.pdf>

[Pew Research Center - Income-Based Digital Divides Tech Adoption](#)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3491/f/uploads/pew_research_center_-_income-based_digital_divides_tech_adoption.pdf

Aging Adults/Councils on Aging:

[Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Enhancing Digital Literacy for Older Adults Grant](#)

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/enhancing-digital-literacy-for-older-adults-grant>

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[AARP Digital Skills Training](#)

<https://www.aarp.org/aarp-foundation/our-work/income/info-2022/aarp-foundation-to-provide-free-digital-skills-training.html>

[AARP Digital Skills Ready@50+](#)

<https://my.aarpfoundation.org/digitalskillsready/>

[AARP Community Challenge Grant Program](#)

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2024/2024-challenge.html>

[Pew Research Center - Age 65 & Over Tech Adoption](#)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3491/f/uploads/pew_research_center_-_age_65_over_techadoption.pdf

[PLA 5 Tips for Teaching Tech to Seniors](#)

<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2019/04/5-tips-for-teaching-tech-to-seniors/>

[Tech Boomers](#)

<https://techboomers.com/>

Broadband Internet & Digital Equity:

[Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment \(BEAD\) Program - Internet for All](#)

<https://www.internetforall.gov/program/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>

[Broadband – Institute for Local Self-Reliance](#)

<https://ilsr.org/broadband-2/>

[Broadband USA - Home](#)

<http://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/>

[Digital Equity Act Info Sheet](#)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3491/f/uploads/digital_equity_act_info_sheet.pdf

[Digital Equity Act Programs - Internet for All](#)

<https://www.internetforall.gov/program/digital-equity-act-programs>

[Digital Equity Act Programs Overview](#)

<https://www.internetforall.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/digital-equity-act-info-sheet.pdf>

[Community Broadband Networks](#)

<https://ilsr.org/broadband-2/>

[Internet for All - Home](#)

<http://www.internetforall.gov/>

[Massachusetts Broadband Institute - MBI](#)

<https://broadband.masstech.org/>

[National Digital Inclusion Alliance - Home](#)

<http://www.digitalinclusion.org/>

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[NTIA's Role in Implementing the Broadband Provisions of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act - BroadbandUSA](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/news/latest-news/ntias-role-implementing-broadband-provisions-2021-infrastructure-investment-and-jobs-act-broadbandusa)

<https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/news/latest-news/ntias-role-implementing-broadband-provisions-2021-infrastructure-investment-and-jobs-act-broadbandusa>

[Pew Research Center - COVID-19 LMI Broadband Impacts](https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhli3491f/uploads/pew_research_center_-_covid-19_lmi_broadband_impacts.pdf)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhli3491f/uploads/pew_research_center_-_covid-19_lmi_broadband_impacts.pdf

[Pew Research Center - Demographics of Internet and Home Broadband Usage in the United States](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>

[Pew Research Center - Internet & Technology - Research and Data](https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/internet-technology/)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/internet-technology/>

[Pew Research Center - The Internet & The Pandemic](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic/)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic/>

[Pew Research Center - You searched for broadband](https://www.pewresearch.org/search/broadband)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/search/broadband>

[Webinars - Internet for All](https://www.internetforall.gov/webinars)

<https://www.internetforall.gov/webinars>

City & Town Leaders:

[Digital Equity Playbook for City & Town Leaders](https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhli3491f/uploads/digital_equity_playbook.pdf)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhli3491f/uploads/digital_equity_playbook.pdf

[Equity - Office of Educational Technology](https://tech.ed.gov/equity/)

<https://tech.ed.gov/equity/>

[National League of Cities – Digital Equity](https://www.nlc.org/resource/digital-equity/)

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/digital-equity/>

[Next Century Cities - Home](http://nextcenturycities.org/)

<http://nextcenturycities.org/>

Device Distribution Programs:

[Everyone On – Digital Literacy and Devices for All](https://www.everyoneon.org/find-offers)

<https://www.everyoneon.org/find-offers>

[PCs for People](https://pcsrefurbished.com/sales/salesHome)

<https://pcsrefurbished.com/sales/salesHome>

[Tech Goes Home](https://www.techgoeshome.org/)

<https://www.techgoeshome.org/>

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Digital Literacy Programs & Resources:

[Digital Skills Library](#)

<https://digitalskillslibrary.org/>

[DigitalLearn.org](#)

<https://www.digitallearn.org/>

[Everyone On – Digital Literacy and Devices for All](#)

<https://www.everyoneon.org/>

[LINCS Learner Center](#)

<https://lincs.ed.gov/learner>

[Digital Outreach for Obtaining Resources & Skills \(DOORS\)](#)

<https://skills.digitalpsych.org/>

[Goodwill Community Foundation \(GCF\) – Tech Training](#)

<https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/subjects/tech/>

[Goodwill Community Foundation \(GCF\) – Computer Training modules](#)

<https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/computers/>

[Goodwill Community Foundation \(CGF\) – Learning Resources](#)

<https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/>

[Grow with Google](#)

<https://grow.google/>

[LinkedIn Learning](#)

https://www.linkedin.com/learning/?trk=lynda_redirect_learning

[Microsoft Digital Literacy Curriculum](#)

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/digital-literacy?oneroute=true>

[Microsoft Learn](#)

<https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/training/>

[Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment](#)

<https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/>

[Partners Bridging the Digital Divide](#)

<https://www.pbdd.org/training/>

[Skill Share](#)

<https://www.skillshare.com/en/>

[Spectrum Grants for Digital Education](#)

<https://corporate.charter.com/digital-education/grants>

[Tech Soup \(for libraries and non-profits\)](#)

<https://www.techsoup.org/>

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Economic Development:

[Mass Internet Connect Program for Unemployed Job Seekers- MBI](https://broadband.masstech.org/mass-internet-connect)

<https://broadband.masstech.org/mass-internet-connect>

Individuals with Disabilities:

[Digital Outreach for Obtaining Resources & Skills \(DOORS\): A Digital Literacy Program for Adults with Mental Health Conditions](https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/05-Forum-2.pdf)

<https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/05-Forum-2.pdf>

[Welcome to DOORS: A series of pragmatic and interactive lessons designed to develop functional skills for accessing and utilizing the promise of digital health](https://skills.digitalpsych.org/)

<https://skills.digitalpsych.org/>

[Become a DOORS Instructor](https://skills.digitalpsych.org/2021/01/11/online-curriculum-available/)

<https://skills.digitalpsych.org/2021/01/11/online-curriculum-available/>

Education:

[Adult Education Digital Literacy Initiatives and Resources - LINCS](https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/digital-literacy)

<https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/digital-literacy>

[Broadband - Office of Educational Technology](https://tech.ed.gov/broadband/)

<https://tech.ed.gov/broadband/>

[Digital Literacy and Technology Integration in Adult Basic Skills Education](https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/digital-literacy-and-technology-integration-in-adult-basic-skills-education/)

<https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/digital-literacy-and-technology-integration-in-adult-basic-skills-education/>

[Digital Equity Education Roundtables \(DEER\) - Office of Educational Technology](https://tech.ed.gov/deer/)

<https://tech.ed.gov/deer/>

[Digital Equity Education Roundtables \(DEER\) - Resource Guide](https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3491/f/uploads/digital_equity_education_roundtables_deer_-_resource_guide.pdf)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3491/f/uploads/digital_equity_education_roundtables_deer_-_resource_guide.pdf

[E-Rate Program \(FCC\) - Affordable internet, telecommunications, and information services for eligible schools and libraries](https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/universal-service-program-schools-and-libraries-e-rate)

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/universal-service-program-schools-and-libraries-e-rate>

[E-Rate Program - Info Webinar \(YouTube\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRula14kO08)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRula14kO08>

[Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Digital Literacy Now Grants](https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2022/147-2/)

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2022/147-2/>

[National Education Foundation, 100% Digital Literacy Grant](https://www.stemnef.org/grant/digitalalliteracygrant/)

<https://www.stemnef.org/grant/digitalalliteracygrant/>

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[Office of Educational Technology - Home](#)

<http://tech.ed.gov/>

Libraries:

[Institute of Museum and Library Services \(IMLS\) grant programs](#)

<https://www.imls.gov/grants>

[American Library Association \(ALA\) grant program](#)

<https://www.ala.org/grants/view-all-grants>

[E-Rate Program \(FCC\) - Affordable internet, telecommunications, and information services for eligible schools and libraries](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/universal-service-program-schools-and-libraries-e-rate>

[E-Rate Program - Info Webinar \(YouTube\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRula14kO08>

[Ezra Jack Keats Foundation Mini-Grants](#)

<https://www.ej kf.org/about-mini-grants/>

[American Libraries Association, Libraries Transforming Communities: Accessible Small and Rural Communities Grant](#)

<https://www.ala.org/tools/librariestransform/libraries-transforming-communities/access>

[Association of Rural and Small Libraries: New England Libraries Grants](#)

<https://www.ar sl.org/ar sl-new-england-libraries-grants>

[Public Library Association Digital Literacy Workshop Incentives Program](#)

<https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitalliteracy/incentive>

[DigitalLearn.org](#)

<https://www.digitallearn.org/>

[Tech Soup](#)

<https://www.techsoup.org/>

[Digital Literacy in Public Libraries](#)

<https://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/digital-literacy-guidebook.html>

[Tech Skills Checklist for Public Library Supervisors and Staff](#)

<https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/pla/content/initiatives/digitalliteracy/200226-pla-tech-skill-checklist-survey-only.pdf>

[PLA Hotspot Lending Playbook](#)

<https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead/hotspot-playbook>

[PLA Digital Literacy Instruction Playbook](#)

<https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead/digital-lit-instruction-playbook>

[PLA Public Access Computer Playbook](#)

<https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead/public-access-computers-playbook>

[PLA 5 Tips for Teaching Tech to Seniors](#)

<https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2019/04/5-tips-for-teaching-tech-to-seniors/>

[ALA Digital Literacy Interest Group for Librarians - Join](#)

<https://connect.ala.org/pla/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=c3bfc9b2-32db-4a71-82f9-7499e8ea77de>

Racial & Ethnic Minority Groups and English-learners:

[Digital Literacy Courses for English-learners and Speakers of Other Languages \(Microsoft\)](#)

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/digital-literacy?oneroute=true>

[Pew Research Center - Race Ethnicity Digital Access](#)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif3491/f/uploads/pew_research_center__race_ethnicity_digital_access.pdf

Rural Areas:

[Broadband in Rural America - Center on Rural Innovation](#)

<https://ruralinnovation.us/our-work/broadband/>

[Pew Research Center - Digital Divides in Rural Communities](#)

https://www.mrpc.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif3491/f/uploads/pew_research_center__digital_divides.pdf

6.5 NEXT STEPS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONGOING OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT, EVALUATION, MAINTENANCE AND UPDATES

The Town of Templeton is responsible for implementing the specific goals and actions identified within the Digital Equity Plan, Implementation Action Plan detailed in Section 6.4, above, and while the overall responsibility for implementation of the Plan is not regulatory, we believe that it is in the best interest of the community and its people and therefore should be a priority of the Town Administrator and Select Board. Each proposed action has been assigned to a specific Digital Equity Champion, and in large part Templeton Community Television and the Digital Lab are identified as the designated “champion” and are anticipated to play a substantial role in Templeton’s Digital Equity, now and into the future. Supporting their mission, and the mission of the newly established Digital Lab at Scout Hall will, therefore, be in the best interest of the objectives of this Plan.

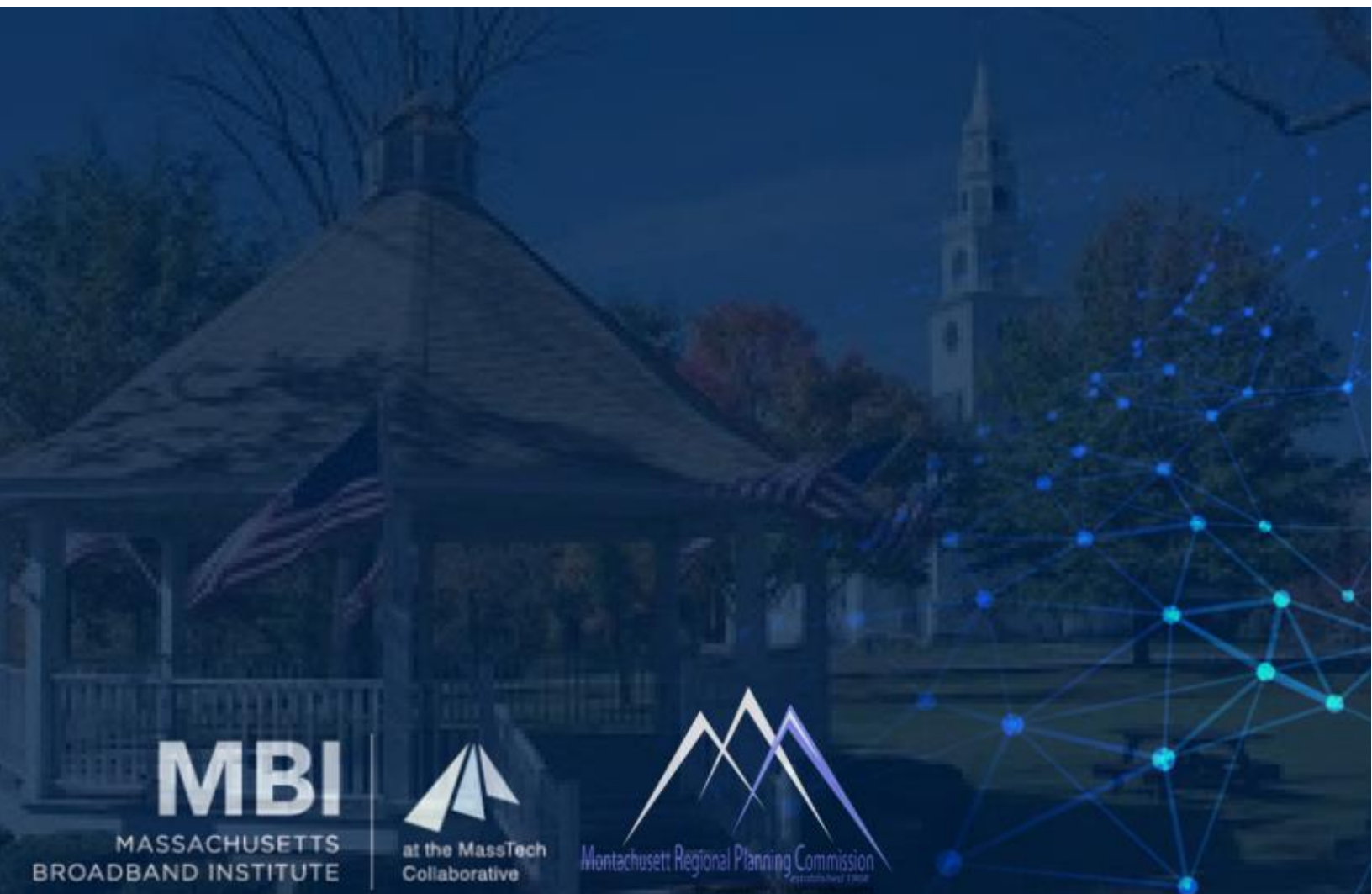
Plan implementation will be accomplished by adhering to the principals of this plan and by utilizing its strategies and recommended actions as a guidance to achieving its overall vision. In some cases, the completion of an action may be contingent on the Town obtaining outside funding or other resources, separate from the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation grant funding program, and when applicable, potential funding sources and a list of additional resources have been provided above.

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Monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing the Town’s Digital Equity Plan are important steps in maintaining an effective document and enhancing Digital Equity over time. Periodic revisions and updates of the plan will be required to ensure that the goals of the plan are kept current, considering potential changes in digital equity and inclusion priorities and accomplishments over time. It is recommended that this plan be revised every 5 years and that accomplishments, new priorities, or evolving needs, are evaluated and tracked over time to aid in the Plan’s implementation and eventual update.

It is the final recommendation of this plan that a Digital Equity Coalition be established at the regional level through a coordinated partnership with other Municipalities within the Montachusett Region who have participated in the Municipal Digital Equity Planning process (as well as those who did not participate in the program), relevant stakeholders, and leaders of Community Anchor Institutions. If such a coalition is established, we recommend that the Town of Templeton participates by designating one or more interested Town officials as members. Through this coalition, we believe that the local and regional digital equity needs, visions, and goals of the Montachusett Region may continue to be enhanced and achieved for the benefit of covered populations and all residents of the region.



7

Appendix

7 APPENDICES:

7.1 APPENDIX A – CORE TEAM MEETING MATERIALS

7.2 APPENDIX B – COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS & FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

7.3 APPENDIX C – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

7.4 APPENDIX D – STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRES & INTERVIEW NOTES