Achieving Digital Equity in Southern Berkshire County

Great Barrington | Lee | Lenox | Sheffield | Stockbridge | West Stockbridge

BRPC Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

MBI Massachusetts Broadband Institute

Acknowledgments

Great Barrington

- Assistant Town Manager: Chris Rembold
- Library Director: Dawn Jardine
- Assistant Library Director: Donna Brown
- CoA Director: Joan Peters
- Affordable Housing Director: Tina Danzy
- BCC ESOL Academic Coordinator, Director of Adult Learning: Ana Suffish
- District Director Southern Berkshire Veteran Services: Thomas Beasley* **serves multiple towns*
- W.E.B. DuBois School Librarian: Jennifer Guerin
- Project Mgr. BERK12 / Project Facilitator BERK12: Jake Eberwein / Brendan Sheran

Lee

- Town Manager: Chris Brittain
- Library Director: Damon Vorce
- CoA Director: Pat DiGrigoli
- Affordable Housing Director: Debbie Pedericini
- Community Television of Southern Berkshires Director: Richard Frederick
- Veteran's Agent: Doug Mann
- Lee Chamber of Commerce Executive Director: Kathy DeVarennes

Lenox

- Town Manager: Chris Ketchun
- Library Director: Katie O'Neil
- CoA Director: Elizabeth Maturevich
- Affordable Housing Director: Shannon Cella
- Lenox Chamber of Commerce Director: Jen Nacht
- Lenox Community Center Director: Kim Graham
- Lenox Public School District Superintendent: Dr. William E. Collins
- Lenox Public Schools IT Director: Randy McCloud
- Lenox V.F.W. Post 12079 Commander: Lou Fortune

Sheffield

- Town Manager: Rhonda LaBombard
- Select Board Member (retired): Rene Wood
- Library Director: Deena Caswell
- CoA Director: Kathie Loring
- Southern Berkshire Regional School District Superintendent: Beth Regulbuto
- Mount Everett School Librarian: Alexis Kennedy
- Mount Everett Media / IT Tech Teacher: James Siket

Stockbridge

- Town Manager: Michael Canales
- Library Director: Wendy Pearson
- CoA Director: Polly Mann
- Affordable Housing Director: Andrea Lindsay
- Stockbridge Chamber of Commerce: Barbara Zanetti

West Stockbridge

- Town Manager: Marie Ryan
- Select Board Member: Andy Krouss
- Library Director: Rachel Alter
- CoA Director: Heather Lorance
- Affordable Housing Trustees Chair: Mark Webber
- W. Stockbridge Historical Society President: Robert Salerno
- Vision Committee Chair: Champika Fernando

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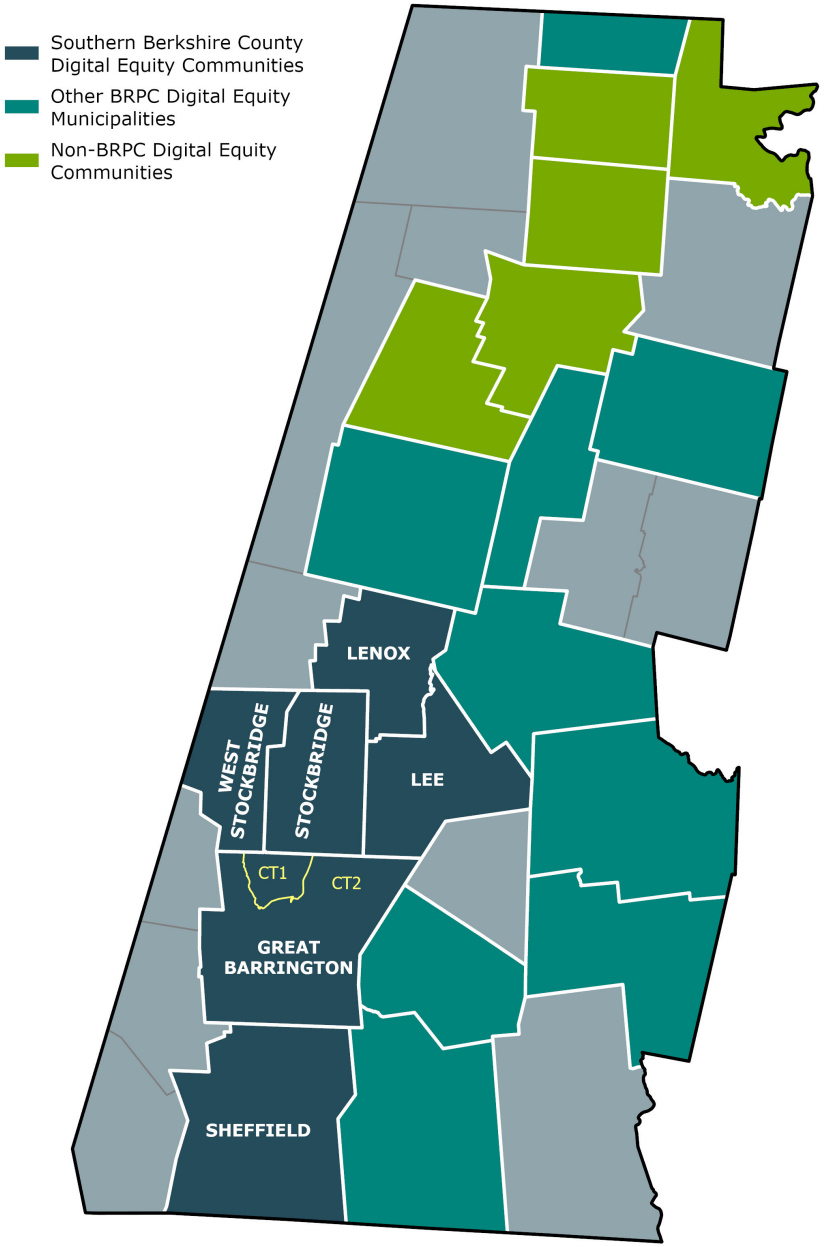


Executive Summary

In September 2023, the **Berkshire Regional Planning Commission** (BRPC) began work on a digital equity plan for six towns in the southern region of Berkshire County: Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield, Stockbridge, and West Stockbridge. The plan was funded by the **Massachusetts Broadband Institute** (MBI) at the MassTech Collaborative under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. Funding was provided by Massachusetts ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds.

The plan represents a deep exploration over more than a year into the computer and internet access, adoption, and affordability needs, hopes, and dreams of residents in these six towns and of the organizations that serve them. These organizations (e.g., senior centers, libraries, veteran's agents and more) and their leaders were instrumental in creating this plan, and their dedication to digital equity and willingness to share the challenges they face addressing residents' digital needs has grounded this plan in people's lived experiences.

BRPC began the process of writing this plan by gathering quantitative data from sources such as the American Community Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society. Staff then engaged in a public outreach and awareness campaign to gather qualitative information from hard-to-reach audiences, notably people representing the Covered Populations who are the focus of the federal government's **Digital Equity Act**. They include:

- Rural residents
- Older adults
- Incarcerated individuals
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People who belong to historically marginalized racial or ethnic groups (BIPOC)
- English language learners
- Low-income residents

BRPC staff connected with residents at town events (e.g., Lenox Art Walk, West Stockbridge Zucchini Festival); handed out flyers and distributed surveys at targeted sites (food pantries, community centers); conducted interviews; and facilitated focus groups to learn how people use the internet and computers to live their lives and then, armed with this information, made recommendations and provided ideas for funding sources town leaders could access in the next one to five years to take steps toward closing the digital divide.

As the COVID-19 pandemic made clear, when people lack internet access, large-screen computer devices, or the skills to navigate the online world, they risk being disadvantaged economically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. This municipal digital equity plan is thus an important step toward bringing about a more equitable world in these six towns by ensuring all residents — from youth to older adults — are equipped to handle an increasingly complex technological future.

Following are 10 key findings and recommendations applicable to all six towns to help town leaders focus their digital equity implementation efforts. A more detailed list can be found at the conclusion of this plan.

BROADBAND ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY - KEY FINDINGS 1-3

1. While most residents in the six towns have **access** to broadband internet, there remain a number of locations that have no service or poor service below the national standard for high-speed broadband of 100/20 megabit per second (Mbps). These locations, identified during the **Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Challenge (BEAD)** in June and July 2024, will require federal funding to address. In the meantime, affected **residents and businesses should be helped to secure free or low-cost hotspots that let them access wireless internet in case of emergencies**. Although wireless service can be impacted by inclement weather and difficult geography, it may be the best option until fiber to the home becomes available.

2. To address the needs of those unable to **afford** broadband because internet service providers (ISPs) require them to pay for more service than they need (i.e., 500/20 Mbps versus 100/10 Mbps), **town leaders should explore state and philanthropic funding to create or extend open Wi-Fi in areas next to libraries and senior centers and/or at large parks or in downtown business centers.** Town leaders are also encouraged to learn about municipal broadband; the process involved to form a municipal light plant; public-private partnerships with start-up ISPs; and mesh networks as a broadband alternative. Town leaders can seek guidance from the **Massachusetts Broadband Coalition**, **Local Initiatives Support Corporation**, and neighboring town leaders who have pursued municipal broadband to understand the pros and cons of these options as an alternative to monopoly environments.

3. Congress' failure to reauthorize funding for the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**, which lowered internet bills for income-qualifying residents placed a further burden on internet affordability. **To address the needs of residents no longer able to get discounted internet via ACP, town leaders are encouraged to work with state partners to advocate for reclassifying internet as a utility with the aim of creating low-cost programs similar to those through Berkshire Gas** and **National Grid**. **Similarly, affordable housing leaders are encouraged to seek MBI FUNDING to equip residents with free or low-cost internet.**

COMPUTER DEVICES and DIGITAL LITERACY - KEY FINDINGS 4-8

4. While reliance on cellphones rather than large-screen computer devices to access the internet reflects a growing trend, it can also hinder residents' ability to take full advantage of the internet for more complex activities. Youth engage mostly through Google Chromebooks; low-income residents via smartphones; and older adults may lack devices or depend on outmoded ones no longer supported by system or software upgrades. To address device gaps, **social service agency leaders should connect with existing device donation programs (e.g., The Alliance for Digital Equity; Computers4People; TechSoup) and explore with regional foundations creating a supply chain through which businesses can donate devices for refurbishment that are later distributed to residents in need.**

5. Residents' computer device and skill needs (e.g., digital literacy) may be unintentionally overlooked by social service providers because digital equity is not core to their mission. To address this problem, **nonprofit leaders are recommended to revise intake forms to include questions about clients' computer device and skill needs so they can more quickly be connected to partners that specialize in those services.**

6. To reach the broadest range of residents with digital skill training, **towns should consider forming an inter-municipal agreement to hire a shared digital skill teacher to travel between communities** providing one-on-one digital navigation to older adults and group classes to working-age adults looking to upskill. Long-term, town leaders may wish to get involved in broader efforts to advocate for a statewide corps of digital literacy trainers and/or funding for AmeriCorps Lead for America fellows.

7. In addition to a digital skill teacher, **students at area high schools and colleges could be encouraged to volunteer to teach digital skills to older adults at Councils of Aging and libraries in exchange for community service credits**.

8. **Affordable housing properties are natural settings for digital literacy classes and one-on-one assistance,** as most have common rooms where devices, a printer, and classes could be sited. Library meeting rooms, larger CoAs, and community centers should also be considered viable locations, so long as people have or can afford transportation to reach them. In the event that they do not, town leaders should consider making affordable transportation vouchers available for this purpose.

STAFF CAPACITY FOR DIGITAL EQUITY - KEY FINDINGS 9-10

9. Town leaders — from CoA Directors to librarians and more — are often at-capacity in terms of their day-to-day roles and may need help learning digital skills or having appropriate computer devices. Given their critical function in communities, **agency leaders should be prioritized for train-the-trainer style digital skill training and device access so they, in turn, can help the residents, clients, and patrons they serve.**

10. To stay informed about best practices related to digital equity, with a focus on Western Massachusetts, **town leaders would benefit from participating in monthly Zoom meetings with The Alliance for Digital Equity; attending the Alliance's Zoom meetings specific to CoA directors and librarians; and listing their services on 413cares.org.**

Existing Conditions

The plan begins with an analysis of existing conditions affecting the **Covered Populations** prioritized by the Digital Equity Act. Understanding these residents' digital equity, access, and affordability needs can help leaders identify what actions to take and where to direct resources to have the greatest positive impact. Data comes primarily from the **U.S. Census Bureau's** American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate for 2018-2022 at the census-tract level. Great Barrington includes two census tracts, while the others towns have one. Similarly, data reported by zip code may include towns beyond the six that are the focus of this plan or overlap across multiple towns (e.g., Sheffield and Great Barrington).

Rural Residents

The first Covered Population are people who live in rural areas. **The Digital Equity Act defines a "rural area" as any area other than...**

- a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 inhabitants;
- an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 inhabitants;
- or in the case of a grant or direct loan, a city, town, or incorporated area with a population greater than 20,000 inhabitants.

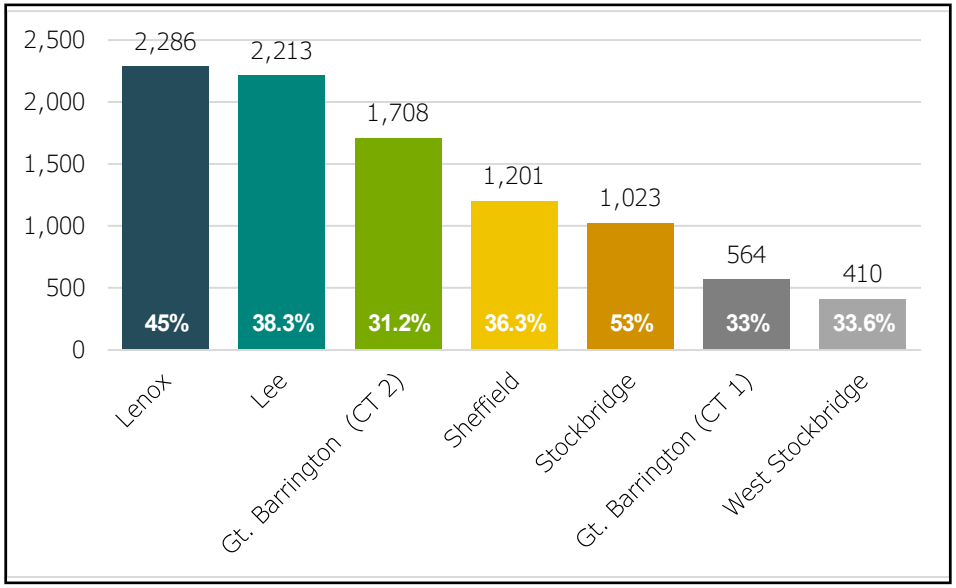
All six towns meet the Rural Area definition. All residents in the six towns are considered Covered Populations.

Older Adults

The second group are adults 60 and older. Across the six towns, Lenox has the largest number in this cohort (2,268), followed by Lee (2,213), and Great Barrington, Census Tract 2 (1,708). As a percentage of the population, Stockbridge has the most older adults (53%) while Great Barrington (CT 2) has the largest number living alone; and Lee has the most grandparents caring for grandchildren.

Although not all older adults in the six towns experience financial hardship, those in the oldest cohort (70+) encountered the internet late in life and may find tasks others take for granted — such as sending photos, downloading apps, or using QR codes — confusing. Older adults overall are also at higher risk for cyber-crimes and lose more money than any other age group.[1] At the same time, many would benefit from building their digital confidence, particularly around using telehealth and scheduling transportation.

Adults Age 60 and Older by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Age and Sex." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0101, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S0101?q=Age and Sex&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 25, 2024.

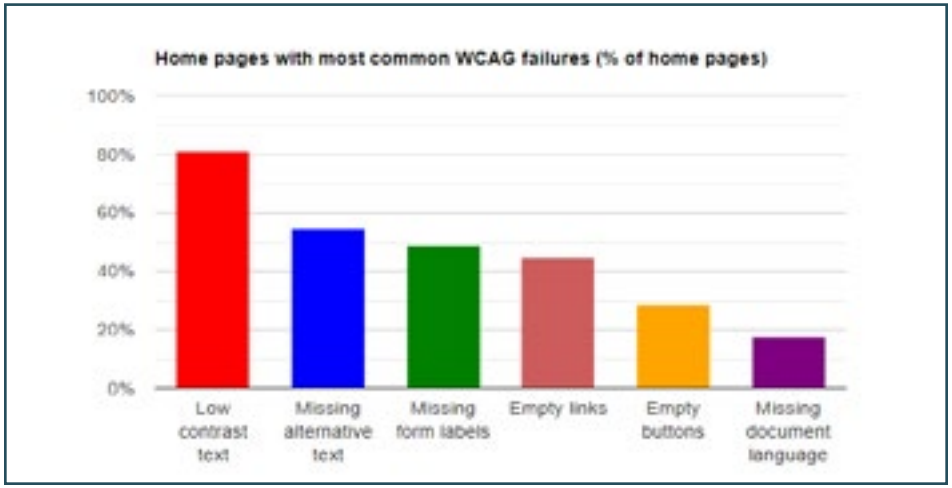
Recommendations: Prioritize older adults for digital equity implementation by providing classes and older adult-friendly devices (e.g., **Claris tablets**, iPads) at organizations such as Councils on Aging and libraries. Help older adults become more aware of free age-appropriate online curricula they can use at home, such as the **Older Adults Technology Service (OATS) from AARP**. Pilot with high schools to run intergenerational tech support programs such as Teens Teach Tech or Cyber-Seniors at CoAs and libraries.

1 https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/info-2022/fbi-elder-fraud-report.html

People with Disabilities

People with disabilities (PWD) represent the third Covered Population group. The **WebAIM Million Report**, which looks at the accessibility of the top 1,000,000 home website pages, found that PWD could expect to encounter errors on 1 of every 21 home page elements. The most common — ones towns and organizations should be aware of — are described in the chart below.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Failures



Source: **WebAIM**

In the six towns, PWD represent approximately 11.9 percent of the population, with the highest being in Stockbridge (17.4%) and the lowest in Great Barrington CT1 (3.8%). The most common disabilities involve walking and climbing stairs (ambulatory); concentrating, remembering, and making decisions (cognitive); and performing activities of independent living, such as visiting the doctor or shopping.

Given the nature of these disabilities, along with the transportation challenges facing rural residents, ensuring PWD have affordable, reliable home internet; large-screen and assistive devices needed for social connections (e.g., Zoom) and healthcare; and the skills to access online resources that contribute to quality of life are all critical.

Recommendations: Invite representatives from nonprofits such as **United Cerebral Palsy of Western Mass.** to present at libraries and CoAs on their assistive technology offerings. Educate staff at social service organizations about where to direct PWD for devices and classes. Expand towns' use of accessible technology to ensure everyone, regardless of ability, can participate in civic life. Ensure town and agency meetings, websites, and newsletters are designed for accessibility, particularly to reach those with vision and hearing challenges.

People with Disabilities by Census Tract **Top Three Disabilities in Each Town Highlighted*

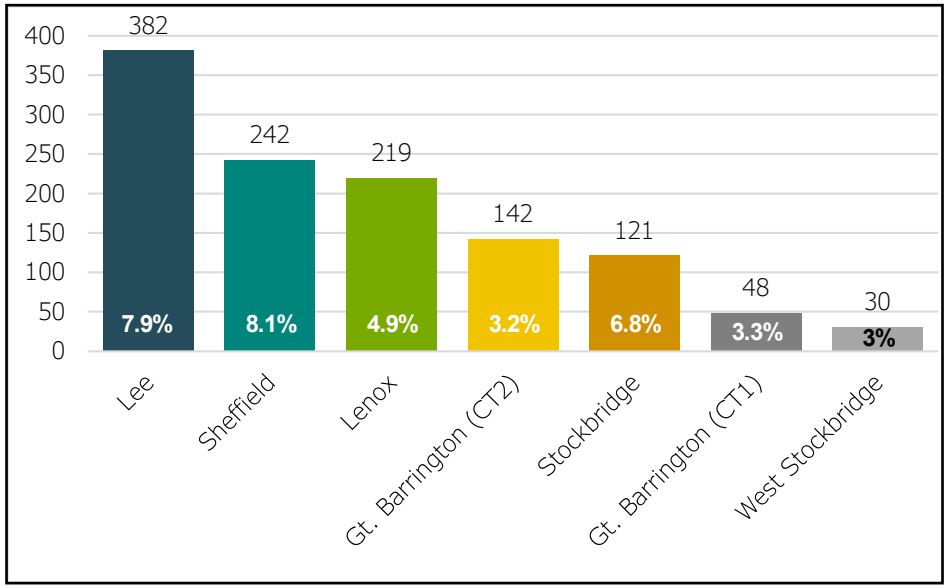
Disability	Great Barrington (CT 1)	Great Barrington (CT2)	Lee	Lenox	Sheffield	Stockbridge	West Stockbridge	TOTAL
Ambulatory	42	**188**	214	**361**	**195**	0	76	1,076
Cognitive	24	**181**	**340**	**231**	86	126	63	1,051
Independent Living	12	**185**	**234**	**325**	173	93	48	1,070
Hearing	42	143	**329**	160	174	88	38	974
Self-Care	19	106	149	157	47	0	45	523
Vision	27	61	126	19	55	44	26	358

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Disability Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1810, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1810?g=040XX-00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Veterans

The towns with the highest percentage of veterans, the fourth Covered Population, are Sheffield (8.1%), Lee (7.9%), and Stockbridge (6.8%). Because veterans tend to be older, potentially less likely to ask for help, and more limited in their transportation, working with veterans' agents is essential to digital equity. Veterans agents, for example, can help vets sign-up for **Veterans Administration (VA) Care** and help those honorably discharged acquire free iPads and computer-related degrees and certificates to which they are entitled as well as their partners, spouses, and children with related services. **Recommendations**: Have the veterans agent survey his clients to explore their interest in digital literacy support at home or at the local office. Focus classes on practical skills (e.g., banking, telehealth) and workforce development. Provide funding for transportation so vets can get to classes. Discuss with the veterans' agent his need for a fax machine to assist veterans unwilling or unable to email documents. Read **Veterans and Digital Equity: Planning for Success** to inform best practices.

Veteran Population by Census Tract

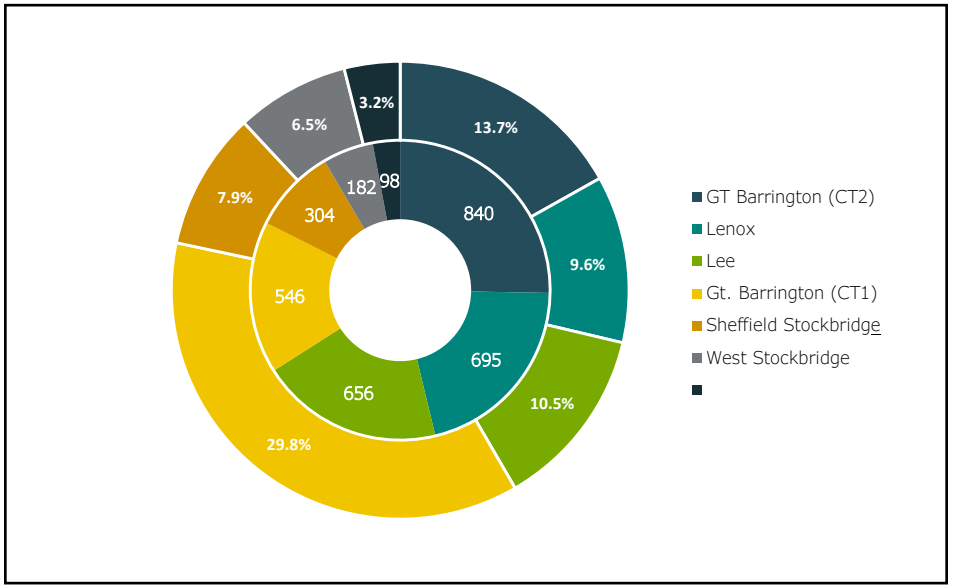


Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Veteran Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2101, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2101?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)

People of color (BIPOC) make up the fifth Covered Population group. The racial and ethnic makeup of the six towns is largely Caucasian (81% or higher) although there is a growing population of Hispanic/Latino residents (approximately 28%) and African Americans. In larger U.S. cities, the **FCC has documented a pattern of digital discrimination against people of color,** including being charged higher rates for internet service, slower speeds, and failure to upgrade broadband equipment through disinvestment. Although this pattern has not been found in the six towns, historical patterns of unequal treatment (e.g., housing, education) should be considered when planning digital equity activities for BIPOC residents to build trust. **Recommendations**: Partner with local BIPOC organizations such as **Berkshire Black Economic Council**, **Blackshires**, **NAACP Berkshires**, **Latinas413**, **Railroad Street Collective**, and **VIM** when planning digital equity activities. Actively work to recruit and train BIPOC digital navigators.

BIPOC Non-White Population by Census Tract

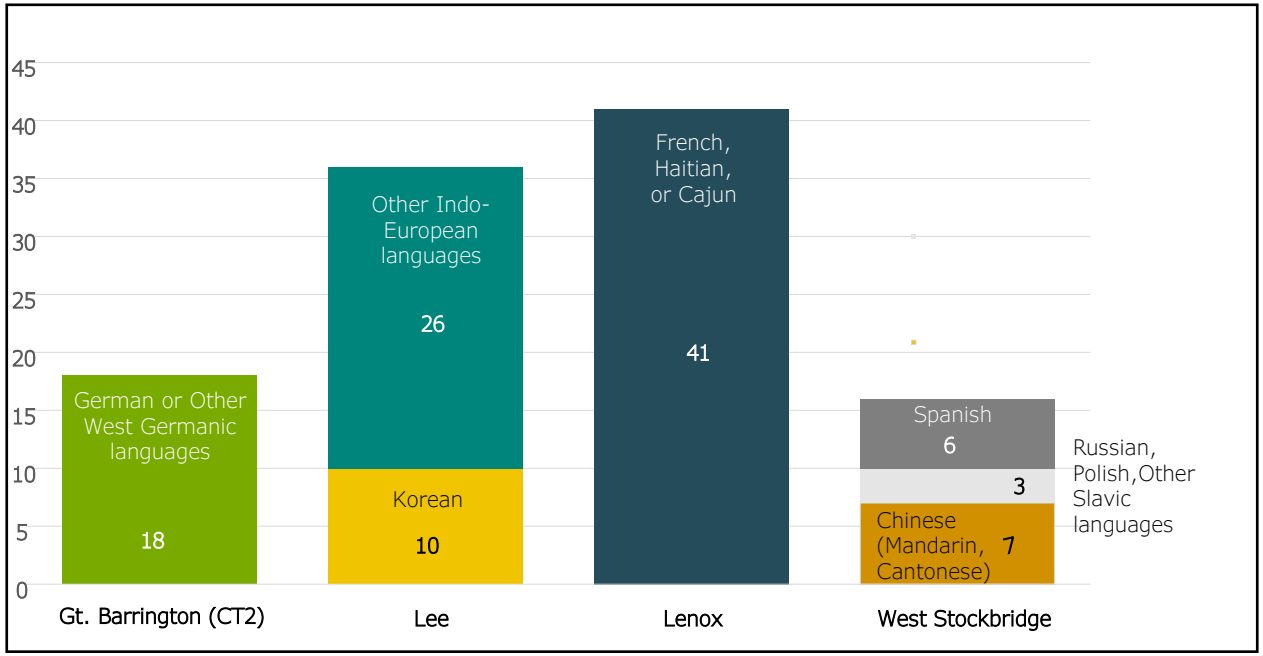


Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP05, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP05?q=DP05: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2 24.

English-Language Learners

Residents who do not speak English well and those with low literacy represent the sixth Covered Population group. Among households in which people speak a language other than English, Spanish dominates. Still, the majority of residents who speak a language other than English **also speak English well.** Far fewer speak English less than well (111 versus 309). Data on ELL speakers comes from the American Community Survey. The data, however, may fail to account for newly arrived immigrants, whose numbers have grown in the last year. A more accurate picture comes from **Berkshire Community College's (BCC) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program** in Great Barrington, which reported serving 148 students in 2024. According to staff, these students often lack internet access, devices, and skills, while having a strong desire to learn. **Recommendations**: Seek funding for a bilingual digital navigator who can help ESOL students access digital skills classes while they attend school and large-screen devices they can continue using post-graduation. Focus bilingual outreach primarily in Great Barrington and Lee.

Non-English Speaking Households: Primary Language by Town



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Detailed Household Language by Household Limited English Speaking Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B16002, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2022.B16002?q=B16002: Detailed Household Language by Household Limited English Speaking Status&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Berkshire Community College ESOL Students 2023-2024: Number and Town of Residence by Zip Code

	Great Barrington | **Includes Alford | Egremont | New Marlborough |* *Parts of Sheffield* **01230**	**Lee: 01238**	**Lenox: 01240**	**Sheffield |** *Ashley Falls:* **01222 + 01257**	**Housatonic: 01236**	**West Stockbridge |** *Interlaken:* **01266**
Enrolled	31	18	8	4	3	1
Wait list	37	15	3	3	5	0
Left	10	6	2	1	0	0
Removed from Wait list	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**79**	**39**	**13**	**8**	**8**	**1**

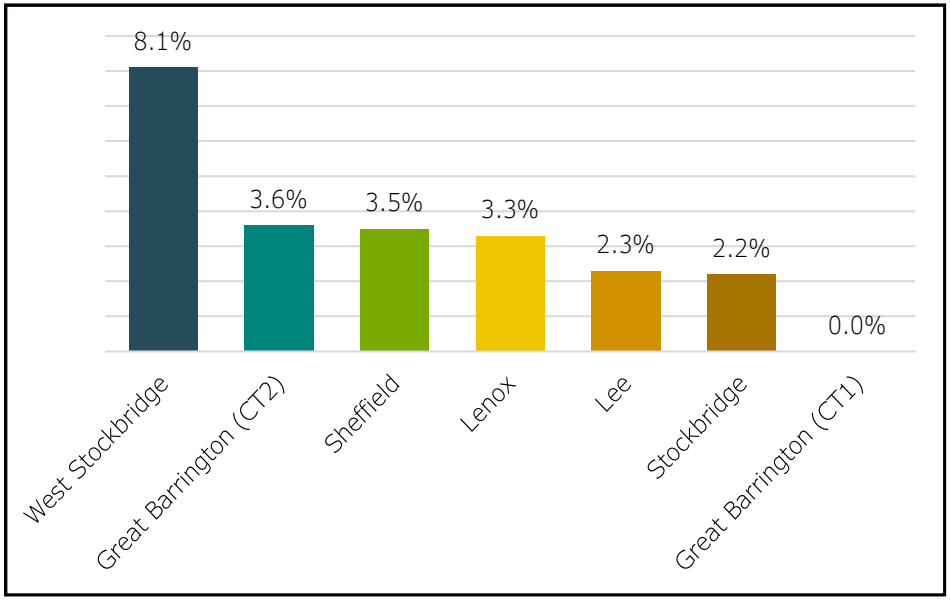
Source: Berkshire Community College, ESOL Program.

Households in Poverty

People in poverty represent the seventh Covered Population group. The household poverty rate in five of the six towns is extremely low (0 to 3.5%). Only West Stockbridge has a higher rate of poverty as a percent of the total population (8.1%). For comparison, the rate of households below poverty in Berkshire County is 6.7 percent. For low-income qualifying households, the federal government's **Affordable Connectivity Program** (ACP), which provided a $30-a-month subsidy for internet service and $100 toward purchase of a new computer, was an essential financial offset, particularly during the pandemic. Now that Congress has failed to reauthorize ACP, just over 1,200 households in the six towns will lose that benefit. Another 1,500 qualified for ACP but never took advantage of it, bringing to 25 percent the households needing financial assistance to pay their internet bills.

Recommendations: Ensure town leaders and social service organizations stay apprised of and, to the extent possible, participate in statewide advocacy to develop a Massachusetts version of ACP, similar to that passed in **California** and **New York**. In the interim, have nonprofits working with low-income residents educate them about lower-cost but slower internet plans available to them and how to negotiate with their ISPs for lower monthly bills. Expand hotspot lending at libraries for those forced to end their internet service.

Percent of Households in Poverty by Census Tract



Highest # of People in Poverty by Age: Top Three Census Tracts

Under 18 →	Lee	Sheffield	West Stockbridge
18 to 34 →	Sheffield	Gt. Barrington (CT2)	Stockbridge
35 to 64 →	Gt. Barrington (CT2)	Lenox	Stockbridge
65+ →	Lenox	Lee	Gt. Barrington (CT2)

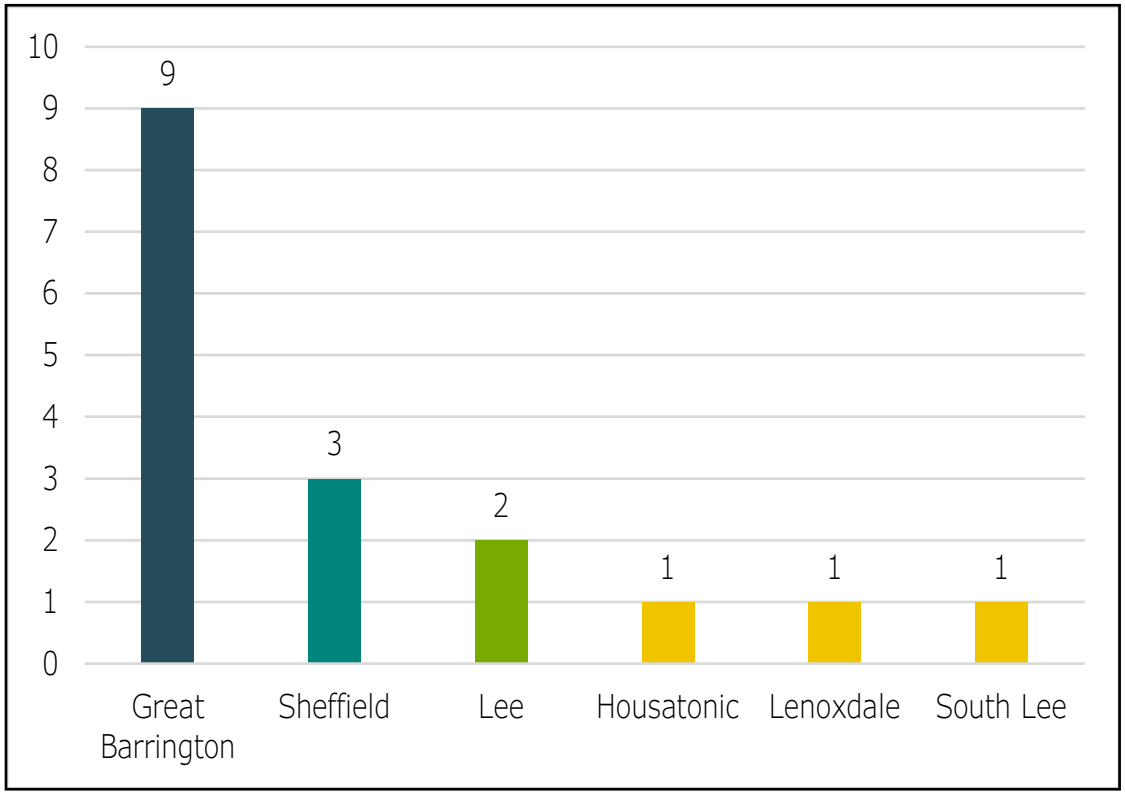
Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1701, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1701?q=S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

People incarcerated in state prisons represent the eighth Covered Population group. In January 2024, the Massachusetts Department of Corrections reported three people from Great Barrington and one in Lee in its custody and one residing in Lenox post-custody. While this Covered Population is small, studies show that formerly incarcerated individuals, and the communities in which they live, stand to gain through **lower rates of recidivism when those incarcerated are provided early in their sentences with meaningful access to technology and classes**. The chart below, based on data from **2nd Street Second Chances**, a Pittsfield-based nonprofit that supports formerly incarcerated individuals with wraparound services, offers a window into the number of residents in the six towns potentially needing digital support.

Recommendation: Partner with **The Berkshire Center for Justice** and **The Guthrie Center** in Housatonic to pilot a workforce-focused device refurbishment and digital skills program with formerly incarcerated adults. Explore having staff from 2nd Street, Second Chances establish a satellite at The Guthrie Center to offer remote/virtual classes using **Northstar** and/or **Tech Foundry**, resulting in a free device and a year of internet service for attendees.

Clients Served by 2nd Street, Second Chances by Town: 2023-2024



Source: Email from Executive Director of 2nd Street, Second Chances

Source: Guthrie Center

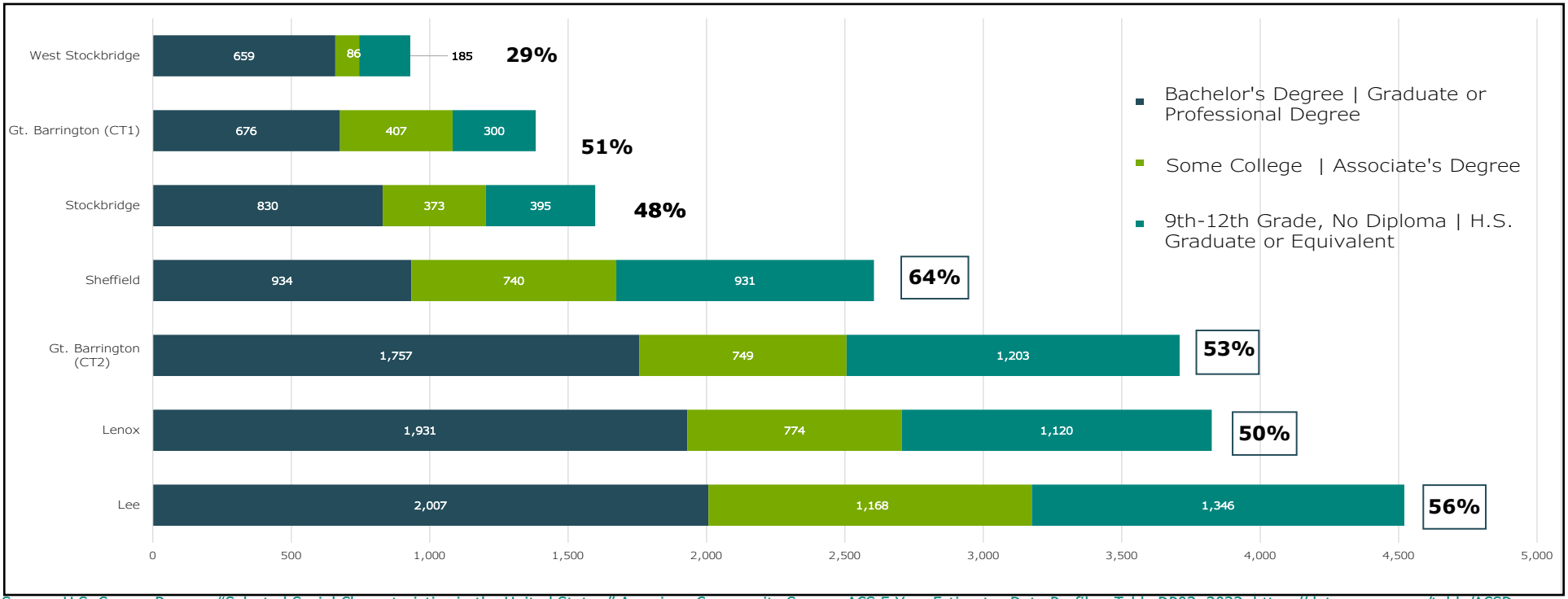
Other Digital Equity Indicators

In addition to analyzing the Covered Populations in the six towns, the plan looks at additional factors that can contribute to or be an indicator of a digital divide such as educational attainment, residency in affordable housing, and the availability of resources at organizations such as libraries, schools, and Councils on Aging. The quality and diversity of internet service is also a key indicator, a metric measured through speed tests and related analyses.

Educational Attainment

The highest grade a person has completed in school often tracks with his or her facility with computers, large-screen device ownership, and ability to afford internet service. In five of seven town census tracts, half or more of residents have earned less than a bachelor's degree. This suggests the need to reach adults in their prime working years outside of traditional academic settings with the opportunity to learn digital skills that prepare them for remote work and, long-term, increase their earning power.

Recommendations: Find non-traditional locations such as bars, restaurants, and community centers to offer upskilling computer classes with the reward of a large-screen device for those who complete courses. See **Tech Goes Home** and **Tech Foundry** as examples. Encourage adult learning, workforce development, BCC, and others to offer micro-credential or certificates to those who complete digital skills classes to assist with job placement.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP02, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP02?q=DP02: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Environmental Justice Communities

Living in an Environmental Justice (EJ) Community is another potential indicator of where digital inequity may exist. Massachusetts defines an EJ Community as one which meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Annual median household income of residents is 65 percent or less than the state's annual median.
- Minorities make up 40 percent or more of the population.
- Twenty-five percent or more of households speak English less than "very well."
- Minorities make up 25 percent or more of the population and annual median household income does not exceed 150 percent of the state's median.

Eight block groups in the six towns qualify as EJ communities.

Mass Environmental Justice Block Groups and Criteria by Town

Town	Census Tract - Block Group	# of Residents	EJ Qualifying Criteria
Great Barrington	9251.01 - 1	647	Median HH income: $53,654 | 64% of MA MHHI
Great Barrington	9251.02 - 2	738	Minority population: 25%
Great Barrington	9251.02 - 4	728	Median HH income: $38,333 | 45% of MA MHHI
Lee	9141 - 3	956	Median HH income: $55,144 | 65% of MA MHHI
Lenox	9131 - 4	473	Median HH income: $36,875 | 44% of MA MHHI
Lenox	9131 - 5	1,045	Median HH income: $48,182 | 57% of MA MHHI
Sheffield	9261 - 2	508	Median HH income: $49,071 | 58% of MA MHHI
Stockbridge	9241 - 2	842	Median HH income: $31,875 | 38% of MA MHHI

Source: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-2020-environmental-justice-populations

Separately, some of these same block groups nearly meet or exceed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Justice threshold for critical broadband gaps. Block Group 6 in Lee has the highest gap (30%), affecting approximately 132 residents.

EPA Environmental Justice Block Groups and Criteria by Town

Town	Great Barrington	Lee		Lenox		Sheffield	Stockbridge	
Block Group	**02-1**	**3**	**6**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**1**	**3**
Broadband Gap *Percent of Households*	23%	19%	30%	19%	22%	26%	22%	18%

Source: United States Environmental Protection Agency. 2024 version. EJScreen. Retrieved: July, 23, 2024, from www.epa.gov/ejscreen.

Recommendations: Prioritize EJ Communities for digital equity implementation efforts to help residents gain the service, devices, and skills they need.

Affordable Housing

People living in affordable housing often need digital support because they are more likely to be impacted by the high cost of internet service and lack the ability to afford newer computer devices. Across the six towns, most residents living in affordable housing pay for internet themselves rather than having it provided by the housing developer/owner. One exception is the Stockbridge Housing Authority (SHA), which negotiated reduced cable TV and internet rates for its residents. While not all tenants are happy with the arrangement, it is a strategy other affordable housing providers may wish to consider to help those who lost their Affordable Connectivity Program benefit.

Affordable Housing Properties and Residents by Town

Town	Affordable Housing Properties	# of Units	Capacity (# Persons)	# Serving 30-60% Area Median or Low-Income*	# Serving Older Adults	# Serving People with Disabilities	# Whose Residents Pay for Internet
Great Barrington	13 | 3 Public Housing	325	1,177	8	5	2	9
Lee	9 | 3 Public Housing	225	552	8	5	1	8
Lenox	4 | All Public Housing	60	119	2	1	2	2
Sheffield**	1	22	22	0	1	1	1
Stockbridge	1 | All Public Housing	31	31	1	1	0	1
Total	**28**	**663**	**1,901**	**19**	**13**	**6**	**21**

**Housing properties not listed are those that a) do not state an income requirement; b) have market-rate units; or c) where eligible applicants can earn above 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). There are no affordable housing properties in West Stockbridge.*
***Sheffield's affordable housing property (Dewey Court) is managed by the Great Barrington Housing Authority.*

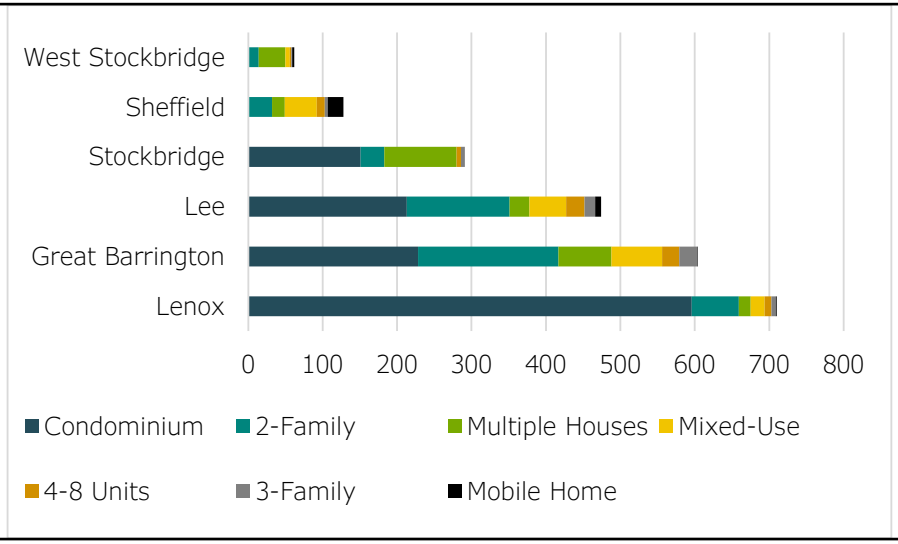
Source: Affordable housing provider reports

Recommendations: Explore re-designing common rooms in affordable housing properties into computer labs by adding a desktop computer and printer and inviting digital navigators in to assist residents with tech needs and teach digital skill classes. Make **BRPC's Digital Equity Resource Guide** available on-site at affordable housing properties to help those interested in self-directed learning. Encourage affordable housing owners and developers to apply for **MBI's Residential Retrofit Program** to help lower the cost of internet for residents.

Multiple Dwellings + Second Homeowners

Mobile home communities, multi-family properties, apartment buildings, condominiums, and cooperatives are often prioritized for broadband infrastructure improvements, particularly those catering to low-income residents. The chart below shows the primary types of multiple-dwelling units (MDUs) in each town. **Recommendations**: Ensure mobile home community residents have access to affordable broadband and explore whether wireless mesh networks might work in these settings to lower costs. Prioritize lower-income group housing sites for digital equity implementation outreach.

Top MDU Types by Town



Towns with high numbers of second homeowners have a different but related challenge. In these communities, part-time residents can increase broadband use for concentrated periods (e.g., summer) but may be disinclined to pay for year-round service. When second homeowners are in town, and there are more visitors, pressure on public internet can surge as can requests for hotspot lending at local libraries. **Recommendations**: Conduct due diligence in towns with high numbers of second homeowners before exploring municipal broadband to ensure sufficient subscription buy-in. Increase the number of hotspots available to borrow at libraries serving more second homeowners (Stockbridge, West Stockbridge, Lenox).

Second Homeowners by Town

	Great Barrington	Lee	Lenox	Sheffield	Stockbridge	West Stockbridge
# Housing Units	3,762	3,053	3,031	1,769	1,619	881
# Second Homes	478	386	634	255	696	321
% Second Homes	12.7%	12.6%	20.9%	14.4%	43.0%	36.4%

Source: American Community Survey, 2018-2021, Table B25004

Community Assets

In contrast to digital inequity indicators, towns also have digital equity assets: programs, organizations, plans, and individuals working to close the digital divide. MBI gathered those assets while writing the **Statewide Digital Equity Plan (SDEP)**, identifying 100 assets serving Berkshire County overall. BRPC later identified additional ones, including senior centers, housing authorities, veterans organizations, and nonprofits that further expand each town's digital equity ecosystem. The chart below lists representative assets in each town. Fourteen organizations specific to the six towns is in the Appendix. The Massachusetts Digital Equity Asset Inventory can be found at **https://broadband.masstech.org/massachusetts-digital-equity-asset-inventory**.

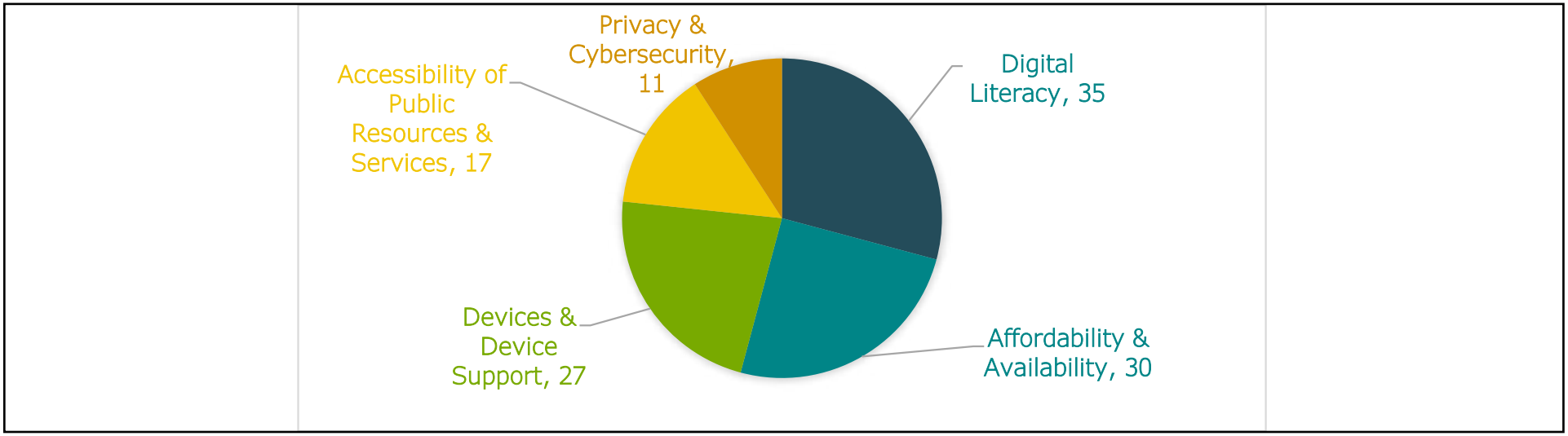
Representative Assets by Town

Town	SDEP-Collected Assets	BRPC-Collected Assets
Great Barrington	FQHC Telehealth - Community Health Programs, Hillcrest Educational Foundation	Berkshire South Regional Community Center, Claire Teague Senior Center, ESOL @ BCC, Great Barrington Housing Authority, Mason Library, Volunteers in Medicine, Southern Berkshire Justice Center
Lee	Lee Public Library	Lee Chamber of Commerce. Lee Council on Aging, Lee Housing Authority,
Lenox	Hillcrest Educational Foundation, Lenox Library	Lenox Chamber of Commerce, Lenox Community Center, Lenox Council on Aging
Sheffield	Bushnell-Sage Library	Dewey Hall, FCC Church of Sheffield, Sheffield Council on Aging
Stockbridge	Stockbridge Library Association	Stockbridge Council on Aging, Stockbridge Housing Authority
West Stockbridge	Hillcrest Educational Foundation	W. Stockbridge Council on Aging, W. Stockbridge Historical Society
All Towns	2nd Street Second Chances, Berkshire Black Economic Council, BERK12, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, CanCode, CyberSeniors, Easterseals, Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Fiber Connect, Greylock Federal Credit Union, Literacy Volunteers, Mass. Assoc. for the Blind and Visually Impaired, MassCyberCenter, MassINC, Three County Continuum of Care, United Cerebral Palsy	AdLib, BCArc, CATA, Community Development Corporation South Berkshire, Community Television for the Southern Berkshires (CTSB), ExtraSpecial Teas, Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Southern Berkshire District Department of Veteran's Services

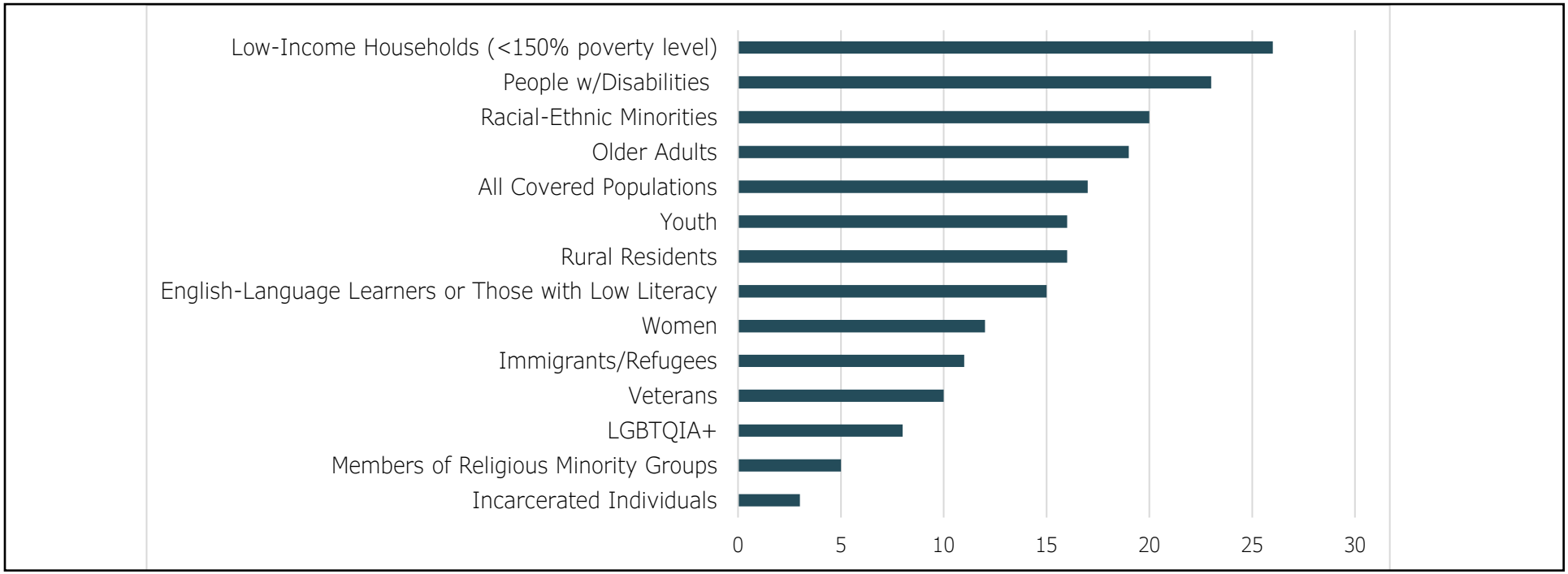
Source: State Digital Equity Plan Asset Map Inventory

Recommendations: Help libraries and senior centers secure updated devices, especially senior-friendly tablets, laptops, and printers, and provide funding for upkeep and maintenance after purchasing. Consider hosting educational events during **Cybersecurity Awareness Month** at places such as Berkshire South Regional Community Center and Railroad Street Collective to increase residents' awareness of privacy and cybersecurity issues. Explore producing digital literacy programming with CTSB. Expand services to Covered Populations less well-served by community assets such as formerly incarcerated individuals by partnering with 2nd Street, Second Chances, The Guthrie Center, and the Southern Berkshire Justice Center.

of Assets Serving Berkshire County by Service Focus

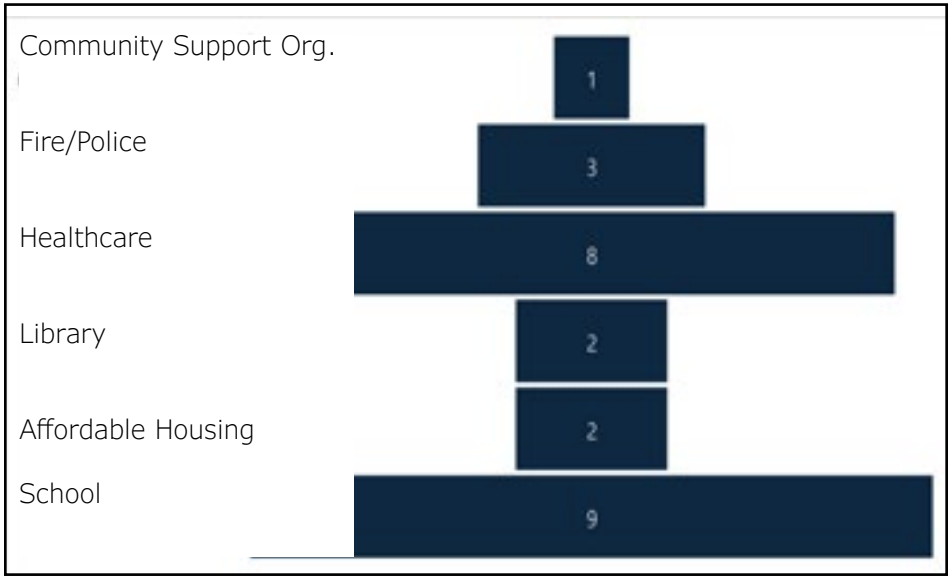


of Organizations Serving Berkshire County Covered Populations



Community Anchor Institutions

Like community assets, **Community Anchor Institutions** (CAIs) provide essential services in towns and support broadband access and availability. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), CAIs are meant to provide one gigabit (1 Gbps) upload and download symmetrical broadband service to the communities they serve, whether to internal staff or the general public. The charts below detail the number and type of CAIs in each town.

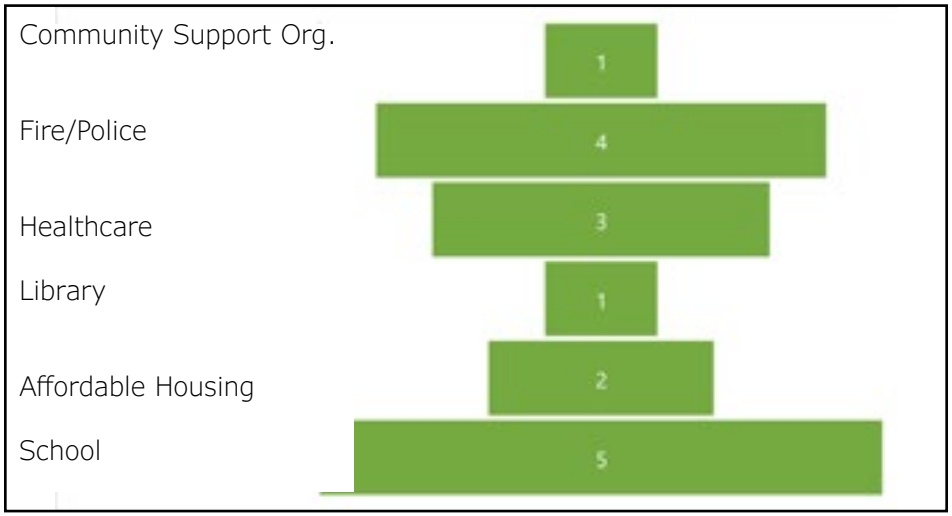


Great Barrington

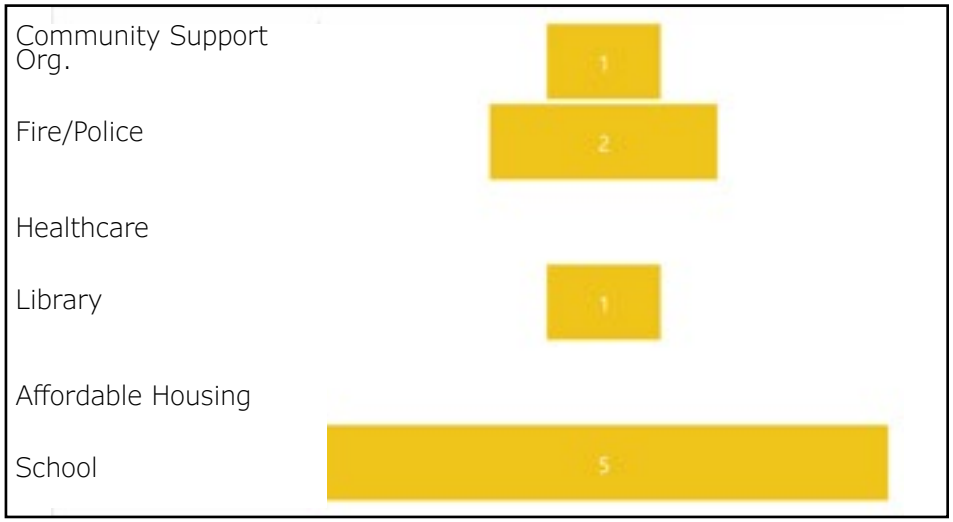
Lee

Source: Massachusetts Broadband Institute

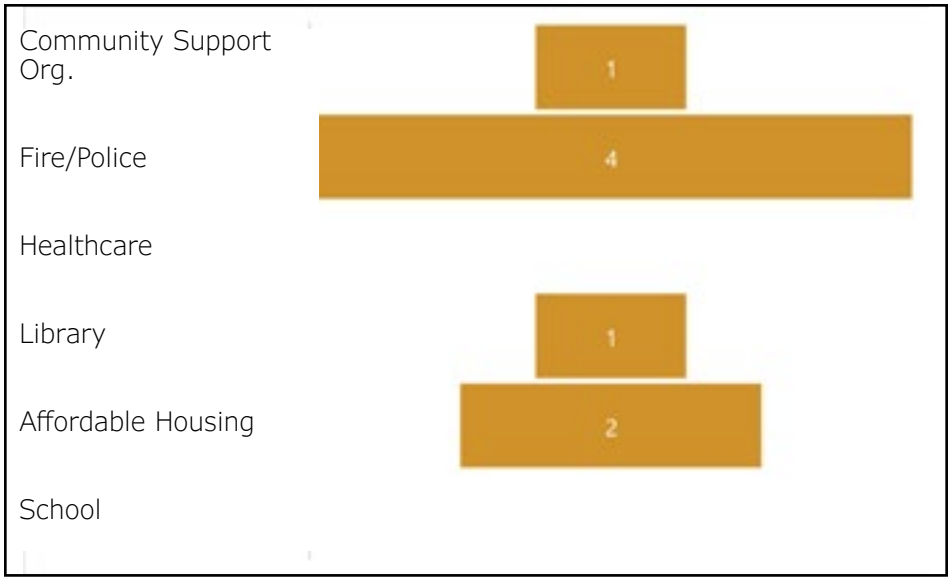
Recommendations: Work with MBI to explore the possibility of expanding the number of CAIs to include schools and affordable housing properties not currently listed, especially in towns with higher numbers of unserved and underserved locations (i.e., Sheffield, Stockbridge, and West Stockbridge). Ensure MBI is aware of errors on the FCC's national broadband map related to missing or incorrect CAI addresses. Work with State representatives to lower the cost of broadband to CAIs unable to afford the **MB123 rate offered by Local Linx**.



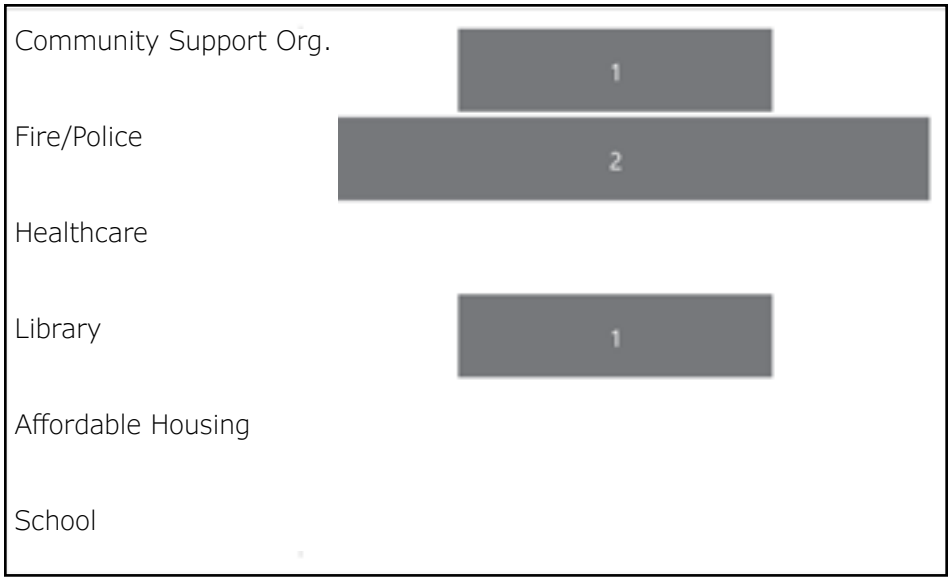
Lenox



Sheffield



Stockbridge



West Stockbridge

Libraries

Each town has a library, all of which offer free internet service to patrons, but none of which hosted computer classes last year. Great Barrington has more desktop computers at its library than the other towns, even though its population is only slightly larger than Lee and Lenox. Interviews with librarians suggest they need significantly more support to meet their own as well as community members' digital access and device needs.

Recommendations: Create library-public school partnerships in which high school students provide one-on-one tech help to patrons in exchange for community service or small stipends. Increase the number of hotspots and computer devices available for lending (Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox). Improve Wi-Fi service (Stockbridge). Replace outdated desktop computer workstations and printers (West Stockbridge).

Key Digital Equity Data by Town Library

Data Indicator	Great Barrington	Housatonic	Lee	Lenox	Sheffield	Stockbridge	West Stockbridge
Municipal Population	7,172	1,109	5,788	5,095	3,327	2,018	1,343
# of desktop computers for on-site use	10	1 - catalogue	3 - all topics 1 - historical research 2 - catalogue	4	3 - all topics 2 - catalogue	8	4
# of laptops, Chromebooks, tablets for on-site use	0	6	0	0	3	0	0
# of printers for on-site use	2	1	0	1	1	0	1
# of laptops, Chromebooks, tablets to lend	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
# of hotspots	7	2	0	10	5	5	3
Did the library offer computer classes in (2024)	No	No staff last year	No	1:1 "Tech Help" in Summer 2023 and June-December 2024	No	No	No
# of meeting rooms / capacity	2 / 40	0 / 20	1 / 60	2 / 55	2 / 85	2 / 25	1 / 23
Sample digital offerings	Library of Things	Library of Things	Mango, Kanopy, Freegal	Indieflix, Quello, The Great Courses	Hoopla, ArtistWorks, Kovels	Kanopy, NYT Digital, Dial-a-Story	Kanopy, Hoopla

Source: Self-reported librarian data and https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/library-statistics/index.php

Senior Centers

Every town has a Council on Aging but not every town has a senior center. West Stockbridge, for example, lacks a dedicated senior center and shares services with the town of Richmond.

Senior Centers are critical assets and the audiences they serve can constitute 30 percent or more of the population in each town. Massachusetts FY22 Council on Aging reports suggest these centers, while serving large audiences, often function with minimal staff and only a handful of volunteers. Separately, a review of senior center websites and social media accounts suggest a need for hands-on training to ensure staff are confident in their own digital skills and that they know how to design public-facing materials (e.g., newsletters, menus) that older adults can read for those visually challenged.

Recommendations: Partner with local high schools or colleges to pilot an intergenerational digital navigator program modeled after Boston's Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly's **Teens Teach Tech** program. Have senior centers purchase a few user-friendly devices such as **Claris Tablets** so older adults can practice using them on-site. Work with **Meals on Wheels** to identify homebound seniors who would benefit from digital literacy or device support. Teach senior center leaders how to use **Canva** or a similar program to redesign public-facing newsletters and social media content to be more legible. Experiment with offering virtual on-site classes through the **Older Adults Technology (OATS) Program from AARP** to assess participant response.

Senior Center Utilization and Staffing by Town

Town	Unduplicated Clients	Paid Staff	Unduplicated Volunteers
Lenox	2,500	1.5	22
Lee	1,000	3	6
Stockbridge	973	2	7
Sheffield	768	4	20
Great Barrington	280	8	25
West Stockbridge	150	1	8

Source: Council on Aging Annual Reports FY22 to Executive Office of Elder Affairs

Meals on Wheels Data by Town

Town	Unduplicated Meals on Wheels Recipients (FY23)
Great Barrington	100
Lenox	89
Lee	85
Sheffield	48
Stockbridge	29
West Stockbridge	17

Source: RSYP Meals on Wheels FY23

Public Schools: Digital Literacy + Computer Science Course-Taking

While youth are not a designated Covered Population group by the federal government through the Digital Equity Act, the digital needs of young people should be taken into consideration as part of town efforts. **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) 2023-24** data show broadly how youth in the six towns perform relative to their peers in terms of digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) course-taking. The data suggest significant differences related to gender, race/ethnicity, income, language, and ability in terms of the grades at which students begin learning DLCS content and their continued engagement with this material in later grades.

Percent of Students Taking Digital Literacy / Computer Science Classes by District and Student Characteristics

<table>
<tr><th>District</th><th>Berkshire Hills</th><th>Lee</th><th>Lenox</th><th>Southern Berkshire</th></tr>
<tr><td>Towns Served</td><td>Great Barrington, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge</td><td>Lee</td><td>Lenox</td><td>Sheffield</td></tr>
<tr><td>Elem. School *Title I</td><td>Muddy Brook (PK-4)*</td><td>Lee Elementary (PK-6)*</td><td>Morris (PK-5)*</td><td>Undermountain (PK-5)*</td></tr>
<tr><td>Female →</td><td>99.4%</td><td rowspan="13">0%</td><td rowspan="13">100%</td><td rowspan="13">0%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Male →</td><td>100%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Low Income</td><td>99.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>High Needs</td><td>99.5%</td></tr>
<tr><td>English language learner</td><td>97.1%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Students with disabilities</td><td>100%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hispanic or Latino</td><td>98.2%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Asian</td><td rowspan="4">100%</td></tr>
<tr><td>African American/Black</td></tr>
<tr><td>Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino</td></tr>
<tr><td>White</td></tr>
<tr><td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td><td>N/A</td></tr>
</table>

District	Berkshire Hills		Lee	Lenox	Southern Berkshire
Towns Served →	Great Barrington, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge		Lee	Lenox	Sheffield
Middle + High School *Title 1 →	*W. E. B. Du Bois * (5-8)*	*Monument Mt. (9-12)*	*Lee Middle/High (7-12)*	*Lenox Mem. High (6-12)*	*Mt. Everett (6-12)*
Female	29.8	10.8	39.6	28	32.8
Male	64.4	27.5	41.9	36.7	47.9
High Needs	51.6	21.2	39.2	31.3	40
English Language Learners	40	8.9	18.2	10	14.3
Low Income	51.3	24	39.4	29.5	41.7
Students with Disabilities	57.1	24	31.9	40	37
African American/Black	28.6	0			
American Indian/Alaskan Native					
Asian	14.3	18.2	22.2	16.7	
Hispanic/Latino	48.1	16.2	27	23.8	43.3
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic/Latino	42.1	23.5	25	40	31.8
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander					
White	47.1	21.1	44.5	34.3	42.2

Source: DLCS Course-Taking Results - https://reportcards.doe.mass.edu/

High School	Town	Special Programs
Monument Mountain	Great Barrington	**Chapter 74**: Auto. Tech. **Non-Chapter 74**: Info. Support Services & Networking **Career Vocational Technology Education (CVTE)**: Art & Design; Auto. Tech.; Computer Science; Engineering-Advanced Manufacturing; **Innovation Pathways:** Business & Finance; Healthcare & Social Assistance; Manufacturing
Mt. Everett Regional	Sheffield	**CVTE**: Technology Education **Innovation Pathway**: Information; Manufacturing
Lenox Memorial	Lenox	**Innovation Pathway**: Business & Finance; Healthcare & Social Assistance

Source: https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/cvte/cte-families/default.html

Recommendations: Help parents learn to access school records by hosting information sessions at the beginning and mid-way through the school year. Ensure elementary students engage with DLCS content by fourth grade. Look at **Farmington River Regional School District's Technology Plan** as a model. Expose students to tech career pathways at earlier ages (i.e., middle school). Explore incentives to reward companies that a) hire high school students for tech apprenticeships or b) provide scholarships to help teens earn IT-related micro-credentials. Implement recommendations proposed by **BERK12/BRLI** related to improving students' digital skills and workforce readiness.

Schools: Other Digital Equity Indicators

Image Credit: Southern Berkshire Regional School District

In addition to in-class content, some schools are also introducing students to technology content through extracurricular activities. Examples include the Southern Berkshire Regional School District's **ROBOTICS, DRONES, ROCKETRY, ELECTRIC VEHICLES, & CYBERSECURITY PROGRAM,** which offers:

- WONDER LEAGUE ROBOTICS (Grades 3-5)
- VEX ROBOTICS COMPETITION (Grades 6-12)
- AERIAL DRONE COMPETITION (Grades 6-12)
- MIAA ESPORTS (Grades 8-12)
- THE AMERICAN ROCKETRY CHALLENGE (Grades 9-12)
- CYBERPATRIOT (Grades 9-12)

Older students won the Massachusetts Tech Challenge state championship in 2013, 2014, and 2015, and in 2015 placed 29th in the **First Tech Challenge World Championship**. The 2018 team advanced to the finals of the **VEX Southern New England Championship**.

The Berkshire Eagle and Janet's Fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation support the program.

At **Lee Middle and High School**, students can participate in a Robotics Team. The school's faculty includes both a Technology and a Digital Arts teacher and a Technology Specialist.

Lenox High School students can join **Engenuity 8227**, a program that challenges teams to design, build, program, and operate robots and compete in a head-to-head challenge. The program helps students "develop STEM skills and practice engineering principles, while realizing the value of hard work, innovation, and working as a team." The program is sponsored by Think Berkshires and Your Color Connection. Lenox High School has on staff both an Engineering & Technology and a Business & Technology teacher.

Monument Mountain Regional High School is notable for its **Career Vocational & Technical Education (CVTE) Program** focused on Technology Education. The program aims to educate and prepare students for employment and continuing academic and occupational preparation through classroom instruction, supportive services, and occupational experiences that develop life-long skills. The school also offers Career Pathways in fields such as Computer Science and Advanced Manufacturing and internships with local employers, including firms working in IT and computer graphics.

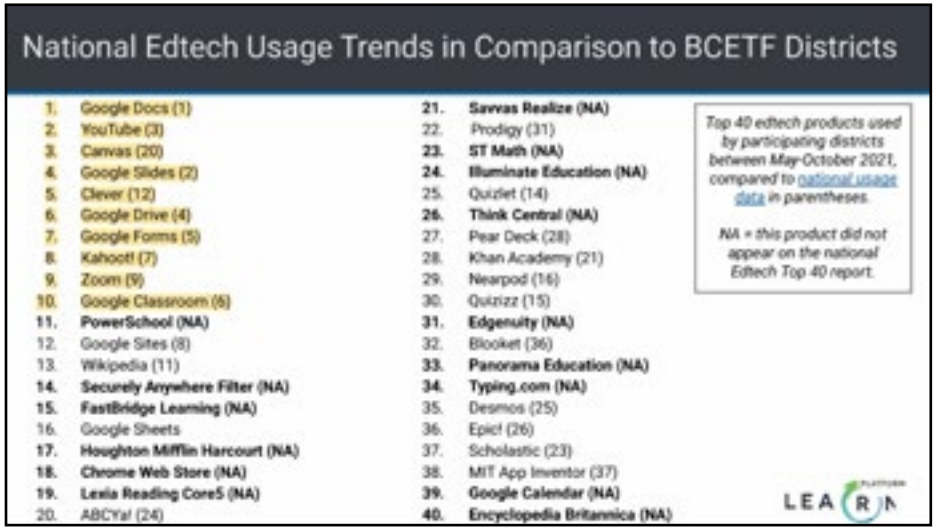
Source: Lee High School

Recommendations: Explore creative extracurricular ways to reach students currently disinclined toward DLCS content (e.g., **Girls Who Code, Geeking Out Kids of Color, AccessCSforAll)**. Make schools and families aware of **robotics summer programs available to Massachusetts high school students**. Pilot a Teens Teach Tech program that pairs high school students with older adults for digital knowledge transfer in exchange for community service school credit or small stipends.

Education Technology

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the nonprofit **BERK12**, which works to "enhance and provide the highest quality education for the children of the Berkshires so they are prepared for college, vocational/technical training, and a rewarding career ahead," launched the **Berkshire Remote Learning Initiative (BRLI)**. The consortium of seven Berkshire County School Districts* sought to share the Canvas learning platform with educators and families; encourage use of virtual spaces for collaboration, professional development, and support; and bring schools and communities together around resources and best practices to ensure consistency around educational technology.

Following the return to in-person learning, the group changed its name to Berkshire Resources for Learning and Innovation to demonstrate its commitment to an expanded view of educational technology that includes teacher professional development and regional collaborations. To support that broader focus, BRLI commissioned an audit of the districts' educational technology use between spring and fall 2021. The findings, shown below, highlight greater use of educational technology in these schools compared to the nation (Image 1) and note in bold the educational technology programs used most frequently (Image 2).



Source: BERK12 / BRLI

Recommendations: Encourage school leaders to work with **BERK12/BRLI** to implement educational technology and teacher professional development goals noted in their education technology audit. Review software spending to evaluate if it is being appropriately directed toward programs that a) show efficacy and b) in which teachers have or can gain proficiency. Promote that schools identify an administrator or faculty responsible for staying apprised of technology trends such as artificial intelligence so students are being taught the most current and relevant content.

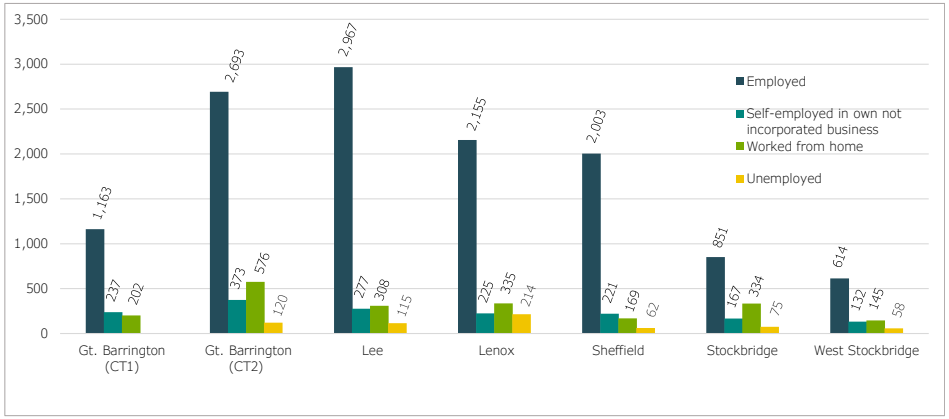
**BRLI School Districts include Berkshire Arts and Technology; Berkshire Hills; Lee; Lenox; North Adams; Pittsfield; and Richmond. Southern Berkshire is not included.*

Employment, Occupation and Industries

Whether the six towns are attracting and retaining people and companies operating in a digital space is a related digital equity indicator. Approximately 62 percent of all residents 16 and older in the six towns are in the labor force. The communities with the highest percentage of employed residents are Great Barrington, CT 2 (79%) and Sheffield (68%). Lenox has the lowest percentage (46.9%). Labor force participation rates across the six towns are lower for those with disabilities and those with less than a college degree.

Stockbridge has the highest percentage of residents working from home (36%); the lowest percentage is in Sheffield (8%). There is no obvious pattern in the number of residents who worked from home before versus after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, towns that can promote themselves as offering reliable, affordable internet may be better positioned to attract remote workers as well as companies that need fast broadband for their operations. In terms of occupations and industries, relatively few people work in computer science, information technology, or engineering. The page that follows provides a full accounting of the sectors in which people work in each town. A list of companies employing at least 5 people in sectors likely to require digital skills in each town is in the Appendix.

Employment Status by Town (CT)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Selected Economic Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP03, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP03?q=DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Work from Home by Town 2019-2022

	Gt. Barr.	Lee	Lenox	Sheffield	Stock.	West Stock.
2019	459	116	330	171	129	76
2022	405	196	306	98	156	55
Change	**-54**	**+80**	**-24**	**-73**	**+27**	**-21**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Census Bureau. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2301?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Recommendations: Create a public relations campaign among the six towns to attract remote workers, especially those employed in computer science and adjacent fields. Find retired IT professionals interested in volunteering to teach digital skills to their peers at senior centers and libraries. Recruit Berkshire Community College students to provide one-on-one support to food pantry recipients. Partner with **CATA** and **ExtaSpecialTeas** to develop digital skills classes tailored to residents with disabilities with a workforce emphasis. Identify locations in each town suited to reach those with less than a college degree for basic digital skills assessments and classes (e.g., Northstar, Tech Foundry), and device distribution.

Number of People Working in Each Sector by Town

Sector	Lenox	Lee	Stockbridge	Gt. Barrington (CT1)	Gt. Barrington (CT2)	Sheffield	West Stockbridge
Educational svcs., & health care & social assist.	713	1,262	193	189	667	470	193
Professional, scientific, & management, & administrative & waste management svcs.	196	258	143	226	279	157	110
Manufacturing	141	198	14	161	159	229	43
Finance & insurance, & real estate & rental & leasing	158	141	78	76	150	268	45
Other services, except public administration	383	121	27	44	160	113	26
Construction	58	202	86	76	179	169	35
Public administration	80	165	15	0	43	39	5
Wholesale trade	7	9	7	53	101	54	0
Information *See North American Industry Classification System Professions	**0**	**80**	**5**	**17**	**73**	**20**	**6**
Percentage Employed in Information Sector	**0%**	**0.84%**	**0.05%**	**0.18%**	**0.76%**	**0.21%**	**0.06%**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Industry by Sex for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2403, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2403?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Number of People Employed by Occupational Category in Each Town

Occupational Category	Lenox	Lee	Stockbridge	Great Barrington (CT1)	Great Barrington (CT2)	Sheffield	West Stockbridge
Education, legal, community service, arts, and media	326	611	147	157	397	190	144
Management, business, and financial	286	589	215	179	460	208	140
Service	605	553	103	133	467	403	97
Production, transportation, and material moving	293	198	70	171	248	324	59
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	39	258	101	76	308	277	56
Sales and office	285	243	92	191	505	435	53
Computer, engineering, and science (CSE)	**133**	**177**	**29**	**201**	**128**	**91**	**39**
Healthcare practitioners and technical	188	338	94	55	180	75	26
Protective service	34	69	0	15	25	28	0
CSE Ranking in Each Town Across Occupations	**3rd to last**	**2nd to last**	**2nd to last**	**1st**	**2nd to last**	**3rd to last**	**3rd to last**

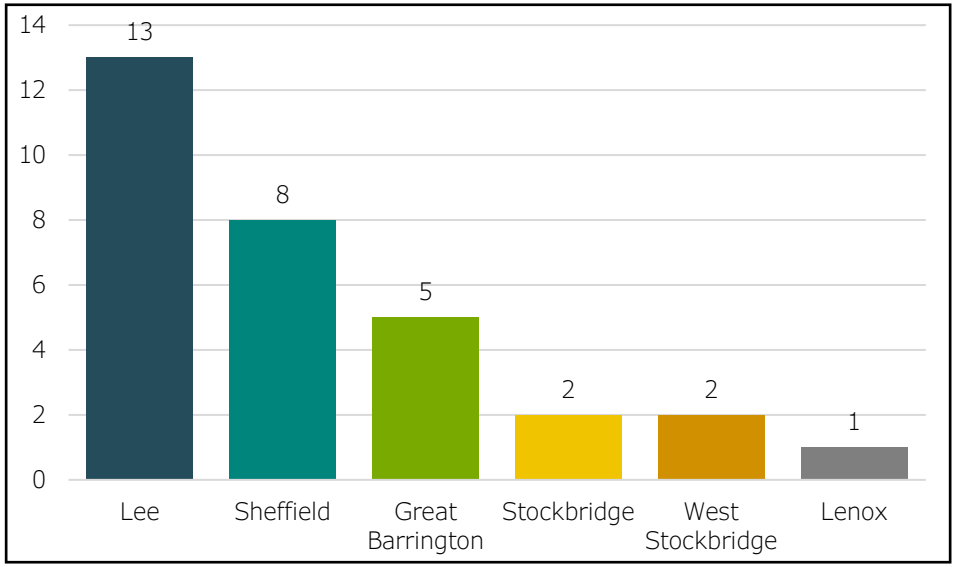
Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Occupation by Sex for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2401, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2401?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Broadband and Computer Access

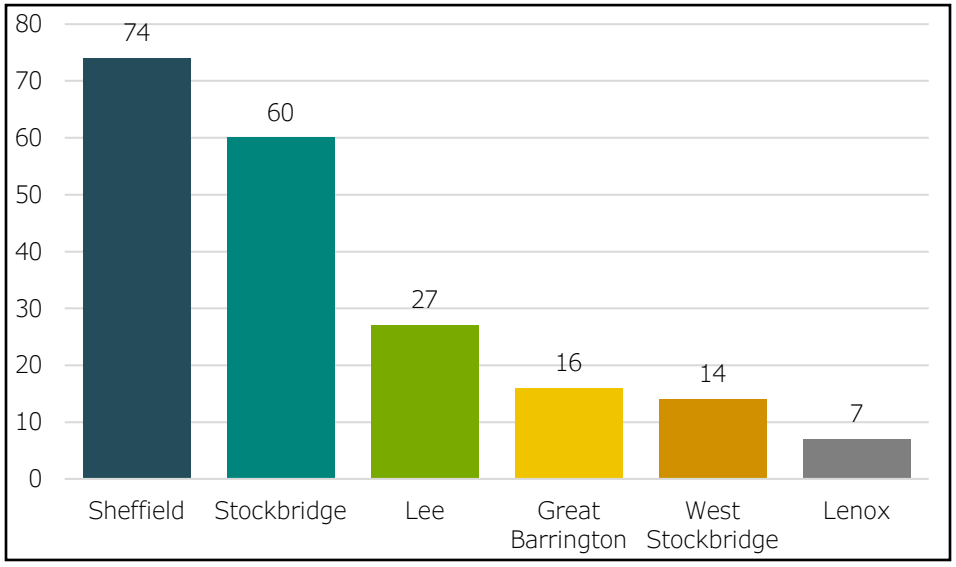
Broadband Availability

Whether people can get internet service — and the range of internet service providers offering and providing minimum service at an affordable rate — is an infrastructure-related indicator of digital equity. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) considers broadband to be available *(i.e., **Served**)* if the resident or business owner can purchase *and receives* 100 Mbps download/20 Mbps upload service through a provider such as Spectrum or AT & T. A location is ***Underserved*** when the only internet speed available *is slower* than 100/25 Mbps (e.g., 25/3 Mbps). A location is ***Unserved*** if no internet provider will connect the location or the only speed available is below 25/3 Mbps. The federal government's recently concluded **Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Challenge** aimed to confirm the Unserved and Underserved locations across the country and provide funding so these locations can be connected to 100/20 Mbps service. Before BEAD, the FCC maps showed Lee with the most **Underserved** locations and Sheffield the most **Unserved** ones. The BEAD challenge does not address lack of service due to affordability only infrastructure. To address affordability issues, town leaders are advised to look at **data from The Benton Institute** about the number of low-income residents eligible for ACP before its termination. A related issue, but one not addressed by BEAD, whether residents receive the service they pay for and why they often must pay for 500/20 Mbps service to get 20 Mbps upload speed not offered at 100 Mbps download, is one town leaders may wish to bring to the state's Department of Cable and Telecommunications to address with all ISPs doing business in the Commonwealth.

Underserved Locations by Town



Unserved Locations by Town



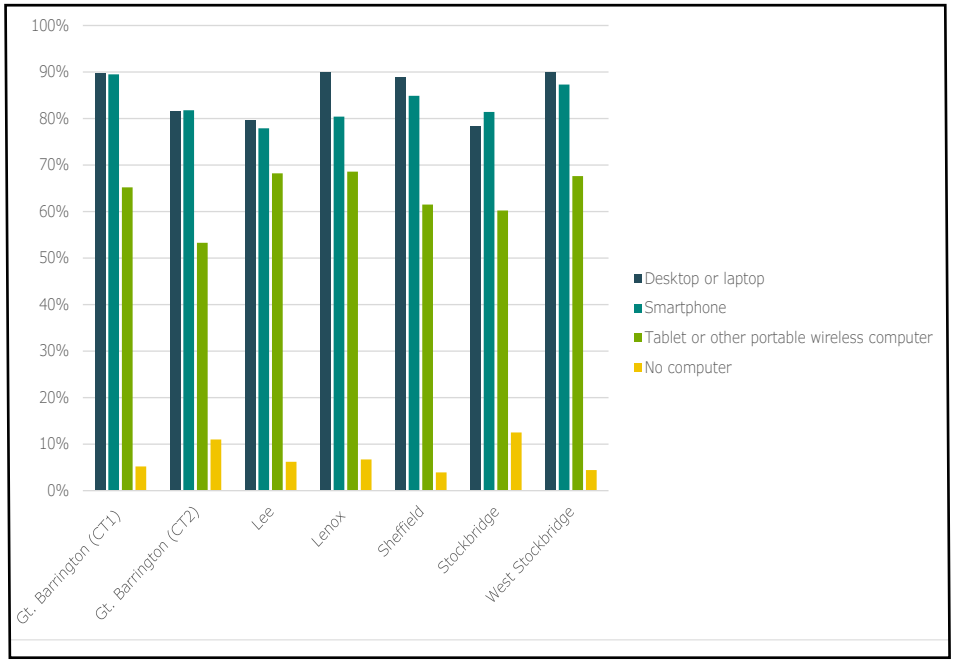
Source: Federal Communications Commission | Massachusetts Broadband Institute

Recommendations: Ensure town leaders stay informed about the outcome of the BEAD Challenge through webinars offered by MBI. Keep lines of communication open with ISPs to identify opportunities to lay fiber along main streets to give those without 100/20 Mbps broadband more options to connect. Look for opportunities to reduce costs to lay fiber by coordinating planning with utility companies and public works departments. Assign a town leader to attend meetings of the **Massachusetts Broadband Coalition** to learn about the costs and benefits of a municipal broadband option.

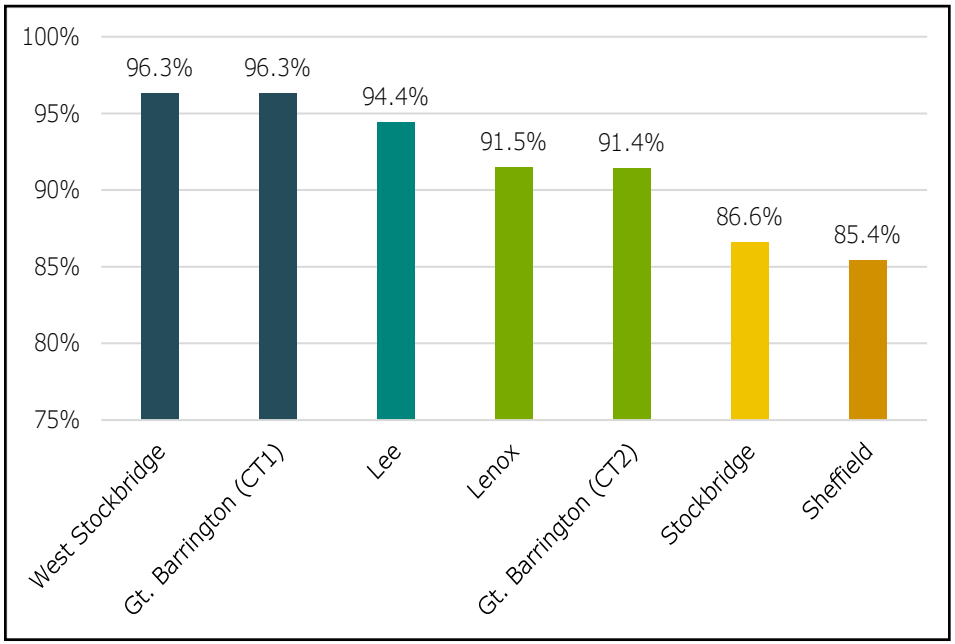
Broadband and Computer Access

Charter Communications (Spectrum) is the most subscribed-to ISP serving the six towns. Spectrum uses coaxial copper as its primary technology. Parts of Great Barrington, Lee, and West Stockbridge have fiber service offered by one of three smaller ISPs (Fiber Connect, Whip City Fiber, Massivemesh Networks) but the percentage of locations served is low (33%). In terms of computer devices, residents report connecting to the internet via a desktop or laptop computer or smartphone in nearly equal measure. The percentage of households with **both** broadband and a computer is nearly comparable or better than the state (93.3%) and county (91.1%) except in Sheffield and Stockbridge where rates are lower. People without computers tend to be older or have not completed college.

Devices Used to Connect to the Internet by Census Tract



Percent of Households with Broadband and Computer by Census Tract



Technology	% Connecting via this Technology
Desktop or laptop	85.5%
Smartphone	83.3%
Tablet or other portable wireless	63.5%
No computer	7.1%

Recommendations: Encourage social service agencies to revise intake forms to identify earlier clients lacking internet or large-screen devices so they can be connected to digital navigator support. Educate agencies about how to help clients secure devices through the **Alliance for Digital Equity**, **Computers4People**, **Digitunity**, or **PCsforPeople**. Solicit businesses to donate devices to the Alliance to be refurbished. Identify a high school interested in creating an after-school **PC-building class** modeled after the one offered by Computers4People. Explore interest in establishing a Berkshire County nonprofit refurbisher to get more donated devices into the community and support workforce development.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Types of Internet Subscriptions by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2802, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2802?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Broadband Speed and Quality

Between December 2021 and November 2022, MBI conducted **Ookla speed tests** to determine not only the **availability** but also the **reliability** of internet service across the Commonwealth. Although not gathered through random sampling, the data suggests whether people are getting the speeds they are paying for from their ISPs. The results suggest they may not. While many factors can contribute to slower speeds, higher latency, or jitter — from distance between a router and computer to the age of a user's computer — the data indicate few users (16-21%) experience speeds that meet the 100/20 Mbps broadband benchmark. Later testing during the June to July 2024 BEAD Challenge similarly confirmed that achieving upload speeds meeting FCC's criteria require that customers pay at least $100 a month for 500/20 Mbps service, further heightening digital inequity.

Recommendation: Make available on town websites a link to the **Ookla speed test** so residents can track their internet speeds to confirm whether they match those offered through their plans. Host an annual Speed Test Day and have residents report their speeds to town leaders so they can be shared with ISPs and elected officials.

Speed, Latency, and Jitter Data by Town

Speed Information	Great Barrington	Lee	Lenox	Sheffield	Stockbridge	West Stockbridge
Total Tests	2,757	2,350	1,856	1,031	946	940
Unique ID Tests	657	503	481	222	230	153
Jitter > 50 ms	165	177	140	107	58	62
Latency > 100 ms	26	22	18	19	4	1
Latency > 500 ms	9	3	3	6	1	0
Speeds < 25/3 Mbps	135	159	173	78	39	30
Speeds < 50/10 Mbps	340	328	321	180	104	82
Speeds < 100/20 Mbps	988	1,002	767	468	387	395
Speeds at least 25/3 Mbps	2,317	1,949	1,500	815	817	842
Speeds at least 50/10 Mbps	1,918	1,566	1,208	599	653	701
Speeds at least 100/20 Mbps	**579 | 21%**	**405 | 17%**	**406 | 21%**	**175 | 16%**	**231 | 24%**	**185 | 19%**
Individual Test Results = Speeds at least 100/100 Mbps	86	1	3	2	0	15

Source: Massachusetts Broadband Institute

Affordable Connectivity Program

The federal government launched the **Affordable Connectivity Program** (ACP) on December 31, 2021, under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The program provided discount internet service ($30 off monthly bills and $100 toward a new computer) to low-income households. Nearly 4,000 households in the six communities participated in ACP. Many more were eligible but never enrolled, most likely due to lack of knowledge about its existence.

On June 1, 2024, ACP ended due to Congress' failure to reauthorize funding. The full impact of that action is still being felt, but nonprofits such as The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society predict terminating the benefit will harm already-struggling households, causing them to cancel internet service entirely or downgrade to speeds so slow they severely degrade people's online experience.

The information below from The Benton Institute shows a) the number of households **eligible for ACP** when it was active; b) the number of households **actually enrolled** before ACP ended; c) a **score reflecting the risk** that people formerly enrolled will cancel internet due to economic pressures (0 to 100 - 100 is highest); and d) percent of **households that pay 30% or more of their income toward rent**.

Affordable Connectivity Program Data by Zip Code* ***Note that Zip Codes May Include Towns Beyond the Six in the Plan*

Town | Zip Code	Eligible Households	Actual Enrollment	ACP Risk Score	Rent-Burdened Households
Great Barrington | 01230	1,411	377	57	12%
Lee | 01238	851	341	43	11%
Lenox | 01240	609	185	64	17%
Stockbridge | 01262	332	81	100	20%
Sheffield | Ashley Falls 01257 | 01222	279 | 28	93 | 41	51 | 23	14% | 0%
Interlaken + West Stockbridge | 01266	149	35	67	6%
Housatonic | 01236	123	64	53	9%
Lenoxdale | 01242	No data			
South Lee | 01260	No data			
Total	**3,782**	**1,217**		**11.1% - Rent-Burden Average**
	Only 33% of Eligible Households Actually Enrolled			

Source: https://www.benton.org/acp_tool

Recommendations: Work with town assets (e.g., library, CoA, social service agencies) to reach low-income individuals with information about alternative ways to lower their internet bills following ACP ending (e.g., **Internet Assist**; **Lifeline**). Increase the number of hotspots available to borrow at libraries in towns with high ACP Risk Scores (i.e., Lenox, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge).

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Internet for All Survey

In addition to collecting data about existing conditions for Covered Populations using quantitative data from external sources, MBI devised a survey that let the state and municipalities collect qualitative information about how people use the internet and the challenges they face in doing so, in part to identify the likely causes of those challenges: access, affordability, or skills. Between December 2023 and August 2024, 838 residents across the six towns completed MBI's *Internet for All* survey. Key results are summarized on the pages that follow.

While respondents overall reported good **internet access** (96%>), the rate at which they felt **internet service** was good enough to meet their needs was notably lower (54-76%). This was especially true in Sheffield and Lee. Respondents in Stockbridge and West Stockbridge reported paying the most, on average, for internet service. Four of the six towns reported monthly internet service costs higher than the state's average of $93.60.

Respondents in Great Barrington, Lee, and Sheffield were most likely to report both internet service as **unaffordable** and **device access** as most challenging. In all three towns, fewer than 55 percent of respondents reported being able to pay more than $500 for a new computer.

Across all towns, scores were lowest for awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program (26.6% average) and lack of concern about internet safety (9.6% average), suggesting more education are needed on both topics.

Town	Survey Respondents
Great Barrington	202
Lee	144
Lenox	113
Sheffield	133
Stockbridge	123
West Stockbridge	123

Town	Average Price Paid for Monthly Internet
Great Barrington	$94.52
Lee	$87.56
Lenox	$86.71
Sheffield	$116.38
Stockbridge	$102.43
West Stockbridge	$106.32

The scoring system on the pages that follow allow for comparison across the six towns. Scores are reported in percentages as follows:

Positive if more than 59 percent of respondents answered the question in the affirmative
Neutral if 49 to 59 percent responded affirmatively
Negative if less than 49 percent responded affirmatively

**Percents reflect the number of respondents who answered a question, including those who chose "Prefer Not to Answer." Respondents who left a question blank were not included.*

Great Barrington

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Great Barrington respondents included a large percentage of older adults, people with children, and low-income residents.

People in Great Barrington had a harder time paying their internet bills and paying for a new computer. They were very concerned about internet safety.

Although few respondents were aware of the Affordable Connectivity Program, the percentage was higher than in the other towns.

Survey Respondents Demographic Profile		
	#	**%**
Total Respondents	202	N/A
...who are 60 and older	93	55%
...with child(ren) 18 or < at home	44	36%
...with household income before taxes < $36,999	49	29%
...with < than a bachelor's degree	44	26%
...with a disability	29	17%
...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	23	14%
...who live in affordable housing	19	11%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	18	11%
...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC	14	9%
...who served in the armed forces / veteran	7	4%
...who are non-English speakers	6	3%
...who define as Native American	2	1%

Positive (>59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	194	96%
How well does your home internet service work?	Good enough to meet my household's needs	130	68%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	169	93%
Are you able to (regularly use the internet for)...online activities?	Easy	168	94%
Are you able to ( )... general internet searching?	Easy	149	93%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very and somewhat accessible	153	91%
Are you able to ( )... participate in your local community?	Easy	120	79%
Are you able to ( )... search and apply for a job?	Easy	82	71%
Are you able to ( )... search for health care or telehealth services?	Easy	93	66%
Are you able to ( )... search for transportation information?	Easy	92	66%
Are you aware of tools or resources you can use to stay safe online?	Yes I have tools or resources to stay safe online	32	60%

Internet Availability

Digital Skills

Internet Affordability

Cybersecurity

Device Access

Neutral (49-59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Are you able to ( )...search and/or apply for benefits or resources for you or your family?	Easy	75	54%

Negative (<49%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Not at all hard Not too hard	85	48%
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	$500-$1000 and more than $1000	82	46%
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	57	31%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all Not very	24	9%

Lee

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

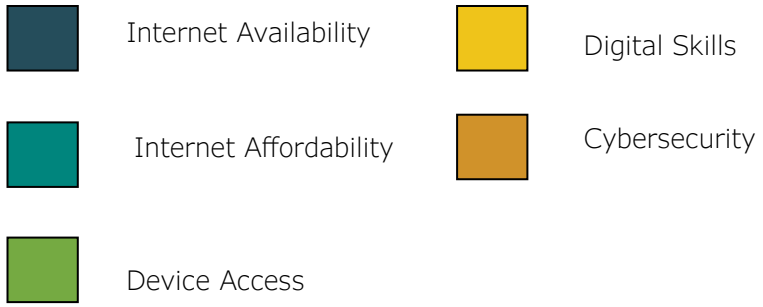
Lee respondents included a large percentage of older adults, people with less than a bachelor's degree, and people with children.

People in Lee had a slightly easier time paying their internet bills than residents in Great Barrington but a similarly hard time paying for a new computer. They also shared their concerns about internet safety.

As with respondents in Great Barrington, a fairly low percentage were aware of the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Survey Respondents Demographic Profile		
	#	**%**
Total Respondents	145	N/A
...who are 60 and older	70	55%
...with < than a bachelor's degree	47	37%
...with child(ren) 18 or < at home	23	24%
...with household income before taxes < $36,999	24	19%
...with a disability	19	15%
...who served in the armed forces / veteran	11	9%
...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	10	8%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	8	6%
...who live in affordable housing	6	5%
...who are non-English speakers	6	4%
...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC	4	3%
...who define as Native American	1	0%

Positive (>59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	140	97%
How well does your internet service work?	Good enough to meet my household's needs	92	68%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	129	96%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very accessible and Somewhat accessible	114	91%
Are you able to (regularly use the internet for)...online activities?	Easy	118	91%
Are you able to ( )...general internet searching?	Easy	98	89%
Are you able to ( )...health care or telehealth services?	Easy	83	82%
Are you able to ( )...transportation information?	Easy	75	78%
Are you able to ( )...participating in your local community?	Easy	76	76%
Are you able to ( )...searching and applying for a job?	Easy	61	75%
Are you aware of tools or resources to stay safe online?	Yes	16	64%



Neutral (49-59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Are you able to ( )...search and/or apply for benefits or resources for you or your family?	Easy	57	58%
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Not at all hard and Not too hard	71	54%

Negative (<49%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	$500 to $1000+	58	45%
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	41	30%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all and Not very	12	9%

Lenox

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Lenox respondents included about the same percentage of older adults as Great Barrington and Lee. The next highest percentage included people with children and low-income residents.

People in Lenox had fewer concerns about the affordability of internet service or paying for devices and slightly more concern about internet safety than respondents from Great Barrington and Lee.

Like their peers in Great Barrington and Lee, few respondents were aware of the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Survey Respondents Demographic Profile		
	#	**%**
Total Respondents	113	N/A
...who are 60 and older	49	52%
...with child(ren) 18 or < at home	24	33%
...with household income before taxes < $36,999	14	15%
...with < than a bachelor's degree	10	10%
...with a disability	9	9%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	6	6%
...who live in affordable housing	5	5%
...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC	5	5%
...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	4	4%
...who define as Native American	3	3%
...who served in the armed forces / veteran	2	2%
...who are non-English speakers	0	0%

Positive (>59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	111	98%
How well does your home internet service meet your needs?	Good enough to meet my household's needs	78	72%
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Total of Not at all hard and Not too hard	67	64%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	99	95%
Are you able to (regularly use the internet for)...online activities?	Easy	99	95%
Are you able to ( )...general internet searching?	Easy	77	88%
Are you able to ( )...searching and applying for a job?	Easy	53	78%
Are you able to ( )...participating in your local community?	Easy	61	75%
Are you able to ( )...health care or telehealth services?	Easy	57	70%
Are you able to ( )...transportation information?	Easy	52	70%
Are you able to ( )...searching and applying for benefits or resources for your family?	Easy	49	64%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very accessible and Somewhat accessible	86	93%
Are you aware of tools or resources to stay safe online?	Yes	13	76%

Internet Availability

Digital Skills

Internet Affordability

Cybersecurity

Device Access

Neutral (49-59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	$500 to $1000+	55	53%

Negative (<49%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	29	28%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all and Not very	11	11%

Sheffield

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Sheffield respondents included the second highest percentage of older adults and a slightly smaller percentage of people with less than a bachelor's degree and people with children.

Respondents in Sheffield were less satisfied than those in Great Barrington, Lee, and Lenox with the quality of their internet service.

Few respondents were aware of the Affordable Connectivity Program and shared the other towns' concerns about internet safety.

Survey Respondents Demographic Profile		
	#	**%**
Total Respondents	131	N/A
...who are 60 and older	71	61%
...with < than a bachelor's degree	23	20%
...with child(ren) 18 or < at home	16	18%
...with household income before taxes < $36,999	16	14%
...with a disability	11	10%
...who served in the armed forces / veteran	6	5%
...who live in affordable housing	6	5%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	4	4%
...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC	5	4%
...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	3	3%
...who are non-English speakers	1	1%
...who define as Native American	1	1%

Positive (>59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	130	99%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	113	93%
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	$500 to $1000+	85	72%
Are you able to (regularly use the internet for)...online activities?	Easy	109	90%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very and somewhat accessible	103	90%
Are you able to ( )...general internet searching?	Easy	86	83%
Are you able to ( )...searching and applying for a job?	Easy	51	75%
Are you able to ( )...participating in your local community?	Easy	65	73%
Are you able to ( )...health care or telehealth services?	Easy	62	66%
Are you able to ( )...search and/ or apply for benefits or resources for you or your family?	Easy	49	60%
Are you able to ( )...transportation information?	Easy	53	63%
Are you aware of tools or resources to stay safe online?	Yes	26	65%

Internet Availability

Digital Skills

Internet Affordability

Cybersecurity

Device Access

Neutral (49-59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
How well does your home internet service work?	Good enough to meet my household's needs	69	54%
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Not at all and Not too hard	67	56%

Negative (<49%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	35	29%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all and Not very	10	9%

Stockbridge

Image Credit: Stockbridge Chamber of Commerce

Stockbridge respondents were represented most by older adults followed by people with children and people with less than a bachelor's degree.

Stockbridge had the most overall positive ratings (scores above 59%) across categories.

Respondents scored slightly higher than the other towns in terms of concerns about internet safety (13% versus 9%). They had a similar lack of awareness about ACP as the other towns.

Survey Respondents Demographic Profile		
	#	**%**
Total Respondents	123	N/A
...who are 60 and older	22	58%
...with child(ren) 18 or < at home	15	44%
...with < than a bachelor's degree	8	21%
...with household income before taxes < $36,999	6	16%
...with a disability	4	11%
...who live in affordable housing	3	8%
...who served in the armed forces / veteran	2	5%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	2	5%
...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	1	3%
...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC	1	2%
...who are non-English speakers	0	0%
...who define as Native American	0	0%

Positive (>59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	118	96%
How well does your home internet service work?	Good enough to meet my household's needs	85	76%
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Not at all hard and Not too hard	78	75%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	106	97%
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	$500 to $1000+	75	69%
Are you able to (regularly use the internet for)...online activities?	Easy	104	96%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very and somewhat accessible	92	93%
Are you able to ( )...general internet searching?	Easy	83	88%
Are you able to ( )...participating in your local community?	Easy	67	82%
Are you able to ( )...searching and applying for a job?	Easy	47	78%
Are you able to ( )...health care or telehealth services?	Easy	68	77%
Are you able to ( )...transportation information?	Easy	62	77%
Searching and/or applying for benefits or resources for you or your family	Easy	53	70%
Are you aware of tools or resources to stay safe online?	Yes	59	69%

Internet Availability

Digital Skills

Internet Affordability

Cybersecurity

Device Access

Negative (<49%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	30	29%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all and Not very	13	13%

West Stockbridge

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

West Stockbridge had the highest percentage of older adult respondents. They were followed by people with less than a bachelor's degree and people with children.

West Stockbridge respondents reported more difficulty applying for benefits online than people in other towns.

Respondents in West Stockbridge had the highest rate of concern about internet safety and the lowest rate of awareness about ACP.

At one point, West Stockbridge had the highest survey response rate in the Commonwealth, as a percentage of the population at 9.6% of town residents.

Survey Respondents Demographic Profile		
	#	**%**
Total Respondents	123	N/A
...who are 60 and older	73	69%
...with < than a bachelor's degree	18	17%
...with child(ren) 18 or < at home	12	13%
...with a disability	12	11%
...with household income before taxes < $36,999	9	8%
...who served in the armed forces / veteran	7	6%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	6	5%
...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC	4	3%
...who live in affordable housing	2	1%
...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	2	1%
...who define as Native American	2	1%
...who are non-English speakers	0	0%

Internet Availability

Digital Skills

Internet Affordability

Cybersecurity

Device Access

Neutral (49-59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Searching and/ or applying for benefits or resources for you or your family	Easy	44	56%

Negative (<49%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	16	13%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all and not very	7	7%

Positive (>59%)			
Question	**Answer**	**#**	**%**
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	130	99%
How well does your home internet service work?	Good enough to meet my household's needs	85	69%
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Not at all hard and Not too hard	81	75%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	105	93%
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	$500 to $1000+	66	60%
Are you able to (regularly use the internet for)...online activities?	Easy	106	95%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very and somewhat accessible	97	92%
Are you able to ( )...general internet searching?	Easy	94	91%
Are you able to ( )...searching and applying for a job?	Easy	47	72%
Are you able to ( )...participating in your local community?	Easy	72	75%
Are you able to ( )...health care or telehealth services?	Easy	61	66%
Are you able to ( )...transportation information?	Easy	53	70%
Are you aware of tools or resources to stay safe online?	Yes	14	82%

Outreach and Engagement

Meeting people where they live and work was key to creating the Municipal Digital Equity Plan for the six towns. BRPC's engagement strategy involved a multi-tiered approach involving increasing levels of contact with town leaders, social service and faith-based providers serving Covered Populations, and community members themselves. This section discusses the approach taken to outreach and presents key takeaways gleaned from focus groups and interviews in each community that further deepen understanding of how digital equity presents in people's daily lives.

Town Leaders

After convening the six town managers over Zoom to hear their goals for the project, the two BRPC staff and one AmeriCorps (ACC) Lead for America Fellow assigned to the project began organizing contact sheets of town and stakeholder leaders in their respective communities. They subsequently reached out to leaders (email, phone, in-person) to introduce the project and ask for their help with community engagement related to the Covered Population groups each served (e.g., older adults, veterans). Early on, BRPC staff became aware of how dedicated these stakeholders were to their constituents and also how challenging it was for them to pivot from their primary role and responsibilities to take on digital equity requests, which often felt secondary to them. Stakeholder leaders, for example, sometimes held multiple jobs, worked part-time or volunteered, or felt uncomfortable themselves dealing with computers and the internet, making it harder for them to assist at the level initially envisioned. These leaders also run their organizations with minimal staff and resources and support clients who face multiple life challenges, of which digital equity often falls far behind immediate needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Whether it was a veteran's agent who serves 12 communities or a senior center director who lacks a modern computer device, leaders themselves were often operating from positions of need.

Community Outreach: Surveys and Awareness Building

Leaders were ultimately, however, instrumental in helping spread the word about the project through notices in newsletters, announcements at events, and inviting BRPC staff to their organizations to speak. Staff subsequently hung posters, made presentations, tabled at community events, and through one-on-one conversations raised awareness about both the statewide and local digital equity project. Residents were not only solicited to complete surveys and provide feedback, but at every step were also helped with practical information intended to address their immediate digital equity challenges. Initially, this involved signing residents up for ACP. Later, it required BRPC staff to help people navigate the challenge of ACP ending.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Once BRPC staff collected a sufficient number of surveys to ensure a representative sample, particularly from Covered Populations, emphasis shifted to organizing focus groups and conducting interviews. Securing participation, even with incentives such as a $25 Visa gift card and food, was often difficult, in some cases resulting in fewer attendees than hoped for. In the end, BRPC facilitated nine focus groups and conducted countless interviews which helped further target recommendations to the needs of towns and Covered Population groups. Even when attendees were few, conversations were instructive, allowing staff to learn what it meant for people to be without internet, devices, or skills and the impact that had on their daily lives. In some cases, especially with older residents, staff encountered high levels of distrust or disinterest around the internet. These same residents often relied on their children or staff at social service agencies to help them figure out how to navigate the online world. With adults with children, their greatest stressors were less around digital skills and more related to device access and affordability.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups: Great Barrington

"I want to be able to get around the computer so well that I feel comfortable." -

Focus Group Participant, Great Barrington Housing Authority

Focus Group #1: Berkshire Community College ESOL class in Great Barrington | 13 Participants* | Low-income residents, English language learners **4 from Great Barrington, 3 from Lee, 2 from Lenox*

Focus Group #2: Great Barrington Housing Authority in Housatonic | 7 Participants | Low-income residents, older adults

Key concerns and needs shared by both groups:

- Internet service and devices are unaffordable.
- Geography and adverse weather conditions can impact internet service quality and disrupt people's ability to perform critical life tasks (e.g., phone calls).
- People prefer in-person digital assistance to ensure understanding and retention.

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #1:

- Over-reliance on cellphones
- Limited access to large-screen devices (e.g., Chromebooks provided by BCC must be returned upon graduation)
- Poor internet quality when multiple people are online simultaneously at home
- Digital literacy classes must be tailored to audience and be engaging

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Eleven of the 13 ESOL students in **Focus Group #1** had internet at home; 12 owned a smart phone. All participants had Chromebooks but received them from BCC and otherwise would have been without. The majority reported feeling more comfortable navigating the internet with a cellphone rather than a computer. Participants largely agreed that using the internet to do things such as make appointments, get information for their children's school, send money, or learn a new community (e.g., GPS, food delivery) were easier done online than by phone due to language barriers. A man who owned a landscaping business said he used his computer to make invoices for clients, but his internet connection was inconsistent. Some students used their smartphones to be DoorDash drivers. Participants agreed that traditional internet service was too expensive. Half the group subscribed to AT&T and the other half to Verizon or T-Mobile, confirming broadband was beyond their means. A number of people reported slow service during bad weather or when multiple people were online at the same time. Calls to customer service often attributed issues to location or terrain. To address affordability, one participant signed up with Cricket, however when he was unable to send money or make calls internationally, he switched to AT&T. Most participants did not know what a hotspot was. One participant used free Wi-Fi at a park while her children were playing. Almost all participants would like to improve their internet skills. Five people tried NorthStar but did not continue because they preferred in-person instruction. Some attendees felt Northstar was boring. Teachers reported it being harder to hold students accountable to complete their work with online courses/certifications.

Recommendations:

- Look into securing refurbished devices for ESOL students that they can keep permanently.
- Explore opportunities to create onsite, in-person learning in public school settings in parallel with after-school programming for children.
- Train ESOL students to deliver Northstar or similar curricula to their peers to ensure information is not lost in translation.
- Train staff at BCC or an organization such as VIM to serve as digital navigators to help students obtain lower cost internet service or hotspots.

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #2:

- Spotty connections especially during weather events
- Feeling taken advantage of by ISP providers upselling costs
- Lack of familiarity/comfort with the internet but openness to learning
- Desire to pay the housing authority online versus by check

All **Focus Group #2** members except one had internet service in their units. The majority had computers and smart phones (six of seven). Participants used the internet for a diverse range of activities from socialization (FaceTime), shopping, and streaming media to transportation, church/rosary, and jury duty. Participants used email to correspond with the housing office and for documentation purposes. Participants felt "bamboozled" and "talked in circles" when dealing with ISPs. The group noted that ACP was sunsetting and they were worried about their bills increasing. For one participant who lacked internet service and devices, fear of the unknown and needing help were her greatest barriers. Residents mostly limited their internet use to the housing authority property. All agreed they would benefit from digital skills classes. Privacy concerns were shared by all, especially of being scammed or experiencing fraudulent use of their bank accounts. Separately, the housing authority manager noted that the administration recently terminated a lower bulk subscription rate for TV, meaning residents will face higher cable and internet bills simultaneously, due to the end of ACP.

Recommendations:

- Create a computer lab in the housing authority's common room for residents' personal use.
- Offer computer/digital literacy and skills classes in the common room.
- Explore with the housing authority transitioning to online bill payment.
- Provide the housing authority with the **BRPC Digital Equity Resource Guide** to keep on hand in common rooms.
- Consider whether creating an open Wi-Fi campus might be a viable option through MBI or similar funding.
- Offer digital navigation support to help residents learn how to use the **TriTown Connector**.

"If any household does not have a computer, they are really disabling the people who live there from participating in a normal community." – **Focus Group Participant, Lee Council on Aging**

Focus Groups: Lee

Focus Group #1: Lee Senior Center | 2 participants | Older adults

Presentation/Conversation #2: Kiwanis Club | Library | Community Television of Southern Berkshires | BASIC | Youth Commission | Tri-Town Health | 12 participants | Rural residents

Key concerns and needs shared by both groups:

- High internet subscription costs
- Cybersecurity and fraud
- Need for one-on-one digital support
- Internet outages and service disruptions

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #1:

- The high price of internet subscriptions and devices limits access.
- People need one-on-one support to build digital skills.
- The changing nature of cybersecurity threatens people's online use.

One participant in **Focus Group #1** shared how she came to embrace technology. She lived in a home with unreliable internet and had few online skills when she was suddenly laid off from her job. She realized she needed to enhance her computer skills and began going to the library to learn. Following a period of consistent study, she was able to apply for and accept a new position that now lets her work from home. However, because she still had internet outages and poor connections at her house, she had to move to get good service. She now reports tripling her productivity. Another participant praised the Department of Veterans Affairs and telehealth for letting him access benefits and prescriptions without having to travel but expressed displeasure about the high cost of internet service. He lived in a housing development in the state of Florida where internet subscriptions cost half what they do in Massachusetts, which he attributed to greater competition.

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Recommendations:

- Install computer stations at homeless shelters.
- Expand digital navigation programs regionally, similar to the shared veteran's agent.
- Create a mobile internet (e.g., bookmobile-style) van.
- Encourage stronger government action to reduce online scams and fraud.

Unique challenges expressed by Presentation/Conversation Attendees #2:

- Lack of high-quality computer devices prevent people from using a wider range of technology.
- Even those with advanced digital skills require program and website navigation support.
- Public Wi-Fi could be expanded to help more people gain affordable internet access.

Participants in **Presentations/Conversations #2** expressed a wide range of digital literacy needs. Older adults wanted more help with device troubleshooting than other demographic groups. Business owners requested greater support around programs and websites for online training and permitting. Participants at some presentations noted how demographic groups congregate in different places and require tailored support. Participants suggested that a digital navigator who could be shared among organizations and travel to where they were needed would be beneficial. Free Wi-Fi at the Lee Athletic Field is widely used and appreciated by the town's parents and children. Participants suggested expanding that service to more public locations, too. Participants expressed concern about internet outages. One participant shared that a local public safety worker subscribes to Spectrum internet and a Verizon hotspot to ensure coverage during emergency situations.

Recommendations:

- Expand free public Wi-Fi to another location beyond the Lee Athletic Field.
- Hire a digital navigator to provide one-on-one support in population-specific settings.
- Help low-income residents secure large-screen devices at an affordable price.

"It took tons of paperwork to apply for the ACP." - **Lenox Community Center Focus Group Participant**

Focus Groups | Interviews: Lenox

Focus Group #1: Lenox Community Center | 4 Participants | Low-income residents, Older adults, Affordable Housing Residents

Interviews #2: Lenox Chamber of Commerce Director | Lenox Community Center Director | Lenox Town Planner | Lenox Public Schools IT Director

Key concerns and needs shared by both groups:

- Cybersecurity is a major risk.
- Participants have limited knowledge about options to make internet more affordable.
- Phones are the predominant way people and visitors get online.

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #1:

All participants in this group live in affordable housing. There is password-protected Wi-Fi in the building and signs showing the password. One participant was a Verizon DSL user. Everyone else gets service from Spectrum. Two people receive ACP but do not know what their options are after it ends. The Verizon DSL user was happy with their service and is happy with the price of the package ($50).Most people use phones and about half use laptops as well. One person loves the phone because it is portable, and s/he loves to be able to use it during travel. Participants use the internet for watching YouTube, sports, research, email, talking to family, texting, making calls, sending photos, and GPS (directions). All use the internet for online banking. Three quarters of participants have experienced identity theft. Participants would love to have digital skills classes at the community center and be able to use computers and printers there. One woman whose mother has caregivers coming to her house suggested tech-trained for caregivers. Some people raised concerns about people taking advantage of older clients.

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Recommendations Focus Group #1:

- Provide digital literacy classes and devices at the community center
- Provide training for older adult caregivers in collaboration with social service/healthcare provider organizations
- Help low-income residents understand their options after the end of ACP**.**

Unique challenges expressed by Interviewees #2:

The Director of the Lenox Community Center reported serving 300 people in the last year. Among the needs she felt were most important to her clients, in order of importance, were:

- hybrid, at-home, or in-person digital literacy classes
- access to a free or low-cost computer lab where people can go to work away from home
- access to a local, state, or federal program that lowers internet bills
- on-site in-classroom digital literacy with an instructor
- access to a computer or device-lending library that allows them to do more advanced computer work at home
- free or low-cost computer digital skills classes people can do at home on their own over Zoom

The Director of the Lenox Chamber of Commerce shared enthusiasm for the Church Street lighting and Wi-Fi project and noted that people cannot use the Chamber's downtown *Explore Lenox* app due to low bandwidth. She stated that Wi-Fi is fairly nonexistent downtown unless a person is at Reading Park (next to the library) and can use its Wi-Fi network. There is no other open Wi-Fi downtown except for at the Chamber and at some of the businesses for their patrons. Cellphones that do not have AT&T have spotty service. The Lenox Department of Public Works is working on setting up a wireless network downtown but ran into issues related to underground wiring that is causing a delay.

The Lenox Town Planner confirmed that the downtown Wi-Fi project was underway but they were confirming the last connection. The town conducted a Village Improvement Workshop and Survey in September 2024, during which they learned that people reported poor cell and internet connectivity downtown, confirming the Chamber director's report. The town planner noted that, even in town hall, the wireless network can be spotty and people have trouble connecting. Town staff have difficulty with their network at times, with Zoom failing during important meetings (e.g., hybrid meeting to amend wireless zoning bylaws). Separately, she felt older individuals may need more assistance with digital skills and offered that, at the start of the pandemic, people often needed one-on-one help, while adding that fewer need that level of support today. Some people are happy with their home internet, but acknowledge it is expensive. There are also areas of town where people cannot get cell service regularly and, when there is a power outage, cannot use their internet, either.

The IT Director for the Lenox Public Schools stated in an interview conducted with other IT Directors across the county that his office only received four or five requests for hotspots during the pandemic. This meant the district had to purchase a device for every student and drive them to every student's home. They replace Chromebooks for every sixth grader and replace the devices every four years. If a student breaks a device more than two times, the parent must pay for the third replacement. Their breakage rate is less than larger towns and cities at 20%. Seventy percent of the devices the returned are re-usable. Returned devices have been donated to the Berkshire Museum for its Tinker Tots program. IT directors would like to do more, but lack the time to write grants and are not technically skilled to do so. He noted that schools often buy technology for teachers, but they may not be used to their full capacity.

Recommendations Interviews #2:

- Continue steps to provide free Wi-Fi downtown and improve service at Town Hall
- Post the BRPC Digital Equity Resource Guide on the town's website
- Look for creative ways to share business' free Wi-Fi networks in exchange for discounts at area restaurants and retailers

"I feel like I'm penalized for not living in the center of town. When the storm hit last week, the internet was out for 30 hours." – **Focus Group Participant, Sheffield Senior Center**

Focus Group: Sheffield

Focus Group #1: Sheffield Council on Aging | 8 participants | Older adults, Affordable housing residents

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Key concerns and needs shared by group:

- Internet subscription costs are too costly
- Lack of knowledge about scams hinders people's feelings of safety online
- Unreliable home service is inhibiting broadband adoption
- Lack of local technical assistance is frustrating

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #1:

- Service quality does not reflect what participants pay.
- Residents do not receive timely restoration of service during weather outages.
- Residents have trouble deciphering whether something is real or a scam on social media.
- Lack of ISP competition leaves residents vulnerable to price increases.

Participants in **Focus Group #1** primarily use the internet for education and general research while a few use it for telehealth. Participants felt their internet service was too expensive for what they receive and did not like having to talk to automated customer service to address their issues. One participant shared that he built his home in a lightly populated area and previously did not have infrastructure to connect to coaxial cable. The participant said Spectrum received a contract to build out the neighborhood but felt the company waited until the last minute to do it. The participant reported his connection as still unreliable, with trees now hanging on wires. The participant said the company has not done enough to maintain the infrastructure to prevent outages.

Recommendations:

- Apply pressure on ISPs to improve customer service.
- Address outages by encouraging people to report them immediately to the ISP responsible and filing complaints for repeat offenses and non-responsiveness to the **Federal Communications Commission**.
- Educate the public about strategies they can use to navigate the internet safely.

"If you bring fiber to somebody's door and they can't afford to pay and can't afford a device they are capable of using, it's a waste of money." - **Focus Group Participant, Stockbridge Library**

Focus Groups: Stockbridge

Focus Group #1 Heaton Court | 6 participants | Older adults, Affordable housing residents

Focus Group #2: Stockbridge Library Museum & Archives | 8 participants | Rural residents

Key concerns and needs shared by both groups:

- Internet subscriptions and computer devices are too expensive
- Cybersecurity and fraud remain major concerns
- People want one-on-one digital support
- High-speed internet and cell phone service are not readily available

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #1:

- The high price of internet subscriptions and devices limits access.
- People need one-on-one support to assist them with troubleshooting connectivity challenges.
- Lack of cell phone service makes it difficult to access the internet.

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

One participant in **Focus Group #1** began using the internet for healthcare during the pandemic. At first he was uncertain accessing services online but eventually found it easier. The individual shared that getting medical care online was helpful because it limits his need to travel. His confidence using the internet increased and he is now looking to attend formal classes online to improve his education. In contrast, other participants felt unsafe online, noting their uncertainty around cybersecurity, affordability, and lack of general knowledge. One attendee, a veteran, visits the VA in person because he "never got into being online," and didn't feel knowledgeable enough to do so. Another avoids online banking because of the potential for fraudulent activity. For others, the biggest barrier to access is cost. One resident lost his ACP enrollment and considered unsubscribing before the Housing Authority negotiated better pricing for him.

Recommendations:

- Provide Heaton Court residents with an IT professional who can help them troubleshoot connectivity problems, learn about online safety, and acquire large-screen devices at an affordable price.
- Work with the VA agent to arrange one-on-one digital literacy help for veterans.

Unique challenges expressed by Focus Group #2:

- Lack of ISP competition puts customers at a disadvantage in terms of pricing and quality of service.
- Keeping up with changes in technology, especially as it relates to cybersecurity and internet scams, is overwhelming.
- Residents prefer one-on-one digital navigation support and device access programs.
- Government oversight is needed to regulate the internet as a utility.

A participant in **Focus Group #2** shared that he works at home and frequently lacks adequate service. The participant noted that his internet provider is not meeting the speeds for which he pays. Others added that prices are consistently rising but service does not improve. The group felt ISPs are not held accountable for cybersecurity failures that happen on their networks. Participants collectively felt customers would benefit from stronger government regulations and oversight of ISPs. Participants recognized that there are gaps in access to devices, services, and education. They noted the library serves as the main digital equity asset in town and could be a home for digital navigation services, device lending, and access for those who need it.

Recommendations:

- Advocate for stronger government regulations and oversight of ISPs.
- Have the library serve as the home for digital navigation, device lending, and access.
- Expand the fiber optic network downtown to reach nearby homes.
- Install after-hours device lending vending machines.
- Promote online training about new and emerging scams and cybersecurity protection strategies.
- Connect tech-savvy people with those who need help to set up home devices or for tech. assistance.
- Develop a local device refurbishment program.

"It seems to me that the rural areas are the ones that need help the most." –
West Stockbridge Town Representative

Town Conversations: West Stockbridge

Town Interviews #1: Council on Aging Director, Library Director, Select Board Members, Vision Committee | 8 interviewees | Rural residents, Older adults

Town Interview #2: **West Stockbridge Historical Society Director, Select Board Member, Town Manager |** 3 interviewees | Rural residents

Key concerns and needs shared by both interviewees:

- Despite a lack of digital equity resources, community members are highly active.
- Town Hall could serve as a critical asset for digital equity due to its use for social gathering and emergency purposes.
- The Historical Society and parking area behind it are well-suited for free public Wi-Fi.

Unique challenges expressed by Interviewees #1:

- The library needs more computer devices and suffers from slow internet service.
- The outdoor space adjacent to the library has the potential to be used for activities/events but needs Wi-Fi.
- Digital equity navigation should be piggybacked with social activities that have strong participation (e.g., knitting group at CoA, artist guild meeting, Zucchini Festival).

Image Credit: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Over the course of the year, the AmeriCorps fellow assigned to West Stockbridge conducted interviews and held one-on-one conversations with town leaders, including the library director, members of the Select Board, and the town's Vision Committee. The ACC fellow learned about a lack of computer devices and hotspots at the library and interest in extending public Wi-Fi to the park that abuts the library. The library shares its internet service with the town and its administration offices and noted that this affects the speeds staff and patrons can access. The West Stockbridge CoA also operates out of Town Hall and conducts activities in conjunction with the town of Richmond. Although the CoA is small, they have a knitting group that serves 10 to 20 people weekly and would be a good setting to host a digital navigator. Town Hall is a multi-use building that serves as the town's emergency shelter and hosts the annual town meeting, artist guild gatherings, and family-friendly events. For this reason, and given that the building's broadband infrastructure was installed by MBI 10 to 15 years ago, this building would benefit from increased broadband capacity. Town leaders also expressed interest in extending the capabilities of service into downtown with a WISP network or connecting the network to a future downtown lighting project.

Recommendations:

- Secure new computer work stations, a printer, and hotspots for the library.
- Increase Wi-Fi speed at the library by exploring separating it from town administrative offices.
- Expand Wi-Fi to the park outside the library and potentially to more of downtown through a WISP network.

Unique challenges expressed by Interviewees #2:

- Monthly ongoing internet service costs for the Historical Society are too expensive for them to pay and nonprofits are not afforded discounted rates.
- The Historical Society should be recognized as a Community Anchor Institution so they could access dedicated 1 Gbps service.
- The space behind the Historical Society is well-situated to offer public space Wi-Fi.

The director of the Historical Society, Town Manager, and a member of the town's Select Board met with a BRPC staff member with the conversation focused on recommendations for digital equity implementation funding. The director of the historical society stated he would like to stream their educational programs and performances to an online audience or be able to connect with audiences via Zoom but cannot because their internet service is borrowed from a store across the street, something they have done for 15 years. He added that when Artist Guild members are in the building to sell merchandise, they have to use their personal hotspots to conduct transactions due to the lack of robust internet. He would love to have fiber reach the building to address these issues but the cost to wire the building is exorbitant and prices for monthly service are estimated at $1100 a year. From there the discussion turned to public Wi-Fi. Participants noted that the parking lot behind the Historical Society is owned by town and is being considered as a future site for EV charging stations and could also make a good site for public space Wi-Fi. Other needs expressed by the Historical Society director included Chromebooks or laptops for the public and a larger screen and projector for public presentations.

Recommendations

Consider engaging a shared or multi-town IT Director to create a digital equity sub-page on town websites, and link to BRPC's Digital Equity Resource Guide in the interim, so residents can find computer and internet-related information focused on common issues such as lower cost internet, cybersecurity tips, and websites offering free digital skills assessments and classes. As time permits, personalize sites to each town by including information about local businesses and nonprofits offering free Wi-Fi access in exchange for patronage.

→ **Town IT Director or Consultant**

Work with **key town partners** to share the services of a **digital navigator** who can travel among towns and targeted sites to assist people 1:1 with tech questions and facilitate small group digital skills classes (e.g., Northstar) to help residents build their digital confidence and skills.

Create a **practical digital workshop series** addressing challenges identified by residents that may not be addressed through general programs like Northstar such as using the internet to apply for benefits, conducting telehealth sessions, booking local transportation, completing online forms, and paying bills and taxes.

Increase the number of hotspots, tablets, Chromebooks, and laptops available at town libraries, especially during summer months when there are more visitors and second homeowners.

→ **Library Directors**
Council on Aging/
Senior Center Directors

Increase the supply chain of refurbished large-screen devices available for free or at low-cost to low-income residents by a) having nonprofits register with Computers4People and nominating people for devices and/or requesting devices through the Alliance for Digital Equity as they become available; b) encouraging local businesses to donate computers to these organizations and asking that they be made available exclusively in Berkshire County; and c) exploring the creation of a Berkshire County-based nonprofit refurbisher through a collaboration between partners such as MassHire, BCC, 1Berkshire, Berkshire Innovation Center, United Way, and local corporations and banks.

Schedule quarterly digital equity Zoom sessions with CoA directors, librarians, nonprofit program staff, and school leaders to convey information about digital resources available to residents such as programs to reduce monthly internet bills or digital skills training to increase job readiness.

Help housing authority leaders create mini-computer labs in common rooms through the purchase of a desktop computer and printer.

Provide food pantries with the BRPC Digital Equity Resource Guide to distribute when people come for pick-ups. Explore opportunities for an occasional digital navigator to assist clients 1:1 with tech-related questions preceding or following distribution.

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.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Identify subcontractor actor who can serve as a municipal digital equity manager / navigator to provide services in all six towns.	Identify a representative from each town, or work with BRPC, to draft a job description for an individual to oversee and run digital equity activities in multiple towns. Post the job and interview applicants. Hire a candidate and have them plan, implement, and measure outcomes of digital equity activities. This role would be similar to a shared inter-municipal position.	Town Managers	1 year	**AARP Community Challenge Grant**; **Alliance for Digital Equity**, Bank Foundations (Various); **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation**; **Berkshire United Way**: **MBI Digital Equity Implementation**; **Milltown Capital**; **Rural Health Care Services Outreach Program**
All (Great Barrington, Lee)	Help Veterans' Agents perform their duties while managing ongoing costs.	Cover the cost of Veterans Agents' annual fax machine fees so agents can help vets fax paperwork to the VA.	Veterans Agents	1 year	MBI Digital Equity Implementation; U.S. Veterans Administration
All	Participate in the monthly Alliance for Digital Equity to stay up to date with best practices in the digital equity ecosystem.	Have town and agency staff (library, CoA) rotate in the role of attending Alliance Zoom meetings and report back to the Select Board.	Town Representatives (various)	Immediately – ongoing	Existing municipal funding

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.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Provide more support for IT Directors and educators.	Encourage schools to work with Berkshire Funding Focus to find computer science and IT-related funding. Set aside time for teachers to learn to use technology to its fullest. Work with a DESE Educational IT Tech consultant to analyze software use in schools to ensure best practices.	Berkshire Superintendent's Roundtable; School principals and librarians	2 years	See **Berkshire Funding Focus; DESE Engage Grant**
All	Improve security at schools and for students.	Bring in an outside security consultant to help IT Directors better protect their servers and networks.	IT Directors	1-2 years	**FCC Schools and Libraries Cybersecurity Pilot Program**

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.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Identify a viable affordable housing property or low-income community in each town whose residents and leadership are interested in piloting in-unit Wi-Fi and are willing to measure pre- and post-outcomes.	Organize a meeting of housing authority leaders. Survey residents to identify interest in in-unit access. Finalize the selection of a pilot site where at least 15 households will benefit. Engage the services of a technology consultant to determine design, logistics, and costs. Conduct pre- and post-interviews or surveys of residents to document the impact of the technology on their lives.	Housing Authorities; Mill Pond Trailer Park; Optional: Construct, Inc., Hearthway	1-1.5 years	**HUD-CDBG**; **Community Compact IT Grant Program**; **MBI Residential Retrofit**; MBI Digital Equity Implementation
All	Increase the availability of hotspots to lend for those who cannot afford internet at home following the end of ACP.	Create an in-state hotspot lending program focused on Covered Populations.	Libraries	1.5-2 years	**AARP Foundation; Mass. Library Board of Commissioners**

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.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Increase the number of large-screen computer devices available at public libraries.	Secure large-screen devices and hotspots requested by town libraries to ensure a range of devices suitable for users of all ages and abilities.	Libraries	1 year	Alliance for Digital Equity; MBI Digital Equity Implementation
All	Help senior centers secure 1-2 Claris tablets or similar devices for seniors who lack devices so that they can try to take AARP OATS classes.	Contact Claris or use the **State's contract vendor database** to determine if a bulk rate can be obtained to buy a minimum of 10 devices.	Senior Centers	1 year	**AARP Community Challenge Grant 2025**; MBI Digital Equity Implementation

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.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Increase access to free public Wi-Fi in popular public locations for people who lack home service and/or in case of emergencies	Identify a central location in each town suitable for free public Wi-Fi.	Town Government	1-2 years	Alliance for Digital Equity; Chambers of Commerce; Community Compact; MBI Digital Equity Implementation

Connectivity for Economic Hardship

Provision of Wi-Fi cellular hotspots to individuals lacking stable housing where they are unable to have a fixed broadband internet subscription.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Ensure that people lacking housing and people in transitional housing (recovery centers; formerly incarcerated) have access to the internet.	Hold a once- or twice-annual convening of substance use providers, transitional housing managers, parole officers, librarians, and others serving this population and leaders from these populations themselves to articulate their needs and for organizations to find ways to seek funding to accommodate them.	2nd Street, Second Chances, Brien Center, Habitat for Humanity	1-2 years	Nonprofit philanthropies (**Barr Foundation**, **Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund**)

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, a-synchronous online instruction, or one-on-one training.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding and Resource Sources
All	Prioritize older adults for digital literacy using approaches that have proven successful.	Provide CoAs/Senior Centers with older-adult friendly devices. Pilot intergenerational digital literacy one-on-one support and classes modeled after Teens Teach Tech.	Senior Centers	1 year	MBI Digital Equity Implementation; **AARP Community Challenge Grant**; **Alliance for Digital Equity**; **Create-Center** (Skill Questionnaires) **GLUU Society**; **National Digital Inclusion Alliance; Berkshire United Way Volunteer Center**; **Berkshire Taconic Foundation - Equity Fund (BIPOC / New World Fund - Immigrants**)
	Increase the ability of people with disabilities (PWD) to fully participate in civic life.	Educate staff at non-PWD-specific organizations about where to direct PWD for free and low-cost classes. Evaluate town websites for Web accessibility.	Nonprofit agencies; Town IT Directors	1-2 years	
	Increase BIPOC residents' awareness of and participation in digital literacy classes.	Partner with local BIPOC-serving organizations when planning digital equity activities. Actively work to recruit and train BIPOC digital navigators.	NAACP, Blackshires, Berkshire Black Economic Council, Latinas413, Railroad Street Collective, Volunteers in Medicine (VIM)	1 year	
	Increase immigrants' and ELL's awareness of and participation in digital literacy classes.	Host Northstar and/or other digital literacy classes in students' native languages at locations where they feel safe.	BCC, VIM, Literacy Volunteers, Railroad Street Collective	1 year	

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, a-synchronous online instruction, or one-on-one training.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Increase participation in adult digital literacy classes for post-high school and mid-career adults looking to upskill.	Find non-traditional locations to offer computer classes related to workforce development with the reward of a large-screen device for those who complete courses. Provide micro-credentials or certificates to those who complete classes.	CDC of South Berkshire, Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, MassHire, BCC	1-2 years	MBI Digital Equity Implementation; United Way
Great Barrington; Lee	Help vets take advantage of services through the VA by increasing their digital skillls and confidence.	Survey vets' interest in digital literacy support at home or in congregate settings. Focus classes on practical skills such as workforce development and accessing #VAResources online. Include funding for transportation so vets can travel to classes.	Veterans Agents	1-2 years	MBI Digital Equity Implementation; **MyHealtheVet, #VAResources,**
Great Barrington	Support formerly incarcerated adults improve their digital skills to reduce recidivism and expand economic opportunity.	Explore with 2nd Street, Second Chances establishing a satellite at The Guthrie Center for remote classes with formerly incarcerated adults.	Berkshire Center for Justice; The Guthrie Center; 2nd Street Second Chances	1-2 years	MBI Digital Equity Implementation; United Way

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, a-synchronous online instruction, or one-on-one training.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Increase parents' facility with online access to their children's school records.	Have school librarians host a how-to virtual webinar for parents regarding accessing school records at the beginning and mid-way through the school year.	School librarians	1-2 years	**DESE Grants**

Device Distribution and Refurbishment

Provision of new or used internet-connected devices, such as laptops, tablets, and smart phones, to distribute to target populations.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Increase the ability of PWD to take full advantage of the internet.	Invite representatives from UCP to present at libraries on their assistive technology offerings.	Libraries	1 year	MBI Digital Equity Implementation
All	Help low-income residents who have lost their ACP benefit find new ways to access internet service.	Expand hotspot lending at libraries for those forced to end their internet service following the ending of ACP.	Libraries	1 year	MBI Digital Equity Implementation; Alliance for Digital Equity
Great Barrington	Bring more devices into the community through a workforce development model.	Pilot a workforce-focused device refurbishment and digital skills program with formerly incarcerated adults.	Berkshire Center for Justice; Guthrie Center	1-2 years	MBI Digital Equity Implementation: Alliance for Digital Equity

Education, Outreach, and Adoption

Provision of outreach and engagement activities, as well as digital navigation services, designed to increase success of digital equity programming, including awareness and adoption of lower cost internet options, digital literacy programs, devices access and Wi-Fi or hotspot connectivity.

Town(s)	Strategy	Activities to Support the Strategy	Lead Entity to Implement	Estimated Timeline	Potential Funding Sources
All	Seek alternatives to ACP for low-income residents.	Ensure town leaders and social service organizations stay apprised of and, to the extent possible, participate in statewide advocacy to develop a Massachusetts version of ACP. Have nonprofits working with low-income residents work together to develop a flyer to educate clients about lower-cost but slower internet plans and how to negotiate with ISPs for reduced monthly bills.	Librarians, CoA Directors, Nonprofit leaders	1-2 years	Alliance for Digital Equity

Future Funding Opportunities

In addition to the funding recommendations provided previously, the chart below goes into further detail about grants town leaders and stakeholders can pursue to meet unmet challenges. The list of grants is not exhaustive, and some may not be available until 2025. Leaders should also stay apprised of BRPC's **Berkshire Funding Focus** website for notifications of federal and state grants and learn how to use the **Candid Foundation Directory** at the Berkshire Athenaeum to search for federal, state, and philanthropic grants not included.

NATIONAL		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Rural Healthcare Connect Program	This program seeks to improve the quality of healthcare available to patients in rural communities by ensuring eligible healthcare providers have access to telecommunications and broadband.	Berkshire Medical Center
AARP 2025 Community Challenge Grants	AARP Community Challenge grants change every year in their foci. For March 2025, the grant can be used to support the following: • Capacity-building microgrants such as one-on-one coaching from national nonprofit organizations, webinars, and cohort learning opportunities. • Flagship grants support projects that improve public places including digital connections and community resilience.	Nonprofits

STATE		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Community Compact IT Grant Program	A competitive grant program focused on driving innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology. Grants of up to $200,000 support the implementation of innovative IT projects by funding related one-time capital needs such as technology infrastructure or software. Incidental or one-time costs related to the capital purchase such as planning, design, installation, implementation and initial training are eligible.	Town Leaders
DESE – Computer Science Engage Grant	This continuation grant aims to establish and promote rigorous, engaging, and standards-aligned digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) education in public schools for kindergarten through grade 12. This grant supports the creation of new programs and/or expansion of existing programs to serve more students who are the most underserved (including but not limited to students designated as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, special education, underrepresented minorities, underrepresented females, and those living in rural areas).	Public Schools
DESE - Middle School Career Connected Learning Partnership Grant	This competitive grant aims to assist school districts in planning and developing a career-connected learning model for middle school students. Activities and projects will be developed to support students as they discover their personal interests, skills, talents, and passions, explore careers that align with those attributes, and engage in meaningful experiences to deepen their learning. The model will help students see the relevance of their academic learning as they begin exploring careers and understand all the potential learning opportunities and pathway options that will be available when they transition to high school.	Public Schools
MassBoard of Library Commissioners (MBLC)	The Open Program allows applicants to apply new methods to solve problems, build programs, and best conduct their library's mission and plan. It encourages creative program development and rewards those librarians willing to engage in a higher level of effort and to take those risks. The federal LSTA program encourages such innovation and risk-taking.	Town Libraries

STATE		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Massachusetts Councils on Aging Grant & Funding Resources	As the voice of older adults in Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) champions policies and programs that enhance the well-being of older adults and strengthen the capacity of local Councils on Aging (COAs). Through advocacy, collaboration, and resource sharing, MCOA ensures that older adults have access to the services and support they need to thrive in their communities.	Councils on Aging
Mass Cyber Center Cyber Resilient Massachusetts Grant Program	Municipalities in Massachusetts are eligible to receive a one-time grant of up to $25,000 to support cybersecurity improvements based on a vulnerability assessment conducted by a qualified provider. Respondents may apply grant funding towards the cost of vendors to implement the cybersecurity improvements or IT-related staff costs of the municipality performing the services in lieu of using a vendor.	Municipal Leaders
MassLINKS — Adult Education Virtual School (DESE)	Recruits, intakes, orients, enrolls, instructs, assesses, advises, offers supportive services to, and posts exit follow-up for adult learners not served by programs currently funded by Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) and/or whose need for services is not met by programs currently funded by ACLS. All services must be delivered virtually. This grant could be accessed to address the needs of out-of-school adult learners.	Local educational agencies; Community-based or Faith-based organizations; Volunteer literacy organizations; Institutions of higher education; Public or private nonprofits
Municipal Fiber Grant Program	A competitive grant program that will support the closing of critical gaps that exist in municipal networks. The provision of fiber in communities allows for centralized management of IT infrastructure, including an enterprise approach to network monitoring, cybersecurity, records management, and backup and recovery. A key provision of this grant program is that the fiber must be owned by the municipality.	Municipalities

PHILANTHROPIC		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund Trust	This Mass-based foundation has made grants to 221 organizations, nearly all in the state, since 2018. Among their foci are health, human services, and public safety. They have made no grants in the Berkshires but 12 in neighboring counties totaling over $1.7M.	Nonprofits
Berkshire Bank Foundation Inc.	The foundation supports organizations involved with arts and culture, environmental education, employment, housing, mentoring, human services, immigrant advocacy, military and veterans, and economically disadvantaged people. Special emphasis is directed toward programs designed to promote education and community economic development.	Nonprofits
Corporation for Public Broadcasting	CPB provides funding for the development of public media television, radio, and digital content as well as multi-platform projects that reflect public media's mission to educate, inform and inspire the American public by providing stories through diverse perspectives, genres, styles and technologies.	Community TV
Donald C McGraw Foundation, Inc. *__No website__	This funder has awarded 36 grants in Berkshire County since 2018, including to Hillcrest Educational Centers, Berkshire Education and Correction Services, and Berkshire Medical Center. They can be approached for telehealth grants.	Berkshire Education and Correction Services, Berkshire Medical Center, Hillcrest Education Center
Feigenbaum Foundation	Based in Pittsfield, they have awarded 303 grants in Berkshire County since 2018, including to The Berkshire Museum, Berkshire Taconic Foundation, and Community Access to the Arts. Among their foci are education, arts, and human services. This funder could support youth digital literacy through the arts.	Nonprofits
Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund	A Boston-based philanthropy that has awarded 321 grants in the Berkshires since 2018, including to 18 Degrees, Berkshire United Way, and Berkshire Taconic. Among their foci are education and human services, which dovetail into digital equity.	Nonprofits
Jane and Jack Fitzpatrick Trust	The Jane & Jack Fitzpatrick Trust makes capital grants and project grants that are important to the mission of the applying nonprofit. The Trust will consider matching challenge grants where appropriate. The Fitzpatrick Trust is particularly interested in offering support to projects that deliver positive economic results to the community.	Community TV, Nonprofits

PHILANTHROPIC		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Mountain One Community Dividend Grants	Funding preference is given to organizations or specific not-for-profit programs that support small businesses or low- to moderate-income individuals and families. Qualified 501(c)3 organizations may apply once annually for funding from Mountain One in support of programs and projects that directly impact our local communities and customers.	Nonprofits
Pittsfield Co-op Charitable Donations	Since 1889, Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has been committed to enhancing the economic vitality and social welfare of the communities we serve through charitable donations. A major focus of their charitable giving is directed towards education, youth programs, and community development.	Nonprofits
Point32Health Foundation	Point32Health Foundation supports work to advance equity in aging—prioritizing efforts that address systemic inequities. We invest in nonprofit organizations centering community-led solutions that address systemic inequities. We give grants in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.	Councils on Aging
Spectrum Digital Education Grant	Spectrum Digital Education grants support nonprofits whose work includes digital skills training, professional advancement opportunities, and technology and resources needed for education.	Nonprofits
Vanguard Charitable Philanthropic Impact Fund	The Philanthropic Impact Fund (PIF) issues grants to nonprofits through a competitive RFP process ranging from $30,000-$50,000. Requests can be for full or partial funding.	Nonprofits

Glossary

Bandwidth
The rate at which a network can transmit information. Higher bandwidth is typically more desirable. The amount of bandwidth available can determine whether a user can download a photo in two seconds or two minutes.

Broadband Equity
A condition in which all people and communities can access and use affordable, high-speed, reliable internet that meets their needs. Broadband can be delivered over wire (i.e., fiber or cable) or wirelessly (i.e., cellular). The FCC recently set the new speed of high-speed broadband at 1100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. Some fiber providers have proposed even higher speeds of 100/100 symmetrical Mbps.

Digital Divide
The gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous people, low-income households, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

Digital Equity
A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, life-long learning, and access to essential services. Equity acknowledges the systemic barriers that must be dismantled before achieving equality for all.

Digital Inclusion
Refers to the activities necessary to ensure all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) including five elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; and 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration. Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to technology access and use.

Digital Inclusion Ecosystem
A combination of programs and policies that meet a geographic community's unique and diverse needs. Coordinating entities work together in an ecosystem to address all aspects of the digital divide, including affordable broadband, devices, and skills.

Digital Literacy
The ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information requires both cognitive and technical skills.

Digital Navigator
Trusted guides who assist community members around internet adoption and use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

Digital Redlining
Discrimination by internet service providers in the deployment, maintenance, or upgrade of infrastructure or delivery of services based on income, race, or ethnicity.

Digital Subscriber Line (DSL)
The technology used to provide high-speed internet using telephone networks.

Fiber Optic
A system that uses glass or plastic to carry light that is used to transmit information. Typically, each side of a fiber strand is attached to a laser that sends light signals. When the connection reaches capacity, the lasers can be upgraded to send more information along the same strand. Fiber technology has been used for decades and will remain the dominant method of transmitting information for the near future.

Fixed Wireless
A connectivity model that uses stationary wireless technology to bridge the "last mile" between the internet backbone and subscriber.

Hotspot
A physical location that offers internet access over a wireless local area network (LAN) through use of a router connected to an internet service provider.

Gap Network
A network — usually fixed wireless or Long-Term Evolution (LTE) — deployed quickly and at comparatively low cost to address immediate connectivity in a small area. Many gap networks were launched at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Internet Service Provider (ISP)
An Internet Service Provider is a company that provides services to access and use the internet.

Last Mile
The final leg of a connection between an internet service provider and the customer. In DSL and cable systems, this is the most frequent bottleneck and most expensive to resolve. An ISP may run a faster fiber- optic network into the neighborhood but deliver the last mile (which may be far away) with a phone line that cannot sustain fast speeds.

Megabits (Mbps)
A measure of speed in which 8 Mbps means that 8 million bits of information are transferred each second. Using an 8 Mbps connection, it would take one second to transfer a 1 Mbps file such as a photo. More Mbps are faster. One Kbps (Kilobits) is less than 1 Mbps, which is less than 1 Gbps (Gigabits).

Middle Mile
The network connection between the last mile and the broader internet. For instance, in a rural area, the middle mile connects the town's network to a larger metropolitan area where it connects with major carriers.

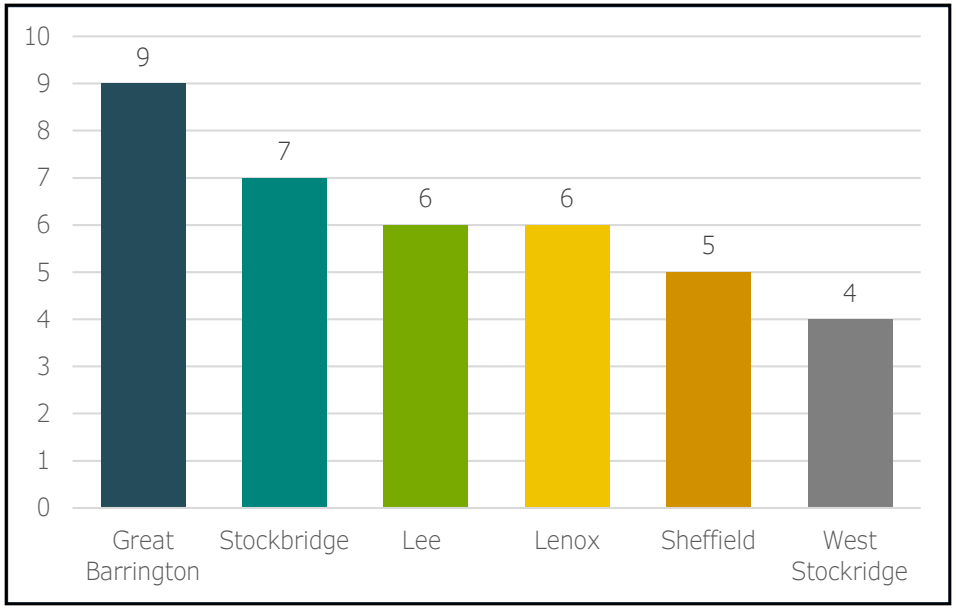
Wi-Fi
Networking technology that allows computers and other devices to access the internet using a wireless signal.

Appendices

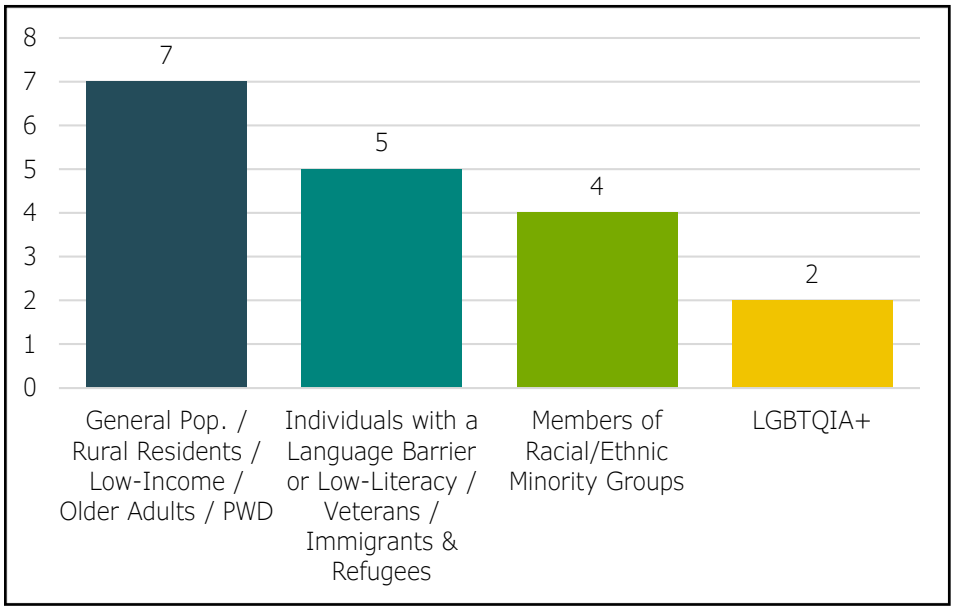
Appendix 1: Community Assets on MBI's Digital Equity Asset Inventory

The tables and charts below highlights the 14 organizations unique to the six towns, based on their having listed the municipality as one where they are based or serve.

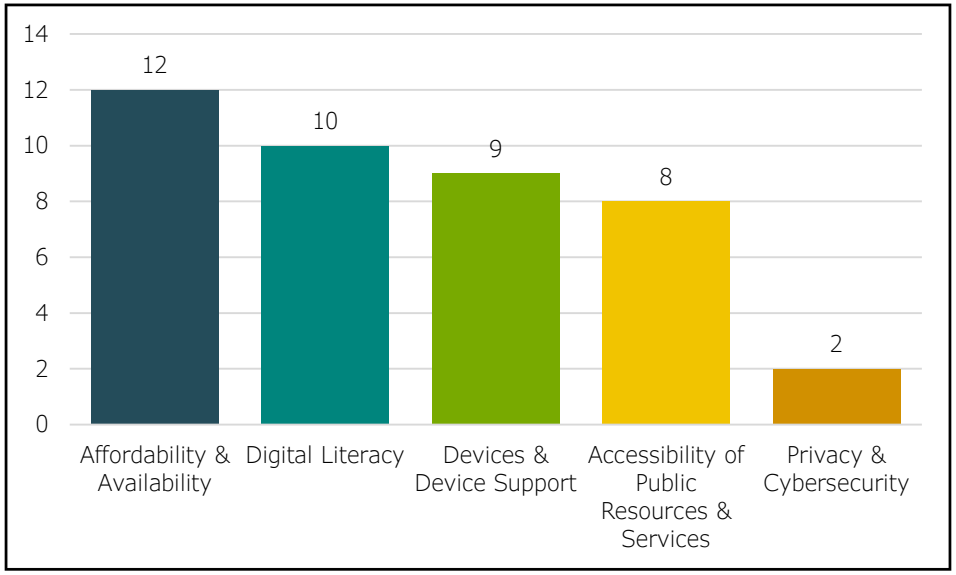
of Organizations Providing Digital Equity Services Per Town



Covered Populations Served by # of Organizations



Type of Service Provided by # of Organizations



Organizations Serving the Six Towns: Details

Organization Name	Towns Served	Covered Populations Served	Service Type
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge	Residents of Rural Areas, Aging Individuals (60 and older)	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy
Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation	Sheffield	General - All Covered Populations	Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy
Bushnell-Sage Library	Great Barrington, Sheffield	General - All Covered Populations	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support, Digital Literacy, Privacy & Cybersecurity

CanCode Communities	Great Barrington, Lee, Stockbridge	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Aging Individuals (60 and older), Veterans, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Residents of Rural Areas, Members of Racial/ Ethnic Minority Groups, Women,Youth, Immigrants/Refugees, Individuals with Disabilities,General - All Covered Populations	Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support, Digital Literacy, Privacy & Cybersecurity
Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity	Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Aging Individuals (60 and older), Veterans, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Members of Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups, Residents of Rural Areas, Women, Immigrants/Refugees	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support
Clinical & Support Options	Great Barrington	Individuals with Disabilities, Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level)	Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy, Devices & Device Support
Community Television for the Southern Berkshires // Lee Public Library // Literacy Network of South Berkshire	Lee	General - All Covered Populations // Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Veterans, Individuals with Disabilities, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Residents of Rural Areas, Members of Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups, Women, Aging Individuals (60 and older), LGBTQIA+ Individuals, Youth, Immigrants/Refugees, Members of Religious Minority Groups, Incarcerated Individuals (in non-Federal facilities) // Immigrants/Refugees, Individuals with Disabilities, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Residents of Rural Areas	Digital Literacy // Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support, Digital Literacy // Digital Literacy

Great Barrington Veterans of Foreign Wars	Great Barrington, Sheffield, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge	General - All Covered Populations, Aging Individuals (60 and older), Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Individuals with Disabilities, Residents of Rural Areas, Veterans	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Digital Literacy
Hillcrest Educational Foundations	Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level),Youth, Individuals with Disabilities	Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy
Lenox Library	Lenox	Residents of Rural Areas	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support
Life Needs Coop, Inc. // Town of Great Barrington	Great Barrington	Individuals with Disabilities // General - All Covered Populations	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Digital Literacy // Affordability & Availability
Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County	Lenox, Stockbridge	Immigrants/Refugees, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy)	Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support
MOLARI Employment and Healthcare Services	Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge	Aging Individuals (60 and older)	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Devices & Device Support, Digital Literacy
Stockbridge Library Association	Stockbridge	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Aging Individuals (60 and older), Veterans, Individuals with Disabilities, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Residents of Rural Areas, Members of Religious Minority Groups, Women, LGBTQIA+ Individuals,Youth, Immigrants/Refugees, Members of Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Devices & Device Support

Appendix 2: Representative Businesses in Sectors Requiring Digital Skills

Town: Great Barrington / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
Accord Engineering & Surveying, LLC	4	Engineering Services
American Institute For Economic Research	25	Research and Development in the Physical, Engineering, and Life Sciences (except Nanotechnology and Biotechnology)
American Investment Services Inc.	5	Portfolio Management and Investment Advice
Ark Media, Inc.	4	Custom Computer Programming Services
Berkshire Community Land Trust Inc.	4	Trust, Fiduciary, and Custody Activities
Berkshire Corporation	30	Textile and Fabric Finishing Mills
Berkshire International Film	4	Motion Picture and Video Production
Berkshire Publishing Group, LLC	10	Book Publishers
Berkshire Waldorf High School Inc.	21	Graphic Design Services
Bilmar Veterinary Services LLC	7	Veterinary Services
Blueline Design Inc.	6	Motion Picture and Video Production
Bola, Inc.	5	Supermarkets and Other Grocery Retailers (except Convenience Retailers)
C & S Lawn Care, Inc.	4	Landscaping Services
Churchill & Company LLC	4	Other Management Consulting Services
Clark & Green, Inc.	6	Architectural Services
Cohen Kinne Valicenti Cook	20	Offices of Lawyers
Community Development Corporation Of South Berkshire, Inc.	9	Other Scientific and Technical Consulting Services
Community Growth Partners Great Barrington Operations LLC	15	Custom Computer Programming Services
Destination Design Center, LLC	4	Other Specialized Design Services
gShips LLC	4	All Other Support Services
H D L Inc.	5	Sewing, Needlework, and Piece Goods Retailers
Hellman & Shearn	8	Offices of Lawyers
Hellman, David N ATTY	4	Offices of Lawyers
Housatonic Water Works Company	4	Water Supply and Irrigation Systems
Jess Cooney Interiors, Inc.	8	Interior Design Services
Kelly, Granger, Parsons & Associates, Inc.	6	Surveying and Mapping (except Geophysical) Services

Town: Great Barrington / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
Ksn Energies, LLC	4	Research and Development in the Physical, Engineering, and Life Sciences (except Nanotechnology and Biotechnology)
Lamme and Linscott Law Office	4	Offices of Lawyers
Law Offices Of Scott A Sanes	6	Offices of Lawyers
Lazan Glover & Puciloski	4	Offices of Lawyers
Mason Library	8	Libraries and Archives
McCormick, Murtagh & Marcus	10	Offices of Lawyers
Neonet Technologies, Inc.	5	Research and Development in the Physical, Engineering, and Life Sciences (except Nanotechnology and Biotechnology)
Noble View Insurance Of Massachusetts LLC	7	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages
Okerstrom-Lang, Ltd.	5	Landscape Architectural Services
Organization Ink, Inc.	5	Other Accounting Services
Rising Son International, Ltd.	6	Record Production and Distribution
Smith Watson & Co	1	Offices of Certified Public Accountants
Southern Berkshire Janitorial Services Inc.	10	Janitorial Services
Southern Berkshire Shoppers Guide, Inc.	4	All Other Publishers
St. James Place, Inc.	4	Marketing Research and Public Opinion Polling
Tall Tree Productions, Inc.	5	Graphic Design Services
Tasha Polizzi	4	Apparel Accessories and Other Apparel Manufacturing
The Mike Jaffe Company	5	Human Resources Consulting Services
The Orion Society Inc.	13	Periodical Publishers
The Triplex Cinema, Inc.	6	Motion Picture Theaters (except Drive-Ins)
Tom Whalen Inc.	4	Landscape Architectural Services
Triplex Management Corporation, Inc.	4	Motion Picture Theaters (except Drive-Ins)
Troy's Travel Agency, Inc.	5	Travel Agencies
Universal Family Insurance	4	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages
Warrior Trading, Inc.	11	Software Publishers
Weston Associates	6	Portfolio Management and Investment Advice
Wheeler & Taylor, Inc.	27	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages
Wingate Furniture Company, Ltd.	8	Interior Design Services
Zenn New Media LLC	5	Custom Computer Programming Services

Town: Lee / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
Berkshire Greenscapes	4	Landscape Architectural Services
Berkshire Powertech Inc.	8	Engineering Services
Berkshire Wireless Corp.	8	Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite)
Boyd Biomedical Inc.	47	Industrial and Personal Service Paper Merchant Wholesalers
Deely & Deely Attorneys	4	Offices of Lawyers
Entrepid Corporation	8	Computer Systems Design Services
Excelsior Integrated Inc.	5	Marketing Consulting Services
Fairview Associates Limited Partnership	4	Administrative Management and General Management Consulting Services
Frank Consolati Insurance Agency Inc.	4	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages
GL and V	5	All Other Support Services
Hunter and Graziano PC	4	Offices of Lawyers
Jms Investments Inc.	8	Veterinary Services
Katie's Landscaping	4	Landscape Architectural Services
Kidsart Productions Inc.	4	Motion Picture and Video Distribution
L V Toole Insurance Agency Inc.	14	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages
Lee Bank	34	Mortgage and Nonmortgage Loan Brokers
Lee Healthcare	6	Employment Placement Agencies
Lee Land Trust Inc.	4	Trust Fiduciary and Custody Activities
Lee Library Association	8	Libraries and Archives
Limelight Productions Inc.	8	All Other Consumer Goods Rental
Phase Four LLC	5	Other Specialized Design Services
Robert Healey Jr.	5	All Other Support Services
Scheurer Consulting Engineers	4	Engineering Services
Tetrad Lee Management LLC	4	Office Administrative Services
Toole Lawrence V. Insurance Agency	13	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages

Town: Lenox / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
16sur20 Management LLC	8	Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing (except Contractors)
A M Estate Management	5	Office Administrative Services
Allegrone Construction Co. Inc.	24	Commercial and Institutional Building Construction
Arc Investment Planning and Management	7	Portfolio Management and Investment Advice
Berkshire Fiduciary Group PLLC	12	Trust Fiduciary and Custody Activities
Council on Employee Benefits	17	Human Resources Consulting Services
D. F. Lane Landscaping Inc.	3	Landscape Architectural Services
Doherty & Stuart PC	4	Offices of Certified Public Accountants
Excelsior	40	Computing Infrastructure Providers Data Processing Web Hosting and Related Services
Executive Staffing LLC	5	Executive Search Services
Eye Patch Productions LLC	4	Motion Picture and Video Distribution
Groupe 16sur20 LLC	2	Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing (except Contractors)
Heller & Robbins Attorneys at Law	9	Offices of Lawyers
Keator Group LLC	4	Investment Banking and Securities Intermediation
Kueber Communications LLC	5	All Other Telecommunications
Kwi North American Corporation	1	Other Specialized Design Services
Lane Asset Management	4	Portfolio Management and Investment Advice
Lawrence V. Toole Insurance	6	Insurance Agencies and Brokerages
Lenox Library Association	9	Libraries and Archives
Lenox National Bank	2	Commercial Banking
Mark Smith Design	6	Architectural Services
Media Frequencies LLC	4	All Other Telecommunications
New Energy Solutions Inc.	5	Engineering Services
Renaissance Investment Group	4	Portfolio Management and Investment Advice
Thistle - Doo Development Inc.	5	Other Services to Buildings and Dwellings
Toole Management Inc.	5	Office Administrative Services
Your Color Connection Inc.	5	Commercial Printing (except Screen and Books)

Town: Sheffield / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
Aquatic Designs Inc.	15	All Other Specialty Trade Contractors
Bushnell-Sage Memorial Library	5	Libraries and Archives
Country Landscape Inc.	4	Landscape Architectural Services
Don Hadders Ltd.	6	Broadwoven Fabric Mills
Impact Entrepreneur LLC	4	Administrative Management and General Management Consulting Services
Johnston Enterprises Inc.	5	Commercial Screen Printing
The Eagle Fund	6	Open-End Investment Funds
Tomich Landscape Design & Construction Inc.	11	Landscape Architectural Services

Town: Stockbridge / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
Mungy LLC	10	All Other Telecommunications
Pilling Landscaping Inc.	6	Landscape Architectural Services
Sandler Pamela Architect	5	Architectural Services
Stockbridge Library Association	7	Libraries and Archives

Town: West Stockbridge / Companies	Employees (Single Site)	NAICS 2022 Description
Astore Quarry Restoration Incorporated	5	Research and Development in the Social Sciences and Humanities
Atlas Capital Holding LLC	4	Miscellaneous Intermediation
Bwfj Limited Liability Company	4	Direct Property and Casualty Insurance Carriers
Helia Land Design Inc.	8	Landscape Architectural Services
Pressman Design Studio	4	Interior Design Services

Appendix 3: Occupation Projections: Berkshire County 2022-2032

Occupation	Employment 2020	Employment 2030	% Change	Typical Education for Entry	2022 Mean Annual Wage	Estimated Digital Skills
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	2,646	3,040	14.89%	High school diploma or equiv.	$36,591	Low
Retail Salespersons	1,727	2,248	30.16%	No formal educational credential	$36,396	Low
Fast Food and Counter Workers	1,305	1,936	48.35%	Less than high school	$32,837	Low
General and Operations Managers	**1,478**	**1,894**	**28.14%**	**Bachelor's degree**	**$113,430**	**Medium-High**
Registered Nurses	**1,421**	**1,469**	**3.37%**	**Bachelor's degree**	**$94,794**	**Medium**
Cashiers	1,366	1,326	-2.92%	No formal educational credential	$32,704	Low
Cooks, Restaurant	556	1,108	99.28%	No formal educational credential	$39,259	Low
Waiters and Waitresses	676	1,086	60.65%	No formal educational credential	$37,531	Low
Landscaping and Grounds-keeping Wrkr	732	1,045	42.75%	No formal educational credential	$42,586	Low
Nursing Assistants	929	957	3.01%	Postsecondary non-degree award	$38,621	Low-Medium
Office Clerks, General	869	924	6.32%	High school diploma or equiv.	$43,401	Low-Medium
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales	808	888	9.90%	High school diploma or equiv.	$52,575	Low-Medium
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaner	719	883	22.80%	No formal educational credential	$38,562	Low
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	642	874	36.13%	No formal educational credential	$36,828	Low
Bookkeeping, Accounting, & Auditing Clerks	788	854	8.37%	Some college, no degree	$50,081	Medium
Customer Service Representatives	770	837	8.70%	High school diploma or equiv.	$42,049	Low
Construction Laborers	619	795	28.43%	No formal educational credential	$53,874	Low
Maintenance and Repair Wrkrs	588	763	29.76%	High school diploma or equiv.	$50,268	Low
Stockers and Order Fillers	635	713	12.28%	Less than high school	$36,869	Low-Medium
First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support	631	695	10.14%	High school diploma or equiv.	$62,965	Low-Medium
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	**679**	**687**	**1.17%**	**Bachelor's degree**	**$68,930**	**Medium**
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	644	649	0.77%	Some college, no degree	$38,097	Low-Medium

Source: https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/LMI/LongTermOccupationProjections/LTOPResult?A=15&GA=000001&Cmd=Go&Type=long&Dopt=TEXT

Appendix 4: Technology Needs of Farmers in the South Region of Berkshire County (Survey Responses)

In what town is your farm located?	Do you own or use a desktop or laptop computer?	Do you have internet access at your farm?	"Do you purchase agricultural inputs over the internet?"	Do you conduct agricultural marketing activities over the internet?	Do you have any current or future technology needs? Select all that apply.	What technology support or knowledge would be most helpful to you?
Gt. Barrington	Laptop	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Gt. Barrington	Laptop	Yes	Yes	Yes	Using the internet for marketing and promotion incl. social media, Learning about farmer technology grants and funding	Technology use for automating systems like irrigation, fans, opening and closing high tunnel, remote sensors for temp and humidity data
Gt. Barrington	Laptop	Yes	Yes	Yes	Learning about farmer technology grants and funding	
Sheffield	Both Desktop and Laptop	Yes	Yes	Yes	Newer desktop, laptop, or tablet", "How to use technology such as drones, robotics, sensors, precision agriculture, lasers, etc.", Learning about farmer technology grants and funding	Okay without these
Sheffield	Laptop	No	Yes	Yes	Newer desktop, laptop, or tablet	Automated irrigation run via internet or satellite