Town of Monterey Digital Equity Plan

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

March 7, 2025

BRPC
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

MBI
MASSACHUSETTS
BROADBAND INSTITUTE
at the MassTech
Collaborative

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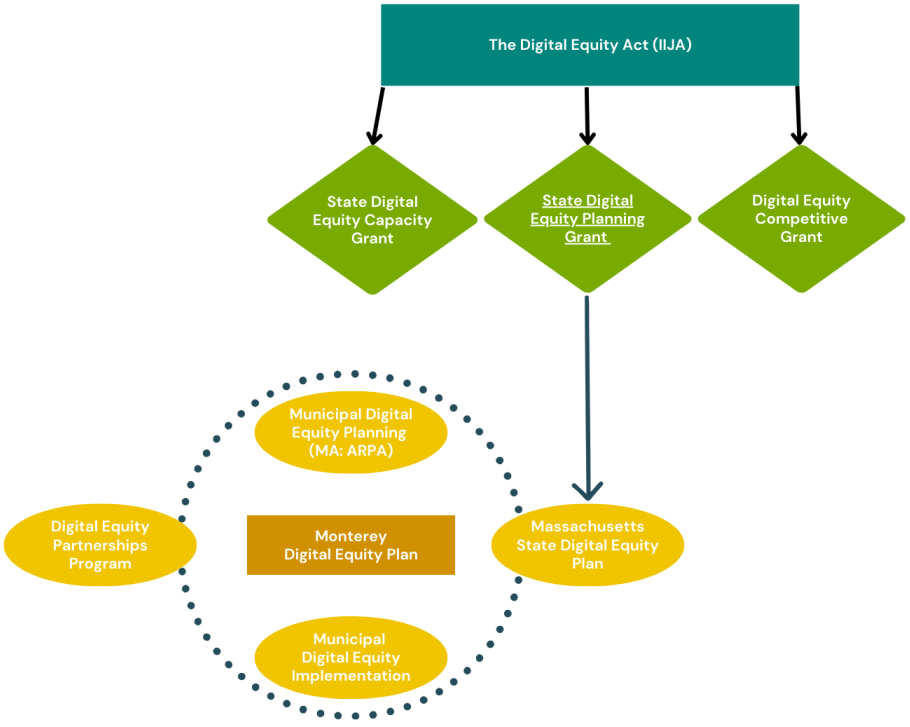
INTRODUCTION

In June 2024, the town of Monterey embarked on a journey to address the digital needs of its residents. To do so, town leaders and stakeholders explored residents' access to broadband service; their ability to afford internet and computer devices; and their confidence developing skills to navigate the online world. The project concluded with a digital equity charrette, or community engagement workshop, and this digital equity mini-plan.

What is "Digital Equity"?

Digital Equity is a condition in which all people have the opportunities and skills to access the internet and digital devices, allowing them to fully participate in society – *National Digital Inclusion Alliance*

The town selected the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), the county's regional planning agency, to lead the charrette. The work involved gathering quantitative data from publicly available sources such as the American Community Survey (ACS), Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Federal Communication Commission; administering a statewide *Internet for All* survey; interviewing community leaders and residents about their digital needs and barriers; and leading a day-long charette, during which attendees shared their experiences with computers and the internet and offered ideas about how to advance digital equity in Monterey.



Bipartisan Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA)

A focus on digital equity nationally originated with the Bipartisan Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (IIJA). Passed by Congress in 2021, the IIJA aimed to "rebuild crumbling infrastructure,"[1] such as high-

[1] "Fact Sheet: The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal," The White House, March 29, 2023, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/06/fact-sheet-the-bipartisan-infrastructure-deal/.

speed broadband, whose fault lines became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Considered a luxury before the pandemic, internet access became a necessity during it, and those without it — due to lack of service or inability to afford it — fell further behind, unable to work from home, access healthcare, or stay connected socially.

The federal government directed two billion dollars nationally toward addressing digital access and equity gaps[2], with funds administered through three programs: State Digital Equity Capacity Grant, Digital Equity Competitive Grant, and State Digital Equity Planning (SDEP) Grant. Massachusetts' statewide broadband agency, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), received $147 million,[3] for the SDEP. Separately, MBI directed monies from Massachusetts' American Rescue Planning Act (ARPA) funds to a more focused Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program supporting the creation of city- and town-level plans and charrettes, The purpose of these narrower plans and charrettes was twofold:

- Guide municipal decision-making and investments to increase access, adoption, and use of the internet for people most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

The Monterey Digital Equity Charette

Municipalities could conduct an in-depth process leading to a Municipal Digital Equity Plan or a shorter, intensive engagement called a Digital Equity Charrette. Monterey chose the latter.

Both the plan and charrette require first understanding the needs of a town's Covered Populations,[4] a term used by the federal government to describe eight groups who have historically faced barriers to digital equity[1] They include:

- Rural residents
- People aged 60 and older
- People with disabilities
- Veterans
- People in households with incomes at or below the poverty rate
- English language learners and people with low literacy
- People who belong to a racial or ethnic minority group (i.e., Black, Indigenous, People of Color: BIPOC)
- Incarcerated individuals in state facilities

When creating a Municipal Digital Equity Plan or Charrette, the needs of Covered Populations must come first, and to do so involves surveying the digital equity landscape, known as conducting an Existing Conditions analysis. Much of the data for the Existing Conditions analysis comes from the Five-Year Estimate 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS). However, because Monterey is a small rural community, the numbers and percents reported in the ACS *must be read with caution, as they often have high margins of error.*

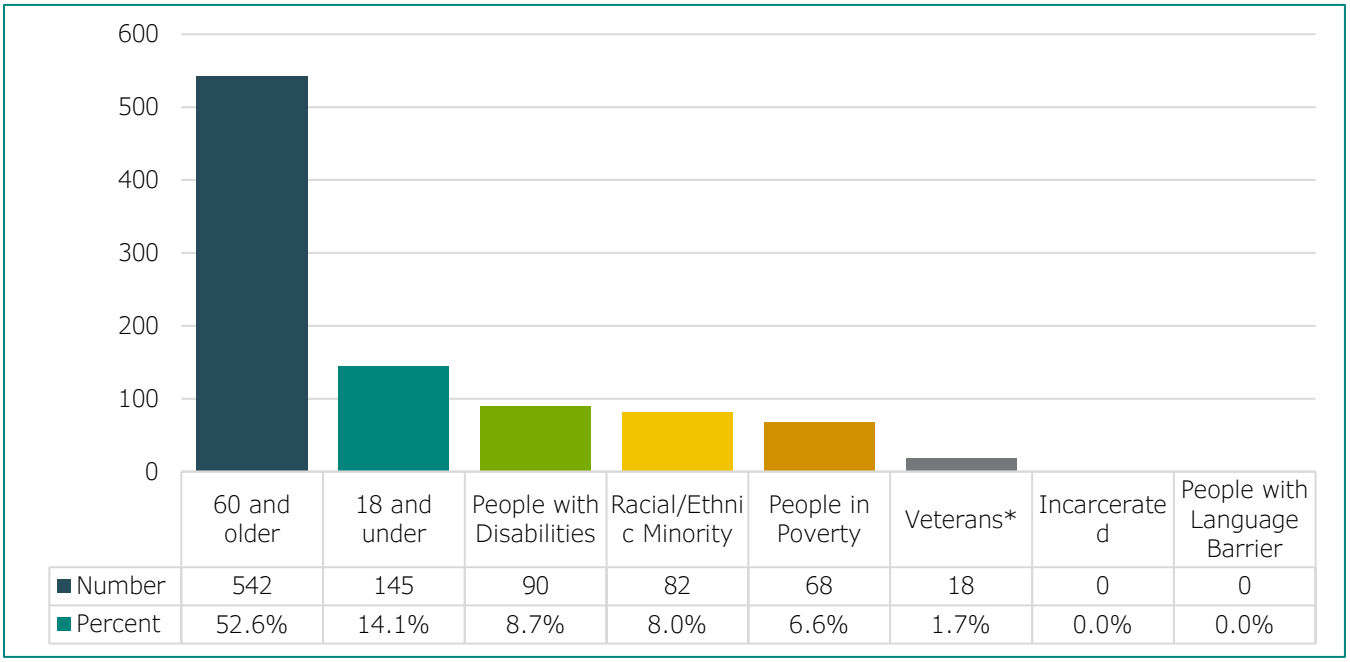
[2] "Fact Sheet: The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal."
[3] "Massachusetts Receives $14.1 Million in Federal Funding to Expand Digital Access," Mass.gov, April 1, 2024, https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-receives-141-million-in-federal-funding-to-expand-digital-access.
[4] US Census Bureau, "Digital Equity Act of 2021," Census.gov, March 28, 2024, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/community-resilience-estimates/partnerships/ntia/digital-equity.html.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Source: Google Images

Monterey is a rural community (Population 1,030; 398 households), as defined by the federal government, and a Level 2 rural community, according to the Massachusetts Office of Rural Health (i.e., based on population, density, commuting characteristics, and hospital access). As such, the entire town and its residents qualify as a Covered Population.[1]

Figure 1: Other Covered Populations



	60 and older	18 and under	People with Disabilities	Racial/Ethnic Minority	People in Poverty	Veterans*	Incarcerated	People with Language Barrier
Number	542	145	90	82	68	18	0	0
Percent	52.6%	14.1%	8.7%	8.0%	6.6%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate, 2019-2023

The table above details the number and percentage of the seven other Covered Populations in Monterey, as well as the youth population, which is an important demographic*, but not a Covered Population.* The largest Covered Population are people aged 60 and older, followed by those with disabilities and racial and ethnic minorities. The ACS suggests language is a non-existent barrier, with all residents reportedly speaking English well, although close to 10 percent of residents speak a language other than English at home, primarily Spanish (5%). There are currently no Monterey residents in the criminal justice system.

**ACS data indicated 118 veterans in Monterey. However, due to the high margin of error this report counts the number of veterans at the number identified by town records: 18.*

Older Adults

The percentage of older adults in Monterey is significantly higher than that of Berkshire County (39% vs. 26.1%), with the largest sub-group being residents who are 85 and older (17.8%). Older adults are served by the Monterey Council on Aging, Monterey Community Center, and Monterey Library. The library has been particularly important to this audience, having received in 2023 a $10K AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) Community Challenge grant that allowed the director to hire a part-time digital navigator to help residents with tech questions. In a rural community, older adults living alone or in isolated neighborhoods are particularly vulnerable without digital skills. Research finds adults 60 and over are one of the groups most susceptible to internet scams and have lost more money than any other age cohort.[5]

Recommendations: Host a workshop to introduce older adults to free resources such as AARP's Older Adults Technology program (OATS). Hold information sessions to spread cybersecurity awareness among older adults, especially those living alone or in remote locations. Invite a representative from Berkshire Medical Center and Fairview Hospital to present at the library about how to access telehealth services and use their patient portal and phone applications.

Veterans

Veterans represent just over 11.5% of the population in Monterey, more than double that of Berkshire County (5.5%). Veterans often need to navigate complex government websites to access pensions, benefits, healthcare, and information about Veteran's Affairs organizations. Without digital skills, device access, or internet service, these tasks can be challenging if not impossible.

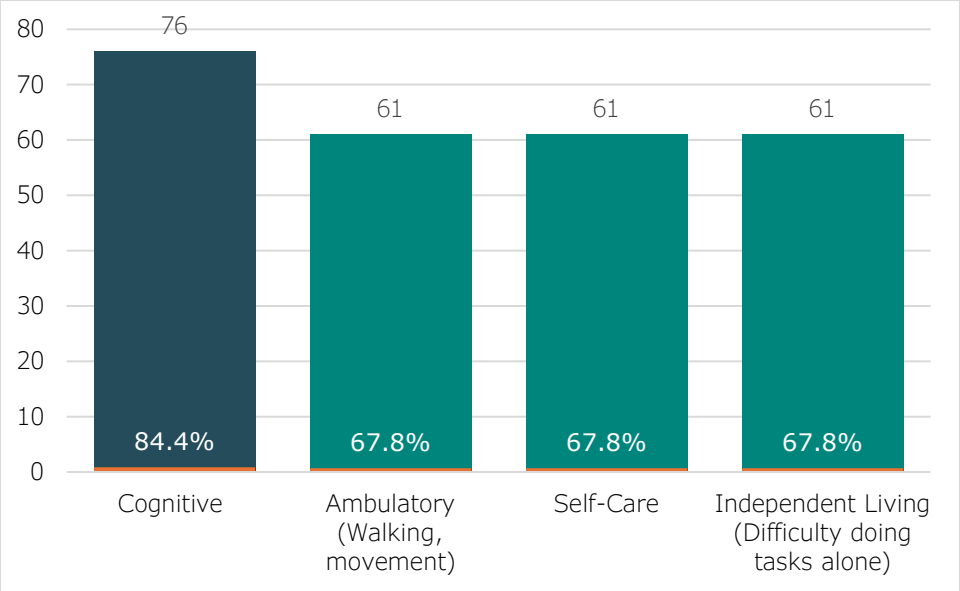
Recommendations: Spread awareness through mail-in flyers and information sessions about online resources such as Mass Vets Advisor, a website run by the state's Executive Office of Veterans Services, where veterans can find information and search for benefits and discounts, and VA Telehealth Services, which helps qualifying veterans without internet service or an internet-connected device access a social worker to secure a tablet and wraparound digital support.

People with Disabilities (PWD)

Monterey residents with disabilities tend to be older individuals living with chronic conditions affecting their cognition (difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions); movement (serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs); self-care (difficulty dressing or bathing); or ability to live independently (doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping). People with cognitive disabilities may need assistance understanding how to use devices, apps, and websites and may have home health aides who also need help with internet navigation, especially related to accessing telehealth and maintaining social connections with family members living far away.

[5] Bryan D. James, Patricia A. Boyle, and David A. Bennett, "Correlates of Susceptibility to Scams in Older Adults without Dementia," *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect* 26, no. 2 (February 5, 2014): 107–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/08946566.2013.821809.

Figure 2: Disabilities Among Monterey Residents



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Disability Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1810, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1810?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 6, 2025.

Those with ambulatory, self-care, and independent living disabilities likely face similar challenges coordinating transportation that may make going to public places (e.g., library, community center) to access computers and the internet difficult. Ensuring these residents can use Zoom to reach doctors and family members; participate in virtual social activities; and download e-books or schedule transportation, are just a few examples of skills it would be beneficial for them to have.

Recommendations: Maintain a Zoom account for the Monterey Community Center so residents can participate in events virtually if they cannot attend in person. Provide closed captioning during town meeting video calls to help those with cognitive and hearing disabilities more easily process conversations. Purchase a "Meeting Owl" video conference device so those attending community meetings virtually feel included through high-resolution streaming and a 360-degree camera. Set aside funding for upkeep and maintenance of hotspots, Chromebooks, and iPads at the Monterey Library to ensure they are ready to be loaned out. Create a mobile unit or volunteer service that can deliver devices to homebound residents. Ensure town and organization websites and online newsletters comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to increase navigability and accessibility.

Racial and Ethnic Minorities and English Language Learners

Although there are currently no documented English Language Learners in Monterey, there may be individuals within the town's BIPOC population who consider English a second language. Additionally, with the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants in Southern Berkshire County increasing,[6] there may be more demand for multilingual digital resources.

Recommendations: Spread awareness about multilingual digital resources such as the online Digital Skills Library by posting a link on the town's website and distributing flyers at town community spaces such as the library and community center. Additionally, distribute a Spanish-language version of the *BRPC Digital Resource Guide* in community spaces. Advertise information regarding bilingual digital literacy and computer

[6] Aina Alvarez et al., "Meet the People Who Help Spanish-Speaking Families Decode Life and Learning in South County," The Berkshire Eagle, November 9, 2022, https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/southern_berkshires/spanish-families-berkshire-county-massachusetts-programs-equity-education-immigrants/article_45c5b982-5baa-11ed-9fa3-9bed9e773aff.html.

science classes held at Berkshire Community College's ESOL program in Great Barrington. Invite Volunteers in Medicine to present over Zoom or at the library on its resources for non-English speaking residents.

OTHER DIGITAL EQUITY INDICATORS

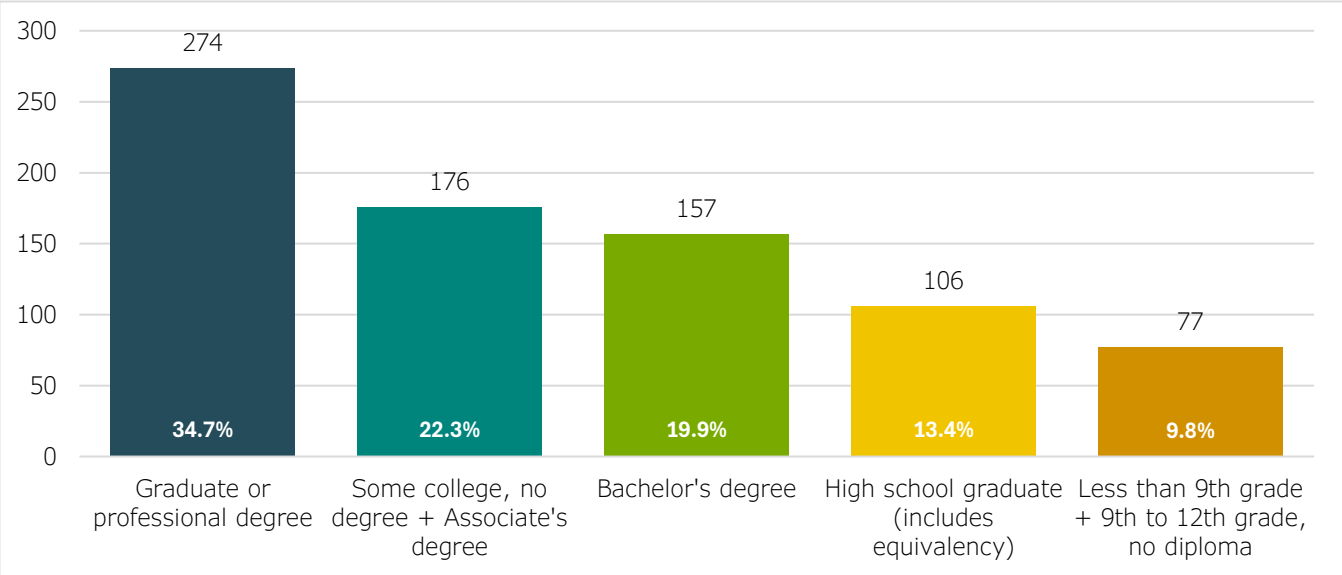
While knowing the Covered Populations in town offers a broad understanding of potential digital barriers and needs, more granular data related to educational attainment, employment, income, broadband and computer ownership, and internet service quality can also inform digital equity recommendations. The section below delves into these specific digital equity indicators and their impact on Monterey residents.

Educational Attainment

The highest grade a person has completed in school can be an indicator of a digital divide, especially for those who have completed high school but not attended college. Today's college students gain exposure to advanced technology (e.g., laptops versus Chromebooks) through classes, assignments, and research, allowing them to sharpen their digital skills. But older Baby Boomers — or Millennials, Gen X, and Gen Z adults who enter the workforce immediately after high school — may miss out on these skills.

While nearly 55% of Monterey residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, 45.4% of those 25 and older do not. The largest cohort without a bachelor's degree are those between the ages of 25 to 34, followed by 18- to 24-year-olds, and residents aged 45 to 64. This suggests an opportunity to offer adults in Monterey digital skill training in non-traditional settings (e.g., library, virtually) to help them build competency without requiring them to earn an advanced degree.

Figure 3: Educational Attainment Population Aged 25 and over



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Educational Attainment." *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1501*, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S1501?g=060XX00US2500342460. Accessed on January 7, 2025.

The relationship between educational attainment and digital equity can also be seen in differences in broadband access and computer ownership, with those having less education also lacking internet service, devices, or skills. In Monterey, the ACS suggests nearly everyone, regardless of education, has internet

service and owns a computer, but it is also possible that some people with less education may also have older computers and lack the money to buy a newer one if theirs breaks.

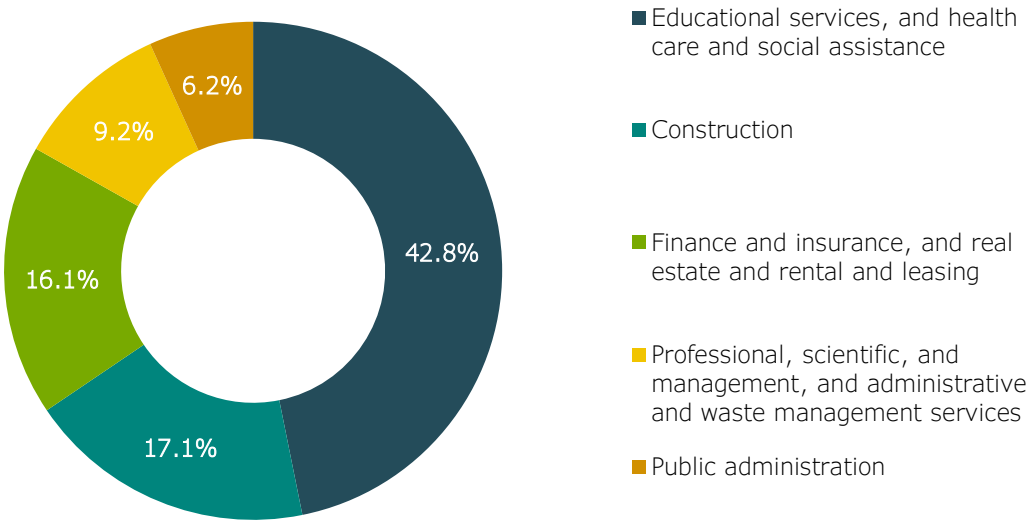
Finally, higher education offers related benefits such as: a) preparing people for positions in higher-paid fields (e.g., robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity);[7] and b) increasing remote and hybrid work options.

Recommendations: Help residents without a college degree learn about free and low-cost ways to gain digital skills outside of academia, such as through programs like NorthStar, Tech Foundry, and Tech Goes Home. Host a Tech Goes Home class at the Monterey Library focused on preparing people without a college degree for remote work in partnership with a local recruiter or the MassHire Berkshire Career Center.

Employment and Occupations

Among Monterey residents age 16 and over (918), 57% are in the labor force* and most are employed (502 out of 523); 66 (13.1%) work from home. The top five industries in which residents work are shown in the chart below. While basic facility with computers and the internet are likely required in most of these industries, those working in construction may have less opportunity to use these skills on the job.

**Residents not in the labor force include students, stay-at-home parents, and retirees.*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Selected Economic Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP03, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2023.DP03?g=060XX00US2500342460. Accessed on January 7, 2025.

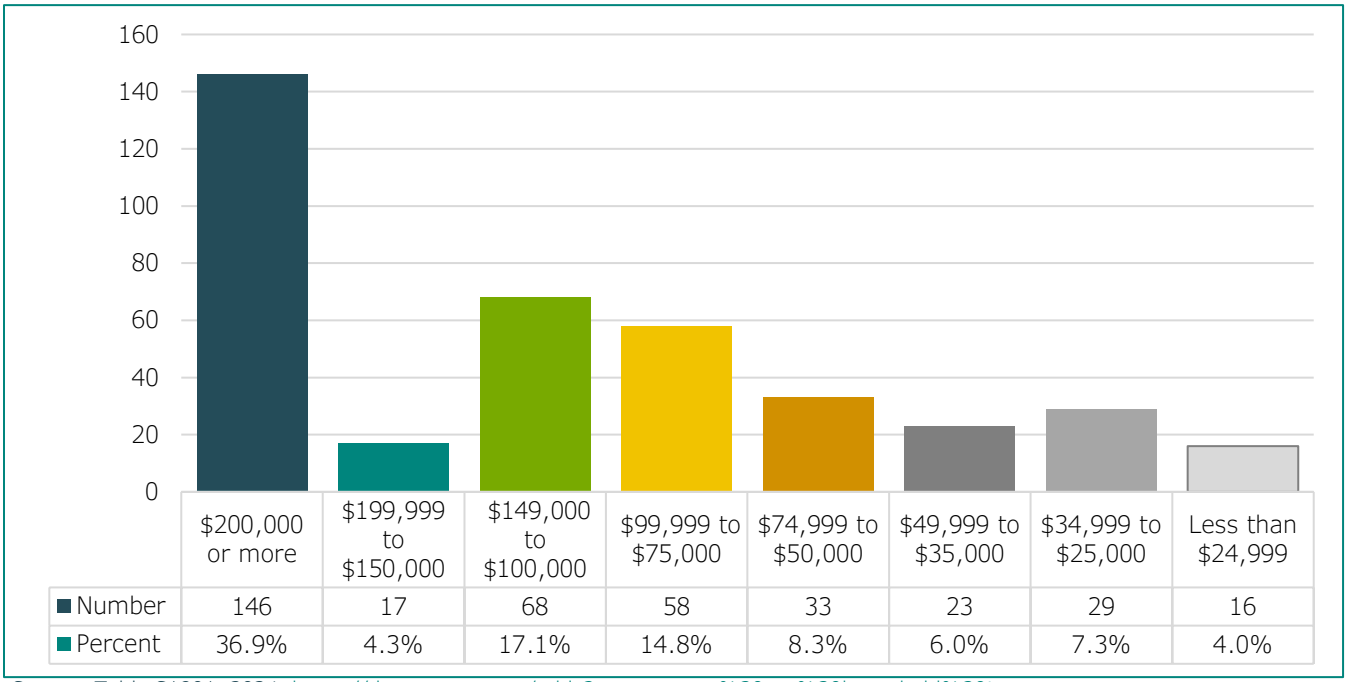
Recommendations: Offer digital skills classes for those working in construction and related fields who may not regularly interact with technology. Tailor classes toward skills specific to in-demand industries (e.g., Microsoft Excel for accounting and budgeting; Microsoft Word for writing project plans; or Google Suite for organizing documents, ordering equipment, etc.).

[7] Ron Haskins, "Economic Mobility Project: An Initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts," The Brookings Institution, accessed December 20, 2024, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02_economic_mobility_sawhill_ch8.pdf.

Income

Thirty-six percent of Monterey residents earn over $200,000 a year and about half as many (17.1%) earn between $100,000 to $149,000. A small percentage (6% +/-) qualify as low-income, placing them at or below 150% of the federal poverty level.

Figure 4: Household Income Distribution in Monterey (2022)



	$200,000 or more	$199,999 to $150,000	$149,000 to $100,000	$99,999 to $75,000	$74,999 to $50,000	$49,999 to $35,000	$34,999 to $25,000	Less than $24,999
Number	146	17	68	58	33	23	29	16
Percent	36.9%	4.3%	17.1%	14.8%	8.3%	6.0%	7.3%	4.0%

Source: Table S1901, 2024, https://data.census.gov/table?q=monterey%20ma%20household%20income.

Recommendations: Increase low-income residents' awareness of lower-cost internet plans through flyers at the library; posts on town websites; and making available or linking to BRPC's Digital Equity Resource Guide. Encourage organizations to partner with Computers4People and The Alliance for Digital Equity to apply for donations of refurbished devices for those who income-qualify. Help residents who want to improve their digital skills enroll in free online classes through nonprofits such as Computers4People, Tech Foundry, NorthStar, and AARP's OATS program.

Housing

Affordable housing properties, mobile home communities, multi-family properties, apartment buildings, condominiums, and cooperatives are often prioritized for broadband infrastructure improvements because they serve more people in one location and can therefore tax broadband quality or speed. In rural communities known for tourism, there can also be challenges related to population increases due to second homeowners or during summer months when there are more tourists who similarly put pressure on broadband needs.

Most single-family homes in Monterey are "non-residential" (68.2%) or second homes while 31.7% are owner-occupied, full-times residences. Monterey has 22 multiple-dwelling units (i.e., condominiums, attached apartments) that may experience more internet quality or speed challenges, depending on: a) how many people want to use the internet at the same time and/or b) what kind of activities people are using the internet for (e.g., movies and games versus Word processing). The number of renters in town is

unknown, but there are five likely rent-burdened households, suggesting they spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs.

Table 2: Households by Type

Household Type	Total # of Units	# Owner-Occupied	% Owner-Occupied	# Non-Residential	% Non-Residential
Single-Family Homes	749	238	31.7%	511	68.2%
Condominium Units	15	5	33.3%	10	66.6%
Single-Family Homes with Attached Apartments	7	3	42.8%	4	57.1%
Parcels of Land with Two Dwellings	32	6	18.7%	24	75.0%

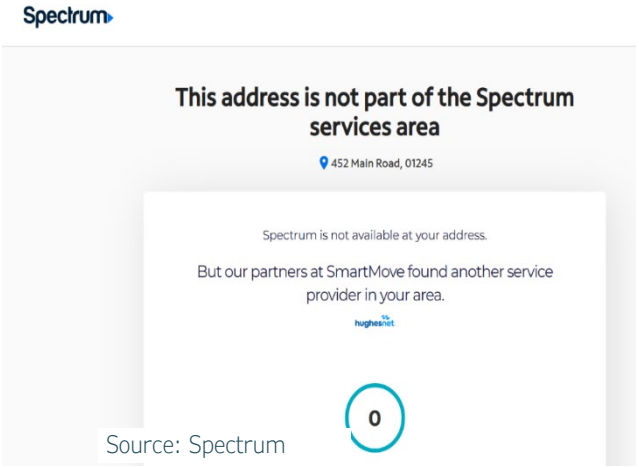
Source: Monterey Town Assessor's Office, "Class 100 Breakdown/Percentage." 2025.

Recommendations: Explore the feasibility of subsidizing some of the cost of internet service for rent-burdened households. Implement programs such as Tech Goes Home to provide low-income households with free hotspots and a year of free internet service following digital skills training. Promote the availability of digital devices and Wi-Fi hotspots at the library, especially during summer months when demand rises.

BROADBAND & COMPUTER OWNERSHIP

Monterey has 917 broadband serviceable locations (BSL), according to MBI's BEAD BSL Eligibility List, nearly all of which (913) are considered served, two of which are underserved, and 2 are unserved.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) considers a location served if the resident or business can purchase commercial internet service with a minimum speed of 100 Mbps download/20 Mbps



Source: Spectrum

upload.[8]; **underserved** if the only available internet service is slower than 100/25 Mbps; and **unserved** if no commercial internet provider offers service or the only speed available is below 25/3 Mbps.

Table 3: Internet Service Provider Comparison Speeds and Types

Internet Provider	Technology	Max Advertised Download (Mbps)	Max Advertised Upload (Mbps)	# BSLs w/ Service Available	% BSLs w/ Service Available
Fiber Connect	Fiber	1000	35	804	89.83
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	100	20	76	8.49
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3	13	3.59
Charter Communications (Spectrum)	Cable	1000	35	15	1.68

Source: Massachusetts Providers, Coverage/Competition by Municipality, June 2024

The fastest internet speed available to Monterey residents is provided by Fiber Connect, a Berkshire County-based ISP that also reaches Egremont, New Marlborough, and Great Barrington. A standard Fiber Connect account costs $99 a month, plus a one-time $499 installation fee. T-Mobile costs about $45 a month, on average, but service is slower (133-415 Mbps download / 12-55 Mbps upload) and may be more susceptible to inclement weather and interference (e.g., mountains, trees). The least available service is through one of the county's largest ISPs, Charter Spectrum, which in Monterey is only available to 1.68% of broadband serviceable locations. Spectrum's monthly fees range from $50 to $70. The company also offers an Internet Assist Plan for low-income households that costs $25 a month with speeds of 50 Mbps download / 5 Mbps upload.

Internet Speed

Until March 2024, the FCC defined high-speed broadband as 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload for basic service. More recently, the agency changed that definition to 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. The fastest residential broadband speed in the U.S. is 1 gigabit (Gbp) simultaneous (equal upload and download).

ISPs charge customers more for faster speeds, but confirming whether advertised speeds match what customers pay and receive can be difficult due to factors such as distance between the user's computer and router; the age of a computer; the number of people using the internet at the same time; the type of activity(ies) in which user(s) are engaged (e.g., gaming versus email); user(s) choice of browser; and geography.

One of the most reliable ways to assess whether customers are getting the speeds they pay for is by conducting online speed tests. MBI contracted with the company Ookla to conduct speed tests across the Commonwealth and documented 954 tests completed at 358 different locations in Monterey beginning in February 2022, resulting in 69 locations having at least 25/3 Mbps service; 166 with at least 50/10 Mbps; 17 with 100/20 Mbps; and four with 100/100 Mbps simultaneous. The data suggests 5.8% of tested locations receive speeds that

[8] Tyler W Wright, "FCC Broadband Collection – Purdue Center for Regional Development," *Purdue Center for Regional Development – Purdue Center for Regional Development* (blog), January 18, 2024, https://pcrd.purdue.edu/fcc-broadband-collection/ #:~:text=Served,communities%20understand%20their%20broadband%20landscape.

meet the new FCC 100/20 benchmark, a much lower percentage in comparison to similar communities such as New Marlborough and Otis where the percentage is 42% and 57%, respectively. These results, however, may no longer reflect the current situation in town due to the introduction of Fiber Connect and other high-speed ISPs after 2022.

Table 5: Ookla Speed Tests

Speed and Quality Results	# of Tests
Jitter > 50 ms	69
Latency > 100 ms	45
Latency > 500 ms	29
Speeds < 25/3 Mbps	69
Speeds < 50/10 Mbps	166
Speeds < 100/20 Mbps	266
Speeds at least 25/3 Mbps	207
Speeds at least 50/10 Mbps	82
Speeds at least 100/20 Mbps	17
Speeds at least 100/100 Mbps	4
Total Tests	954

Source: MA Speed Tests and Broadband Performance, February 2022

Recommendations: Set aside funds for the town to contract with Ookla to reconduct speed tests to ensure accuracy and acquire updated data.

Internet Subscription and Device Ownership

Figure 5: Internet Subscription by Household

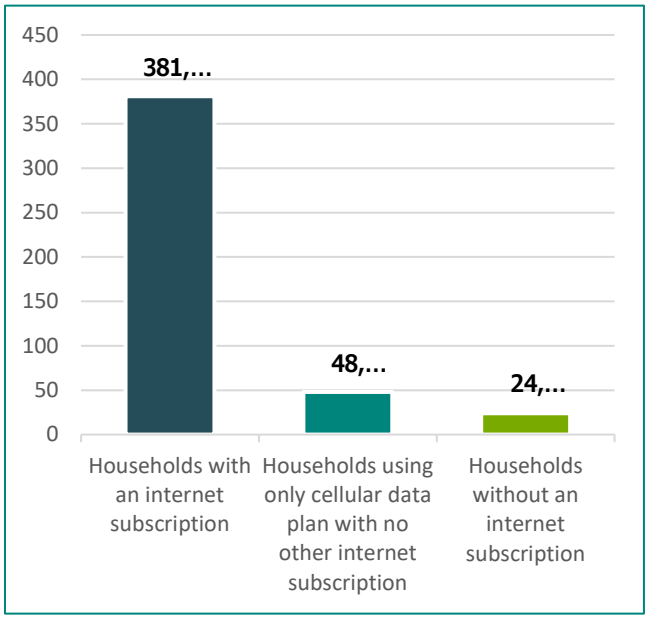
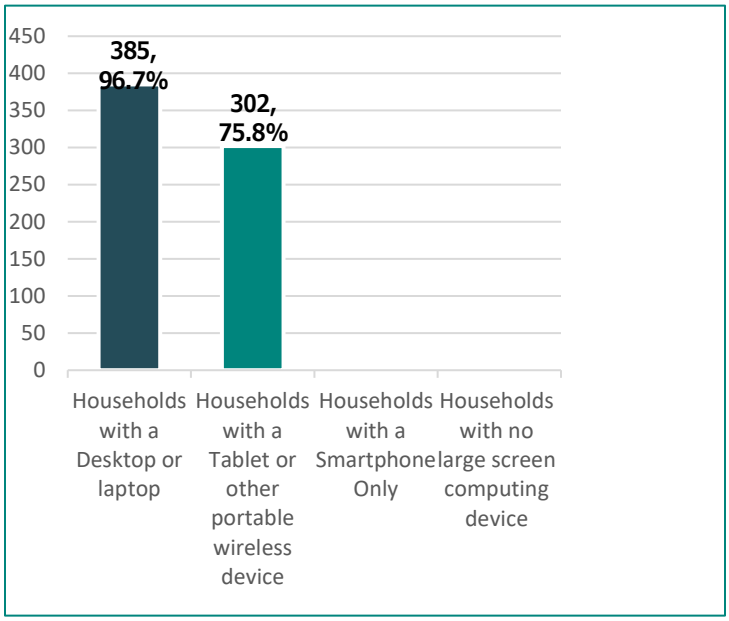


Figure 6: Comparison of Devices Owned by Household



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions. *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2801.*

Nearly all households in Monterey (381 out of 398) have internet service. A few (48) rely solely on cellular data and 24 have no service at all. Reasons for lack of service could include a) second homeowners choosing not to pay for year-round service due to part-time residency; b) disinterest in or fears around technology; and c) high costs associated with installing fiber lines to remote residences.

Ninety-three percent of households also have one or more computing devices, such as a desktop computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Ninety-three percent use a large-screen device, while a smaller percentage (68.3%) use a tablet or portable. No households rely solely on a smartphone, and none lack any large screen device.

Recommendations: Purchase additional Wi-Fi hotspots for the Monterey Library and ensure their upkeep and maintenance to support those who lack internet service due to cost or other barriers. Consider having the town partially subsidize the cost of internet service for income-qualifying households, paralleling programs offered by traditional utilities (e.g., National Gride, Berkshire Gas).

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Enrollment

In December 2021, the federal government launched the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which lowered income-qualifying U.S. households' internet bills by $30 a month and income-qualifying households on Tribal lands' bills up to $75 a month. Income-eligible households also received a one-time discount of up to $100 to buy a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from a participating provider, if they contributed more than $10 but less than $50 toward the purchase.

While the program targeted households with incomes at or below 200 percent of federal poverty, having a household member who met at least one of the criteria below could also make a household eligible for ACP:

- Assistance Programs: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Federal Public Housing, Veteran's Pension or Survivor Benefits, Social Security Income (SSI), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), or Lifeline.
- Tribal Specific Programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or Tribal Head Start (income-based).
- Federal Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision.
- Federal College Pell Grant.
- Broadband Providers' Low-Income Internet Program Qualifications.

ACP ended in May 2024 when Congress failed to reauthorize funding. According to The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, six out of 92 eligible households in the 01245 zip code* were enrolled in ACP before it ended. Benton estimates that 60 of those 92 households would be a- risk of terminating their internet service without the subsidy. **ACP data is collected by zip code, not town.*

Recommendations: Conduct targeted outreach (e.g., pamphlets, mail-in flyers, and information sessions) to Monterey households, especially those known to be income-qualifying through participation in other subsidy programs (e.g., tax abatements, senior discounts), to determine their awareness of ACP and of currently available low-cost internet programs. Have the digital navigator schedule sessions focused exclusively on helping individuals in low-income households apply for alternative low-cost internet service.

DIGITAL EQUITY ASSETS

In addition to learning how digital equity challenges affect individuals and households, an Existing Conditions Analysis also looks at digital equity assets: individuals, programs, and organizations working to close the digital divide, or well-positioned to do so, because they serve one or more of the Covered Populations.

As of February 2024, the Monterey Library, Fiber Connect, BRPC, and the Great Barrington Veteran's Agent were all listed on MBI's Digital Equity Asset Inventory as assets serving Monterey. In the future, the Monterey Community Center, Monterey Council on Aging, and Monterey Town Hall should all be added.

Community Anchor Institutions

Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) are another important digital equity asset. CAIs are defined as:

> *"a public school, public or multi-family housing authority, library, medical or healthcare provider, community college or institution of higher education, state library agency, or other nonprofit or governmental community support organization that facilitates greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, low-income individuals, unemployed individuals, children, the incarcerated, and aged individuals."*

Monterey has three CAIs: the fire station, police station, and community center. While the first two have high-speed internet to conduct official internal business, the community center is a public-facing facility that offers free Wi-Fi to the public both inside the building and in a limited fashion outside in the parking lot.

Recommendations: Extend high-speed public Wi-Fi service further into the parking lot at the Monterey Community Center and ensure that the password is easily accessible via external signage. Have the library added as a Community Anchor Institution.

Monterey Library

The Monterey Library is a member of the Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (CW MARS) network.

The library has three on-site desktop computers used by about 28 patrons a week and 12 Wi-Fi hotspots that patrons can borrow to use at home.

Source: Monterey Library

With funding from a 2024 AARP grant, the library director hired a part-time digital navigator to work with residents one-on-one to address digital questions and challenges. The navigator's term will end in February 2025, but the library director is extending it with other funding.

The library's website devotes much of its space to informing patrons of digital resources available to them through CWMARS. This includes an application called "Libby" that facilitates borrowing from all CW MARS libraries, including e-Books and audiobooks. More resources are available through a digital e-card Monterey patrons can get that gives them access to Boston Public Library (BPL) resources, including

streaming materials from Hoopla and films via Kanopy, an online database with 30,000 titles. Within the Monterey library, patrons can use research databases such as the Commonwealth Catalog and Gale Power Search.

The library serves as a venue for town events and regularly runs programs for children and adults such as movie nights, writing workshops, and author visits that it also promotes on its website.

Recommendations: Set aside funding for upkeep and maintenance of the library's Wi-Fi hotspots, Chromebooks, and iPads to ensure they are in good working order. Set aside money for the library to buy six more hotspots to accommodate increased demand during the summer season. Purchase updated public access desktop computers, as well as two Claris Companion tablets for senior patrons. Additionally purchase a 3D printer and create a "Digital Maker's Space" in the library to teach digital design to younger patrons. Fund the continuation of a digital navigator to help residents with technology issues.

Monterey Council on Aging

The Monterey Council on Aging (COA) meets once a month at the Monterey Town Hall. Meetings are open to the public and minutes can be found on the "Council on Aging" page on the town's website. Because the town lacks a dedicated senior center, the Monterey Library is frequently used as a gathering space for older adult meetings. The lack of a building for posting paper announcements has made the COA's web page and digital calendar more important, whether to publicize a movie night or provide information on medical transportation services. Members of Monterey's COA have expressed interest in creating an online town events calendar where residents of all ages can learn about community events on a single, easy-to-navigate platform.

Recommendations: Create an ADA-compliant website for the Council on Aging separate from that of the Town of Monterey. Create a "Community Calendar" web page where local organizations can post events.

The Monterey Police Department

The Monterey Police Department responds to calls originating in Monterey but does not respond to issues outside its jurisdiction. The Police department runs a Facebook page with 1,000 followers. Many of its posts garner a notable number of comments, likes, and reposts. The department uses its page to announce local police-related matters such as road closures, missing pets, power outages, and community events they host.

The Monterey Fire Company

The Monterey Fire Company was established in 1930 by the residents of Monterey. In 1980, the Monterey Company LTD was incorporated to provide a larger, modern fire station for the town. The company operates out of the fire station located at 411 Main Road, which is also used for town meetings and election polling. The company also owns and maintains the Monterey Fire Pavilion (pictured right).

The Fire Company maintains a website where it posts incidents to which they have responded. The site features an "Annual Update" page highlighting member achievements and events.

Source: Berkshires Outside

Other pages detail Fire Company vehicles, active members, available training, company facilities, and events they host.

Recommendations: Work with the Police and Fire Departments to create Facebook live events related to emergency preparedness.

Monterey Community Center

The Monterey Community Center (MCC) was built and is run by town residents. The MCC is open to the public for community events, gardening, entertainment, and recreational activities. Although events are not age-restricted, the MCC director noted attendees tend to be older adults.

Source: Monterey Community Center

Representative events the MCC hosts include reiki sessions, Tai-Chi classes, and a weekly "jam session" for musicians. Lessons in studio art, yoga, singing, quilting, knitting, cookbook clubs, and mahjong round out typical hosted events.

The MCC's website is easy to navigate and frequently updated. Patrons can add events to an online calendar by emailing montereycommunitycenter@gmail.com. Zoom recordings from a few past events are available on the website, along with a poster gallery advertising upcoming activities. There is a "Spotlight on Volunteers" page celebrating local helpers' achievements. Another page details the center's long history with a link to a virtual tour on YouTube.

The Monterey Community Center strives to remain accessible to visitors with disabilities. Although the Center's website is ADA-compliant, the listening-aid device the director purchased is reportedly now outdated and complicated to use. The director expressed a desire to acquire new devices that can assist those with auditory and visual disabilities benefit from their services.

Recommendations: Fund the purchase of a microphone to increase accessibility during events for those with hearing disabilities. Fund the purchase of a "Meeting Owl," and set up a Zoom account to make community events more accessible through livestreaming and hybrid access. Set aside funding for the purchase of a gaming system to incentivize younger residents to visit the community center and promote intergenerational digital learning through gaming nights and competitions with older residents. Revamp the MCC website and make it more ADA-compliant through larger text sizes, a high-contrast color scheme, captions for all posted media, and more widespread use of headings.

The Bidwell House

The Bidwell House is a historic house and museum in Monterey added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 and turned into a museum in 1990. The museum grounds and gardens are open to the public year-round. Guided tours are available during the summer.

The Bidwell House website is regularly updated and serves as the online platform for people to learn about the site and museum. Sample pages include "Plan Your Visit" that provides detailed directions and information on types of tours offered; "Bidwell Lore," which offers accounts of local history; and an online calendar of events and detailed list of contacts. Separately, maps of the Bidwell House are available on the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC) Berkshire Trails App.

Gould Farm

Gould Farm is a residential therapeutic community located in Monterey and dedicated to helping individuals with mental health challenges recover and regain independence through community living, meaningful work, and clinical care.[9] Staff, seasonal volunteers, and residents (referred to as "guests") live on a 700-acre campus in shared houses that receive high speed fiber-optic internet from Fiber Connect, a local ISP. Guests have access to Chromebooks and desktop computers and have expressed interest in attending digital skills classes.

Source: Cultural Landscape Foundation

Recommendations: Set aside funding to hold digital skills classes on the Gould Farm campus to alleviate transportation barriers. Livestream digital skills classes and/or digital navigator support offered at the Monterey Library so Gould Farm guests can benefit from these services.

Public Schools

Undermountain Elementary School

Undermountain Elementary School is a Title I school serving 257 students from kindergarten through sixth grade. The school is part of the Southern Berkshire Regional School District (SBRSD). Most Undermountain Students go on to attend Mount Everett Regional Junior/Senior High School.

Undermountain does not offer digital literacy or computer science classes. With a few notable exceptions (such as Farmington River Elementary School), this absence of digital classes is typical of most elementary schools in South County.

Source: Berkshire Edge

Device Offerings

Every student at Undermountain is given their own computer to use during the school day. Pre-kindergarten through second grade students receive an iPad; students in grades three through five get Chromebooks. Assistive technology is available for children who participate in speech pathology.

[9] "Therapeutic Community: Gould Farm: United States," Gould Farm, accessed January 6, 2025, https://www.gouldfarm.org/.

Faculty and staff are issued a laptop or desktop at the start of each school year and have smart boards and projectors as well as Chromebooks and iPad carts in classrooms. The school has a dedicated intervention/homework center where students can use digital devices after school. Undermountain also functions as a community hub where students and parents can access free Wi-Fi before and after the school day.

Computer science and digital skill development happens at after-school clubs led by the Technology Director. Clubs include "Robotics," "Introduction to Coding," and "AI Bootcamp," where students can work with Dolly, large language models, and AI software.

Technological Professional Development

Faculty receive professional development technology training covering English Language Arts and math (i-Ready). The superintendent is contemplating offering training on Google Classroom, Canva, and Khan Academy soon. Although the school lacks a technology specialist, the school librarian serves as a media specialist and teaches research methods and internet safety to students.

Device Policies

Undermountain is a phone- and smartwatch-free school. The school strives to have students lead the creation of device policies as much as possible.

Mount Everett Regional School

Mount Everett Regional Junior/Senior High School is a Title I school serving students in grades 7 through 12. The school's enrollment was 295 in 2023. Mount Everett students reside in Alford, Egremont, Monterey, New Marlborough, and Sheffield. The school is equipped with high-speed internet and offers students open access.

Digital Literacy and Computer-Science Course-Taking

Mount Everett Regional School District Digital Literacy and Computer Science Course-Taking Enrollment		
Demographic Group	**#**	**%**
All Students	119	40.3%
Female	43	36.1%
Male	75	63.0%
Low Income	54	45.3%
High Needs	61	51.2%
LEP English Language Learners	2	1.6%
Students with Disabilities	15	12.6%
African American/Black	0	0%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0%
Asian	0	0%
Hispanic or Latino	14	11.7%
Multi-race, Non-Hispanic Latino	7	5.8%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0	0%

White	95	79.8%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Of the 295 students who attended Mount Everett in 2023, 119 (40.3%) took a digital literacy or computer science course before graduation. This compares to an average participation rate of 38.3% for students across the state. Enrollment in these courses skews male versus female (63% versus 36.1%). Just under half of students enrolled (45.3%) come from low-income households that may have difficulty affording digital devices or internet at home. Students who have disabilities (12.6%) and English Language Learners (1.6%) account for a small percentage of enrollees and may need extra support and accommodations. Reflecting community and regional demographics, student enrollees are predominantly white (79.8%) with only 17.5% belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group.

Device Offerings

Mount Everett has a 1:1 student-to-computer ratio. The school offers students who need them a variety of computer devices to choose from for classroom and at-home use including Chromebooks, iPads, and Windows laptops. Alternatively, students can use their own personal computing device if they prefer. Students also have access to software programs such as Microsoft Office 265 and Google Classroom.

District Technology Plan

The Southern Berkshire Regional School District has a technology plan supported by federal, state, and private funding. The plan includes a technology team of faculty and staff who meet throughout the school year. Its commitment includes researching technology devices and software before making large purchases and conducting a formal community survey every year to gather feedback on its technology teaching and learning approach.

The school district requires that teachers use technology every day in the classroom. The district facilitates this by providing digital projectors, electronic whiteboards, and student response systems. Internet access is available at the high school before, during, and after school hours.

Technology Course Offerings

Mount Everett's technology course offerings are extensive and include:

- 3D printing and design
- coding and programming with Linux, Python, and C++
- Cybersecurity
- Robotics
- IT training
- Machine learning
- Networking

Mount Everett also offers an electric vehicle module during which students can explore future technologies in the automotive industry. Courses include vehicle mechanics, electric motors, and battery componentry that together expose students to concepts related to renewable energy and artificial intelligence. The high school is also a Federal Aviation Administration Recognized Identification Area (FRIA) where students can learn to fly drones and use a flight simulator. Mount Everett's drone team recently placed at a national tournament hosted by the Robotics Education Foundation (REF).

Recommendations: Explore introducing digital skills in K-F in a more dedicated fashion. For guidance, look to the program implemented at Farmington River Elementary. Consider offering community service credit by having teens involved in technology courses provide tech support to older adults at the library after-

school. Explore opportunities to use space at the middle- or high school after-school for computer classes for parents of students, especially English Language Learners.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement is central to digital equity planning, as quantitative data alone cannot capture all of a community's needs. Two activities were key to learning about digital needs among Monterey residents: a statewide survey and a digital equity community charrette.

Internet For All Survey

In addition to quantitative research from publicly available sources, responses collected through MBI's statewide *Internet for All* survey also informed plan recommendations. Between June and October of 2024, 34 residents completed the survey, which provided details about how residents feel about internet access, affordability, and skills. The chart below shows the breakdown of respondents across the Covered Population groups.

Figure 8: Monterey Survey Respondents Demographic Profile

Respondents	#	%
60 and older	25	80%
with household income before taxes < $36,999	4	12%
with a disability	4	12%
with child(ren) 18 or < at home	5	9.6%
with < than a bachelor's degree	2	6%
...who define as LGBTQIA+	2	6%
There were no residents in the following Covered Population groups: ...of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin ...who live in affordable housing ...who define as a Person of Color / BIPOC ...who served in the armed forces / veteran ...who are non-English speakers ...who define as Native American	0 / 0%	

Survey Responses

Responses to key questions on the *Internet for All* survey are summarized in the section below. BRPC chose to interpret these responses using categories and percentages. Questions were color-coded to match a broad equity category as follows:

■ = internet or device access: internet availability (navy blue)

■ = internet affordability (teal)
■ = device access (green)

= digital skills (yellow)

= cybersecurity (orange)
Responses were then ranked from positive to negative:

- **Positive** = More than 59% of respondents answered the question affirmatively
- **Neutral** = 59% to 49% responded affirmatively
- **Negative** = Less than 49% responded affirmatively

Of the 32 respondents, some chose not to answer some questions. This is reflected in the different number of total responses to each question. Responses are listed from highest to lowest percentage in each category (Positive – Neutral – Negative).

Positive (>59%)			
Question	Answer	#	%
Are you able to regularly use the internet for…**online activities**?	Yes	31	100%
Do you have internet service in your home?	Yes	32	94%
Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?	Yes	28	90%
How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, RMV?	Very accessible and Somewhat accessible	28	90%
Able to use the internet for…**general internet searching?**	Easy	21	70%
Able to use the internet for…**participating in your local community?**	Easy	19	66%
Able to use the internet for…**healthcare or telehealth services?**	Easy	19	63%
How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Not at all hard and Not too hard	17	61%
Able to use the internet for…**searching + applying for a job?**	Easy	15	60%
Able to use the internet for…**searching +/or applying for benefits or resources for you or your family?**	Easy	15	60%

Neutral (49-59%)			
Question	Answer	#	%
Are you aware of tools or resources you can use to stay safe online?	Yes, I have tools or resources that I use to stay safe online	12	52%

Negative (<49%)			
Question	Answer	#	%
Able to use the internet for…transportation information?	Easy	13	46%
Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?	Yes	7	23%
How concerned are you about internet safety?	Not at all and Not very	1	7%

Results

Responses to the *Internet for All* survey were broadly positive, with many expressing confidence accessing information online, applying for government benefits, and having enough devices to meet their household's needs. The percentage of respondents who own more than one digital device, for example, was 80%.

Responses were positive, but slightly less so, in terms of specific skills (e.g., participating in community events, doing telehealth sessions) as well as around affordability, with only 80% stating they could afford to buy a new computer costing $250 or more and 61% being able to comfortably afford their internet bill.

Only 12 survey respondents reported having the tools and resources to stay safe online and only one was unconcerned about internet safety, signaling a strong need for cybersecurity education among Monterey residents, especially those 60 and older.

Searching for "transportation information" was also a challenge for survey respondents, with only 13 feeling it was easy to find information. Given older adults' reliance on volunteer medical transport, rideshares, and services available through statewide, county, and other towns' COAs, helping residents understand how to book trips is critical.

Recommendations: Use the results from the survey to create subject-specific hands-on workshops at the library with help from a digital navigator. Identify those who would likely have trouble affording a device and explore helping them acquire a new device by working with Computers4People.

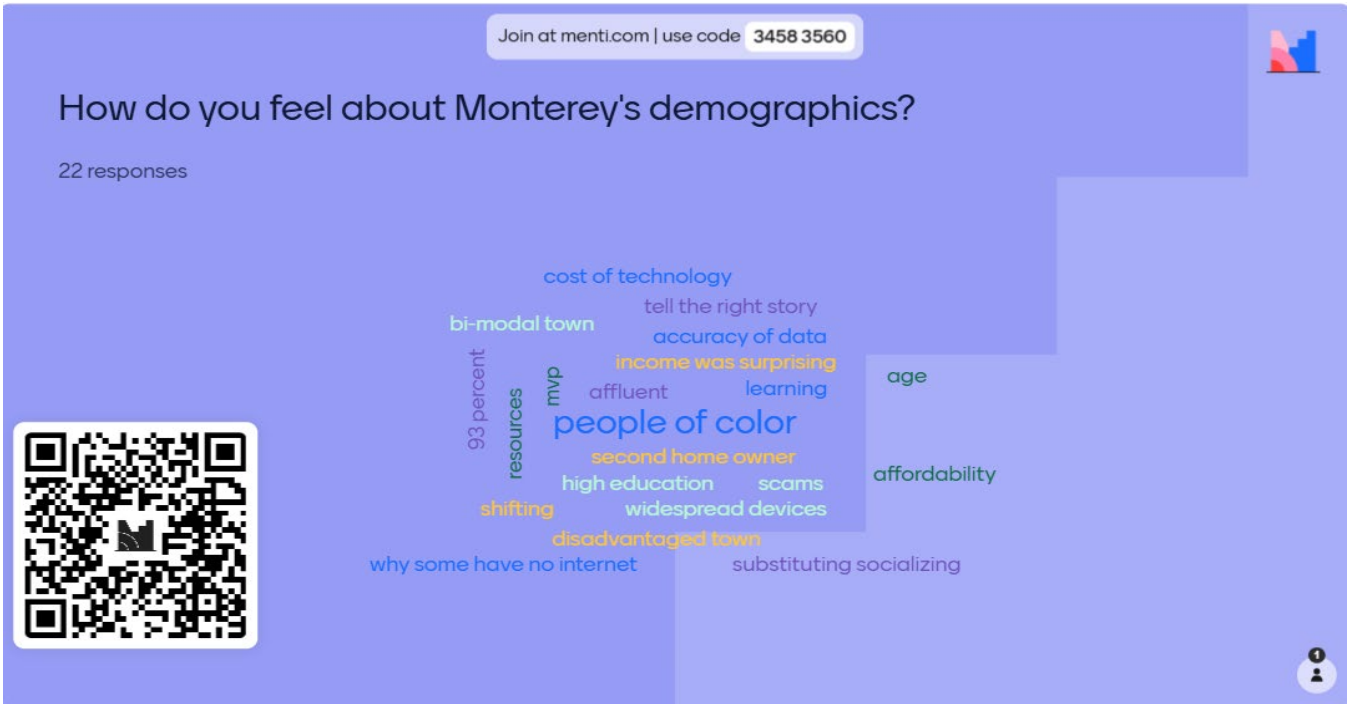
DIGITAL EQUITY CHARETTE

On September 14, 2024, Monterey held its Digital Equity Charette at the Monterey Library to collect direct feedback on the existing conditions and community asset data BRPC had previously collected. The charette also gave residents the opportunity to share in more detail their digital needs and let people make informed recommendations related to future digital equity implementation activities.

Residents received promotional flyers from BRPC staff starting in July 2024 when BRPC's AmeriCorps Lead for America Fellow handed out materials and began introducing the charrette while tabling at community events. Leaders from the Monterey Food Pantry and library also handed out flyers in the weeks preceding, and town leaders posted notices about the event on town and library websites. About a week before the event, BRPC's senior economic development planner spoke about the charrette at a monthly community dinner attended by about 40 people. Residents were encouraged to RSVP using an electronic survey link on the poster and given a choice to attend a morning (9:00 AM to 12:00 PM) or afternoon session (1:00 to 4:00 PM). In total, 19 residents attended the two charette sessions.

The charette began with a presentation by BRPC's ACC Fellow focused on the existing conditions analysis with time built-in for follow-up questions and hands-on activities. Attendees were invited to contribute to a digital "Word Cloud" to capture reactions to the findings (e.g., income, educational indicators) and participated in small group discussions about how people use the internet in their daily lives and the barriers they face.

Figure 7: Monterey Charette Word Cloud



After these exercises, attendees were asked to provide recommendations using a "brainstorm" sheet titled "How Do We Close the Digital Divide in Monterey?" The sheet included a table with questions that attendees were asked to fill in with sections for each Covered Population. The questions included:

1. Identify an "issue or need" (of the Covered Population) related to digital equity.
2. Suggest a "potential action" town leaders could take to address the issue or need.
3. Describe "potential partners" (community organizations) that could help carry out the action.
4. Rank the issue in terms of its importance on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating a top priority.
5. Note the MBI Digital Equity Implementation Program category the action falls within.

Below is an example:

Issue/Need	Potential Action	Potential Partners (Community Assets)	Priority (1-5) 1 is highest	MBI Digital Equity Implementation Category
Residents need education about password managers	Offer workshops at library	Library	1	Digital Skills

Attendees spent about an hour brainstorming recommendations in small groups with the last half hour spent compiling them in an online Google document. The document remained open for 30 days after the charrette to allow residents, including those unable to attend, to make future additions or edits.

Charrette Limitations

While the feedback and recommendations provided during the charrette were essential, there are limitations that deserve to be noted. Most importantly:

- The small number of attendees, reflecting only 2% of the adult population over age 16 in Monterey, suggest caution drawing broad conclusions;
- The attendees' age (skewed to those 40 and older) may fail to capture the perspectives of the 10.4% of Monterey residents 18 and younger;
- The lack of BIPOC and non-English speaking residents reflects the difficulty engaging this audience and may have benefited from a bilingual presenter or organization host.

Future digital equity work could be strengthened with input from a larger and more diverse set of locals.

Nonetheless, there were four key takeaways from the charette:

1. People reported difficulty mastering digital skills, in contrast to the mostly positive responses on the *Internet for All* Survey. Although survey takers were about the same age as charette attendees (60 and older), the former may have been more willing to be honest about their difficulties when talking among peers.

2. Attendees expressed a need for face-to-face technological assistance and frustration over the lack of local places where one can visit an IT specialist.

3. Municipal staff involvement in digital equity was frequently mentioned during the charette as being necessary to carry out long-term digital equity implementation and continue addressing local digital needs as they arise.

4. The high volume of community events in Monterey and lack of a central webpage where organizations can advertise them led many attendees to suggest the creation of a community calendar or website where all local events can be posted.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below represent a culmination of the qualitative and quantitative data gathered on the state of digital equity, access, and affordability in Monterey between June and December 2024. Recommendations are designed to parallel MBI's Digital Equity Implementation Program, which includes specific categories for which Monterey has been allocated funding, They include:

- Staff Capacity for Digital Equity
- Connectivity for Economic Hardship
- Device Distribution
- Digital Literacy
- Education, Outreach, and Adoption
- Public Space Modernization

One category not included, because it did not appear to be a priority and is not suitable for Monterey is:

- Wi-Fi Access and Innovative Connectivity Technology

Descriptions for each category along with recommendations follow.

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.*

One of the most frequently expressed needs of charette attendees was for an IT staff person to be stationed at a centrally located community organization or circulate across sites to provide face-to-face, one-on-one assistance to those needing technological help.

To that end, the Monterey Library was able to hire a part-time digital navigator through its AARP grant who has proved immensely successful troubleshooting digital issues with and for community members. MBI digital equity implementation funding could be used to continue the navigator's tenure.

A desire for municipal staff involvement in digital equity was also expressed during the charette. Attendees recommended that Monterey create a standing committee on digital access to effectively carry out and assess the impact of implementation activities and continue addressing digital needs long-term.

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.*

To improve local internet access opportunities and increase emergency preparedness, funding could be set aside to provide free public Wi-Fi at a popular location in town, to be determined in conversation with residents.

Connectivity for Economic Hardship: *The provision of Wi-Fi cellular hot spots to individuals lacking stable housing where they are unable to have a fixed broadband internet subscription.*

Device Distribution: *The provision of new or used internet-connected devices, such as laptops, tablets, and smart phones, to distribute to target populations.*

Although low-income households make up a small portion of Monterey's population, their digital needs should be a priority. For residents in these income ranges ($34K or less), affording an internet connection or digital device may be a financial burden. This is concerning when one considers the necessity of digital access for a host of activities from telehealth to employment.

For employment specifically, people need to know how to use software like Microsoft Word to create a professional resume. Once done, they would benefit from a large-screen device to apply for positions online. And as more jobs become hybrid or remote, people working from home need a reliable internet connection.

Beyond the workforce, school-age children rely on digital devices and internet service to complete tasks ranging from homework assignments to college applications. If students come from households that have a difficult time affording internet, or their only device is one they use during the school day, their educational path could be hindered.

For Monterey's older adults on fixed incomes, struggles with device and internet affordability can limit their ability to conduct telehealth appointments, access government websites for pensions and Social Security, and communicate with friends and family members.

Increasing the number of hotspots and large-screen devices available to borrow from the Monterey Library is part of the solution to these problems, as is increasing the number of residents able to secure permanent devices through collaborations between local and regional nonprofits such as Computers4People, the Alliance for Digital Equity, Tech Goes Home, and Tech Foundry.

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.*

Digital literacy ensures that people have the skills to safely use devices, online resources, and digital tools to their greatest benefit. Many older attendees of the Monterey charette felt as though they lacked the digital skills and knowledge to feel confident using the internet and stay protected against cyberattacks and

scams. A solution suggested by charette attendees was to create a sustainable, intergenerational digital skills training program on a rotating schedule that pairs local teens with seniors. This program would give older adults the chance to learn, face-to-face, from digital natives who have been exercising since childhood the digital skills with which many seniors struggle.

More traditional classroom style digital skills classes can also be offered through programs such as Tech Goes Home and NorthStar for those who would prefer to learn in a classroom setting. This would still involve a face-to-face element with a "digital navigator" serving as the instructor. Guest speakers from Berkshire Medical Center and Fairview Hospital could be brought in to teach students how to access telehealth and patient portals. These classes could be livestreamed to include students from Gould Farm.

For residents in construction and related fields, separate digital skills classes could be offered and tailored toward industry-specific skills.

Cybersecurity is an increasingly important issue in the Berkshires, especially for older residents who may lack the skills to identify online scams. Holding workshops and information sessions in partnership with the Berkshire County District Attorney's Office to increase online safety awareness among older adults to protect them from victimization.

Education, Outreach, and Adoption: *Enrollment of eligible residents in discounted options for broadband, devices, and digital skills. Outreach may include workshops, call center phone banking, door-to-door outreach, online/printed communications, and public service announcements.*

Residents with disabilities may have difficulty participating fully in community experiences due to lack of assistive technology or inaccessible website designs. Monterey could explore options to boost the accessibility of community spaces and activities with the help of digital devices. Software like Zoom, paired with a "Meeting Owl" and up-to-date audio equipment, could help those who may have challenges with independent travel participate in local events from home. Those with cognitive disabilities could benefit from making town and community organization websites ADA-compliant; adding closed captioning to Zoom meetings; and teaching staff and volunteers how to design newsletters that are readable by all.

To improve digital access for income-qualifying residents struggling with internet and device costs, the town could spread awareness of lower-cost internet plans and partner with organizations that supply refurbished devices and offer free digital skills classes. The town could also consider partially subsidizing the cost of internet for income-qualifying residents with the help of state or private philanthropy.

Veterans can benefit from being better connected to online resources that let them search for benefits and discounts, as well as accessing VA Telehealth Services and opportunities for securing digital devices.

Although the American Community Survey and charrette did not identify English Language Learners in Monterey, given the rise in Spanish-speaking immigrants in Southern Berkshire County, it would be helpful for town and organization leaders to share information about multilingual digital resources and the availability of bilingual digital skills classes at local institutions such as Berkshire Community College and remotely via Tech Foundry.

There are dozens of community events held in Monterey every week. It can be hard to keep track of all of them on separate calendars, websites, and social media pages. That is why many community members recommended creating a "Monterey Community Calendar" on the Monterey town website to help residents

keep track of events and happenings in one convenient location. Local organizations would be granted access to the calendar to post events and foster more local attendance.

In keeping with the community theme, the town could also consider funding the purchase of a digital gaming system (e.g. Xbox, PS4) for the Monterey Community Center to encourage children and teenagers to visit the space and teach older adults how to use technology in a fun manner.

FUTURE FUNDING

To make any of the above recommendations sustainable, they need to have funding. In addition to MBI's Digital Equity Implementation grant, the chart below provides examples of additional funding the town and its partners could pursue in future years. These grants are not exhaustive, and some may not be available immediately. The town and its partners are advised to therefore stay appraised of BRPC's Berkshire Funding Focus for notifications of federal and state grant opportunities and learn how to use Candid/Foundation Directory Online at Berkshire Athenaeum to search for philanthropic grants.

National		
Program	**Description**	**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 / Fairway Hospital
AARP Community Challenge Grants	AARP Community Challenge grants may be used to support three project types. Project types described below will be prioritized over those that support ongoing programming or events. • Permanent physical improvements in the community • Temporary demonstrations that lead to long-term change • New, innovative programming pilots or services	Nonprofits

State		
Program	**Description**	**Applicant(s)**
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.	Town of Dalton
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).	Central Berkshire Regional School District
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	Nessacus Regional Middle School

MassLINKS — Adult Education Virtual School (DESE)	The grant will recruit, intake, orient, enroll, instruct, assess, advise, offer supportive services to, and post-exit follow-up for adult learners not served by programs currently funded by 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
Residential Retrofit	This MBI Grant Program seeks to deploy state-of- the-art broadband infrastructure at Affordable Housing properties across Massachusetts. MBI intends to increase low-income residents' opportunity to access high-quality, reliable, and affordable broadband by addressing deficient wiring and infrastructure through grants for fiber optic cabling to the unit to qualified ISPs. Housing Agencies can utilize the grant to provide free internet service to their low-income populations.	Affordable Housing Managers
MAPC Apartment Wi-Fi Program	The Metropolitan Area Planning Council, with funding from MBI, will provide funding, project management, and procurement support and fund the construction of Wi-Fi networks which provide residents with equal or superior service than what is available from commercial ISPs, at no cost to residents. The funding provides for all capital costs associated with network design, construction, and equipment, and the first year of ongoing operating expenses.	Housing Authorities and Affordable Housing Developers
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.	Libraries

Philanthropic		
Program	**Description**	**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
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 Centers
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

Greylock Federal Charitable Giving	Provides support through grants and sponsorships to 501(c)(3)s and schools in communities in which Greylock has a physical location or large concentration of members. Foci related to digital equity include education, financial literacy, health, human services, and economic development.	Nonprofits
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
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
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 non-profit. 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
Corporation for Public Broadcasting	CPB provides funding for the development of public media television, radio, and digital content as well as multiplatform 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
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

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.

APPENDIX

Appendix I: Average Employment and Wages in Monterey by Industry: All Ownership Types (2023)

Industry	Establishments	Total Wages	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage
All Industries	28	$6,828,015	145	$903
Construction	8	$661,009	12	$1,097
Transportation and Warehousing	1	$185,424	2	$1,712

Source: https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/MunicipalEmploymentData/LmiTown?A=000384

Appendix II: Assets Specifically Serving Monterey on State Digital Equity Asset Inventory

Complete list of assets serving Berkshire County can be found here

Organization	Notes	Covered Populations	Digital Equity and Broadband Focus Areas
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	BRPC is a pre-qualified consultant to provide services to municipalities participating in MBI's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. The ability to engage in digital equity planning will be a critical step for municipal leaders and staff to build a broad understanding of how internet access, or lack thereof, affects residents of their community. In parallel with Municipal Digital Equity Planning, BRPC is also serving as the Berkshire County liaison for MBI Digital Equity Partnerships Program. The Digital Equity Partnerships Program will implement digital equity projects that meet the goals outlined in the Commonwealth ARPA COVID recovery legislation (codified as Chapter 102 of the Acts of 2021) that created a $50 million fund to bridge the digital divide. Partners such as The Alliance for Digital Equity and Baystate Health work with local and regional organizations (BRPC) to implement projects in six program areas.	Residents of Rural Areas, Individuals 60 and older	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy
Fiber Connect of the Berkshires	Low and Fixed Income Program: Approved applicants will receive a 50% discount on Fiber Connect's standard installation fee and monthly broadband service. Please note: You will be responsible for the remaining 50% of your installation fee and monthly service charge, along with any other optional service add-ons. Eligibility is determined by annual household income level.	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level)	Affordability & Availability
Great Barrington Veterans of Foreign Wars	The VFW has been open since 1946. The VFW is volunteer-run by one key person. The VFW is down the road from an affordable housing project that opened this past year. They have senior housing across the street. They also serve a community social function. They host speakers. Latina Festival. 420 Festival. They see themselves as a general community gathering place and, with	General - All Covered Populations, 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

	proper funding, would like to be able to offer more to the people they serve. They have 17 acres of green space but the public cannot access free Wi-Fi off campus. On Tuesday nights WSBS is on-site during the summer offering free music for the community an event which draws 500-1000 people. They have no public-facing computer lab but have space to create one with funding.		
Monterey Library	The library has three desktops, a laptop and 2 iPads available for library use, 6 hotspots available to take home. We offer free printing and scanning service. We also assist people with their technology issues if possible.	Individuals 60 and older	Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy, Devices & Device Support