

# Swansea

# Digital Equity Plan



**SRPEDD**  
Southeastern Regional Planning  
& Economic Development District

**MBI**  
MASSACHUSETTS  
BROADBAND INSTITUTE

  
at the MassTech  
Collaborative

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The Digital Equity Steering Committee, alongside input from community members via the digital equity survey and attendance at our charette made this plan possible.

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# Project Background

## Why is Swansea creating a digital equity plan?

Swansea is working with Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) and the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) to increase digital equity and internet access in town. SRPEDD began its partnership with MBI in 2023. Staff began this partnership by conducting digital equity asset mapping in the Southeast region of Massachusetts. During this period, over 120 digital equity assets across the region, including digital equity programming, digital skills classes, and plans or documents related to digital equity were identified. Outreach was then conducted to all 27 SRPEDD communities, including Swansea, notifying stakeholders of MBI's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program, and introducing relevant town stakeholders to the application process. After SRPEDD's initial outreach, several communities in the SRPEDD region expressed interest in applying for the program and SRPEDD staff subsequently began to work with five of these communities to create digital equity plans tailored to their unique needs.

Alongside this, in the summer of 2023 SRPEDD worked to recruit and hire a Lead for America, American Connection Corps fellow to expand the agency's capacity to work on digital equity planning across the region and to help create Swansea's own Digital Equity Plan. The fellow then stayed on as a full-time staff member following the fellowship term to continue advancing digital equity in the SRPEDD region.

## Project Timeline

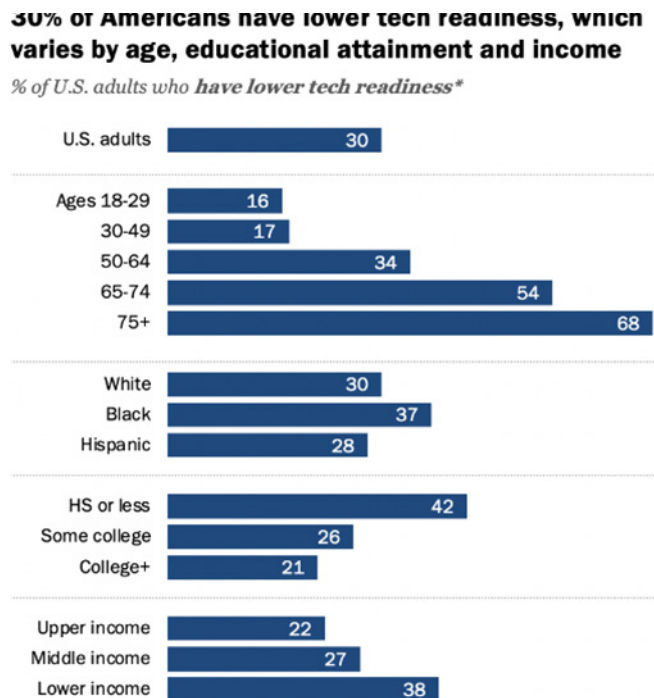


# Introduction to Digital Equity

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic illuminated crucial gaps present in underserved communities across the United States – most notably when it came to accessing the internet to work from home, partaking in online schooling, and generally participating in modern society online.

According to a 2021 article by the Pew Research Center, 30% of Americans possess lower tech readiness skills – meaning 30% of Americans lack the skills necessary to operate a computer, smartphone, tablet, or other digital device. The need for digital literacy and digital skills classes is increasingly important for all Americans, especially members of the covered populations. This percentage grows higher with age, with 54% of Americans ages 65-74, and 68% of Americans aged 75 or older having lower tech readiness.<sup>1</sup> Rising costs of internet plans and devices or unreliable connections due to inadequate infrastructure in rural areas also continue to illuminate why the need for digital equity plans and programs is more important now than ever before.

**Figure 1.** % of U.S. adults who have lower tech readiness, Pew Research Center



<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, “The Internet and the Pandemic”, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic/>



# What is digital equity?

Digital equity is the condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in modern society (such as scheduling a dentist appointment online), democracy (registering to vote online), and economy (paying a bill online). In other words, it is ensuring that everyone has access to adequate devices like routers and computers, the ability to afford a fast and stable connection, and the skills necessary to navigate and troubleshoot their technology. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.<sup>2</sup> The digital divide is created when everyone does not have equal access to these things. This gap affects social connectivity, healthcare access, workforce preparedness, educational opportunities, civic participation, and financial resources, hindering vulnerable populations from participating in everyday life.

## The Digital Divide Impacts..



### Social Connectivity

Communicating with family or friends on social media or email.



### Educational Opportunities

Online learning for students and the ability to pursue adult learning resources.



### Healthcare Access

Access to health records and telehealth services.



### Workforce Preparedness

Ability to apply to jobs online or prepare application materials.



### Financial Resources

Access to online banking, financial literacy resources and assistance.



### Civic Participation

Staying informed about voting, online public meetings or engagement opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> 'Definitions', National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)

## Three Pillars of Digital Equity

There are three pillars of digital equity: internet access, device access, and digital literacy. To achieve digital equity, a person needs to have all three of these.

**Internet Access:** People must have access to a fast and affordable internet connection in their household. Some barriers to internet access include connectivity interruptions, digital redlining, and the inability to afford internet.

**Device Access:** People must have access to devices that suit their needs, such as a laptop or a tablet. Barriers to device access include having outdated software on a device, not being able to afford an adequate device, or having a device that does not meet the needs of the user.

**Digital Literacy:** People need to have the digital literacy skills necessary to use their devices for what they need them for. Having limited digital literacy skills, fear of asking for help, and inaccessible digital skills trainings are barriers to digital literacy



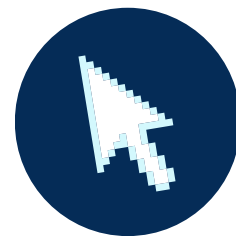
Connection

Having a fast, affordable, and stable connection to the internet.



Devices

Access to working desktops, laptops, or tablets.



Literacy

Ability to navigate technology to meet everyday needs.

# What is a digital equity plan?

A digital equity plan aims to guide municipal decision-making related to services and infrastructure that aims to close digital gaps in underserved communities.<sup>3</sup> This plan analyzes the current state of internet access and digital equity in Swansea. The goals and recommendations provided in this plan are based on findings collected through data analysis, research, and outreach to the public and relevant stakeholders to increase digital equity in the town. Throughout the planning process, residents were given the opportunity to think about equity in their community and determine who is most affected by the lack of broadband access. The intent is to utilize this plan to prepare Swansea to submit grant proposals to existing or forthcoming state and federal programs to support digital equity activities; these include leveraging partnerships with the neighboring town of Somerset, creating more opportunities for residents to access affordable internet and devices, and ensuring all residents, especially covered populations, have the digital skills necessary to safely and effectively navigate the internet. These implementation recommendations, as well as potential funding opportunities are discussed further below in the Recommendations section of this plan.

## Digital Equity Gap Impacts

In today's world, internet access is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Not having internet access, device access, or digital literacy affects many aspects of a person's life.

### Summary of Digital Equity Gap Impacts:

**Social Connectivity:** Social connectivity refers to the ways in which people communicate and interact with their friends and family online. This includes various online activities such as using social media, emailing, and video calling.

**Healthcare Access:** In our modern society, healthcare services are becoming increasingly digital. People need to use the internet to access doctor's appointments,

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<sup>3</sup> MBI, CPTC Presentation, 2023



view their medical records, and even attend virtual healthcare (telehealth) appointments.

**Financial Resources:** Most banks today offer some sort of online banking option. This allows people access to their bank account from home to see their balance, deposit checks, and transfer money. People can also access information regarding other financial opportunities, including loan information, online.

**Educational Opportunities:** Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, many educational opportunities happen online. From kindergarten to college, classes and homework assignments are now found online, along with textbooks and other class materials. Classes often utilize Zoom, Microsoft products, Google products, or similar software, which require a certain amount of digital literacy to properly utilize. Some schools also require students to enroll online now, rather than in person, meaning parents must have a certain level of digital skills to enroll their child in school.

**Workforce Preparedness:** The job search and application process also happens largely online now. People can utilize online platforms to search for jobs and create resumes. Without proper digital literacy skills, people may not be able to find adequate employment for themselves.

**Civic Participation:** Civic participation includes activities such as learning about elections and getting local voting information online. The internet is often necessary to stay informed about local and national political happenings. Local organizations also use the internet to advertise public meetings and engagement opportunities.

## Vision Statement and Goals

The goal of this Municipal Digital Equity Plan (MDEP) is to expand internet access and digital equity through the Town of Swansea. The planning outreach and engagement process was targeted and catered for input by covered populations. Due to Swansea's increasing aging population and its prominent population of veterans, the needs of these groups served as a major theme and focus for the plan's goals and recommendations.

**In short, this plan hopes to expand internet access for vulnerable populations, especially the senior and veteran communities. Through stakeholder interviews, committee meetings, public workshops, and the public outreach process, the project team provided recommendations and an implementation pathway to improve the state of digital equity in Swansea.**

# Goals

## 1. Create more opportunities for underserved communities to access fast and affordable internet.

- a. The Town of Swansea should repursue a Municipal Fiber Grant.
- b. Increase access to affordable broadband.
- c. Create more spaces for residents to access free public Wi-Fi.
- d. Pursue MBI's Residential Retrofit Program for Swansea Housing Authority sites.

## 2. Ensure plan implementation by leveraging and supporting community partnerships.

- a. Identify an existing group or form a new Digital Equity Implementation Committee to ensure the plan is implemented.
- b. Work with the Town of Somerset to coordinate the Towns' digital equity efforts.
- c. Swansea's town departments that provide community services should work together to combine resources to most effectively meet residents' digital equity needs.

## 3. Ensure all Swansea residents, especially covered populations, have access to adequate devices that meet their needs.

- a. Ensure adequate device access in all relevant public spaces.
- b. Utilize a public communications campaign to guarantee all residents are aware of public devices.
- c. Revise purchasing protocols for Town departments.

## 4. Assist vulnerable and underserved populations in safely and effectively navigating the internet and provide resources for troubleshooting digital devices and the internet.

- a. Pursue a shared digital navigator between the Town of Swansea and the Town of Somerset.
- b. Protect vulnerable populations from online scams and phishing.
- c. The Town of Swansea should partner with the Town of Somerset to have students from both towns involved with teaching digital skills to seniors.

# Existing Conditions

The town of Swansea is a suburban town, bordered by Seekonk, Rehoboth, Somerset, and the state of Rhode Island, with a population of 17,375.

## What is broadband?

Broadband is colloquially referred to as “high-speed internet” but is technically defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as internet with speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps – meaning internet with a 100 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed.

This figure was recently updated in 2024 from 25/3 Mbps to 100/20 Mbps to ensure all residents have internet that is fast enough to effectively participate in modern online activities. Having internet that is slower than broadband speeds can greatly limit the activities that a person can engage in online. For example, streaming content can take up to 25 Mbps and playing online video games can take up to 100 Mbps. General web browsing and email sending takes between 1 and 5 Mbps. Broadband internet speeds of 100/20 Mbps generally supports the needs of up to four internet users.<sup>4</sup> A broadband serviceable location or BSL is defined as any residential or business address that can have a broadband internet subscription.

Running speed tests can help a community measure the upload and download speeds at a specific location.

The following table shows the data for 2,374 speed tests from that were run in Swansea, including internet speeds, jitter, and latency. MBI collected this data from Ookla speed tests that were taken between December 2021 and November 2022. MBI then took this data and aggregated it into relevant data sets by municipality. According to this data 704 (29.6%) of locations where tests were run experience speeds that are less than 100x20 Mbps, or less than broadband internet speeds.

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<sup>4</sup>Broadband now, “How Much Internet Speed Do You Need?”, 2024

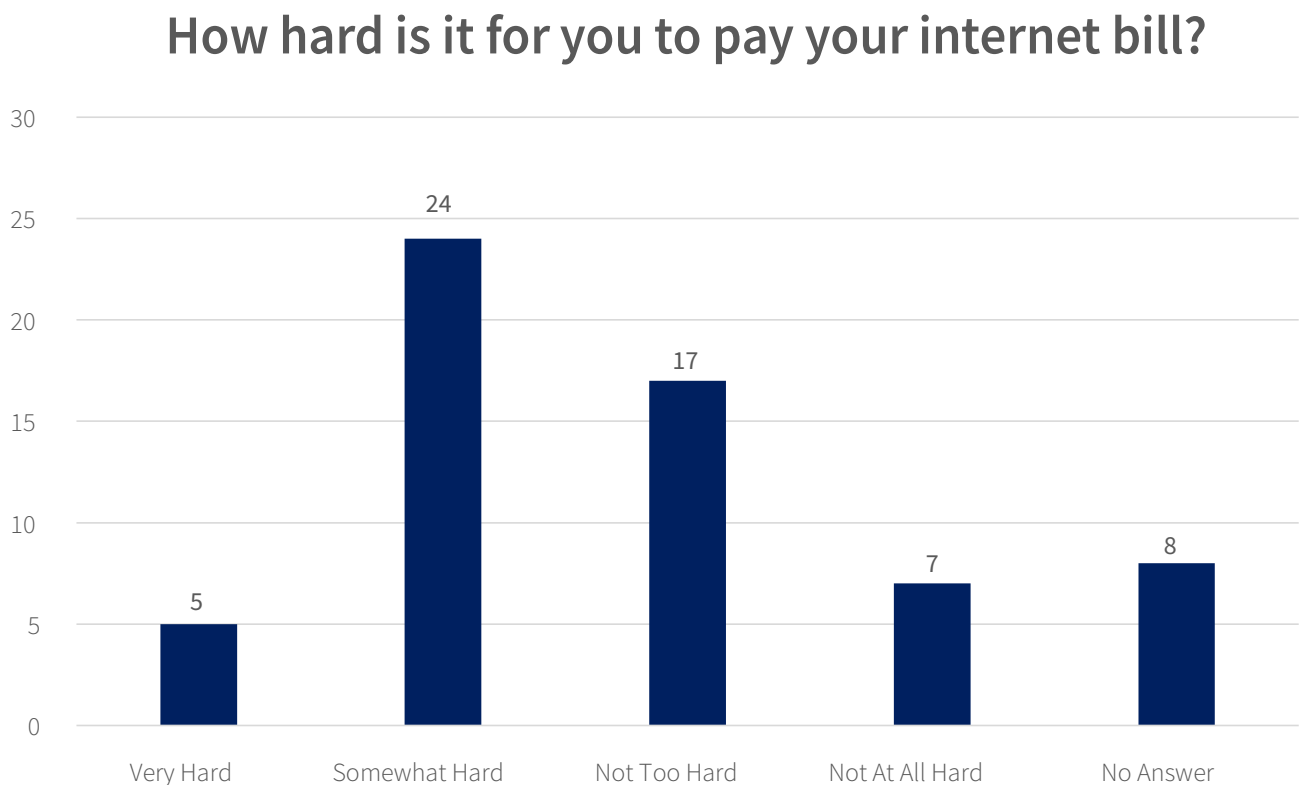
# Connectivity and Affordability

Cost of internet service was a common concern brought up during the public engagement process in Swansea.

In Massachusetts, 81% of the digital divide is caused by the cost of broadband internet.<sup>5</sup> Most residents with whom staff engaged felt that their internet was fast and reliable enough, but that they are paying too much for their monthly bill - some citing it was hard for them to afford.

The below graph shows survey responses to the question “How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?”. The majority of respondents (24) answered “somewhat hard”, followed by “not too hard” with 17 people choosing this option.

**Figure 2.** Survey Q12: How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?



<sup>5</sup> Education Superhighway, Massachusetts Broadband Affordability Gap, 2021, [https://www.educationsuperhighway.org/wp-content/uploads/NoHomeLeftOffline\\_Infographic\\_Massachusetts.pdf](https://www.educationsuperhighway.org/wp-content/uploads/NoHomeLeftOffline_Infographic_Massachusetts.pdf)

Table 1. Speed Test Data

<b>Total Tests</b>	2,374
<b>Unique ID Tests</b>	488
<b>Jitter &gt; 50 ms</b>	180
<b>Latency &gt; 100 ms</b>	17
<b>Speeds &gt; 500 ms</b>	4
<b>Speeds &lt; 25 x 3 Mbps</b>	53
<b>Speeds &lt; 50 x 10 Mbps</b>	229
<b>Speeds &lt; 100 x 20 Mbps</b>	704
<b>Speeds at least 25 x 3 Mbps</b>	2,107
<b>Speeds at least 50 x 10 Mbps</b>	1,597
<b>Speeds at least 100 x 20 Mbps</b>	819
<b>Speeds at least 100 x 100 Mbps</b>	0

Table 2. Maximum Speeds

<b>Max Speed 25/3 Mbps</b>	<b>Max Speed 100/20 Mbps</b>	<b>Max Speed 100/100 Mbps</b>	<b>Max Speed 1000/1000 Mbps</b>
0%	99.45%	0%	0%

The following map shows the maximum upload and maximum download speeds of internet throughout Swansea. The download speed identifies how fast information travels to you, for example, how fast it takes to download large files or show pages with multiple pictures. The upload speed is how fast information can travel from you. This effects things like your ability to participate in a virtual doctor's appointment, which can take 5-10Mbps.

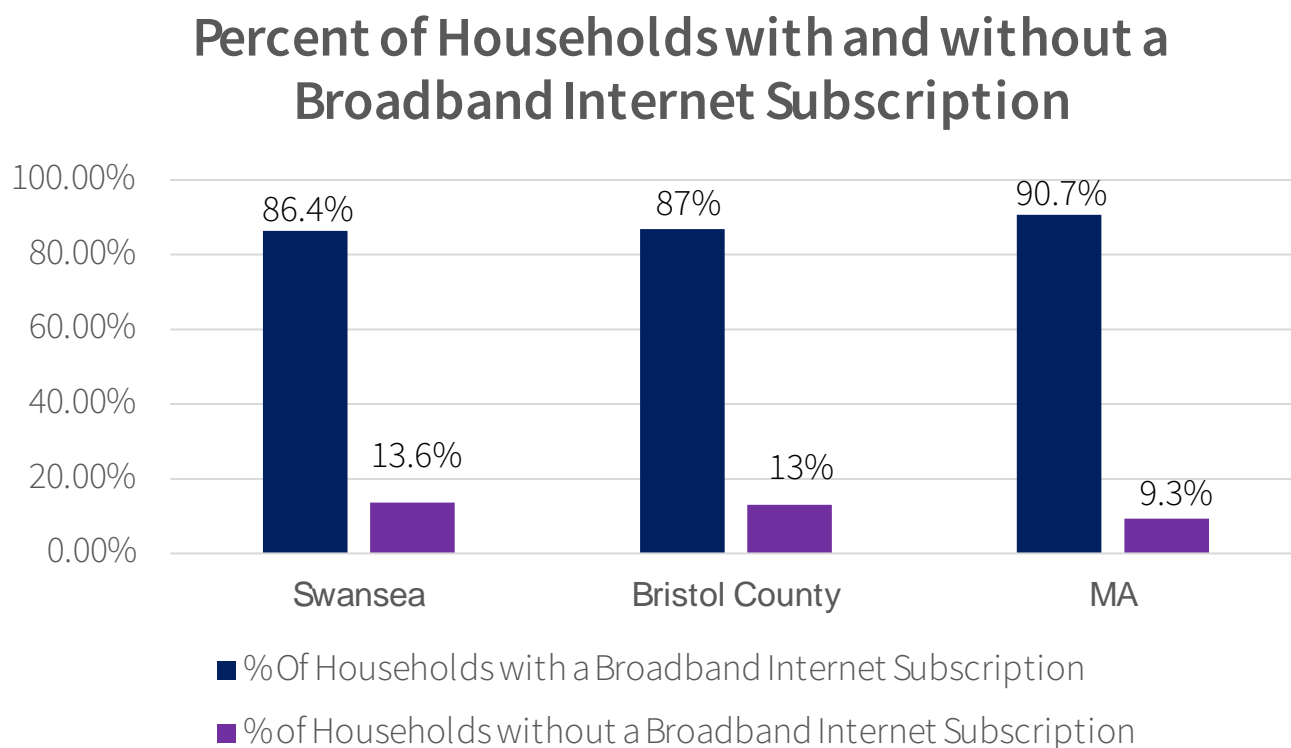


**Map 1.** Maximum Upload and Download Speeds in Swansea



In Swansea, 13.6% of households do not have a broadband internet subscription. This is compared to 13% of households in Bristol County, and 9.3% of households in the state. This percentage is similar to that of Bristol County, but higher than that of the state.

**Figure 3.** Percentage of Households With & Without a Broadband Internet Subscription



The table below shows the internet service providers that are active in Swansea. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute acknowledges service coverage from Comcast and T-Mobile in the Town. In research, staff found that ViaSat and HughesNet also provide service in Swansea. From feedback during community outreach and the digital equity survey, staff found that most people in Swansea utilize Comcast as their ISP, with Comcast holding a strong monopoly on the town. Respondents to the digital equity survey also noted having AT&T and Cox as their internet service providers, which were companies that SRPEDD did not identify during the research process.

**Table 3.** Internet Service Providers in Swansea

<b>Provider Name</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Max Advertised Download Speed (Mbps)</b>	<b>Max Advertised Upload Speed (Mbps)</b>	<b># of BSLs with Service Available</b>	<b>% of BSLs with Service Available</b>
Comcast	Cable	1200	35	6,730	99.45%
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3	864	12.77%
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	100	20	318	4.7%
ViaSat	Satellite	100	N/A	N/A	N/A
HughesNet	Satellite	100	N/A	N/A	N/A

The following two tables show coverage and competition of internet service providers (ISPs) in Swansea. There are no broadband serviceable locations in Swansea that have service of at least 100/20 Mbps from 2 or more providers. This means that there is a monopoly of ISPs in most of Swansea, with many people citing that Comcast (Xfinity) is the only option that they have at their address, forcing them to pay the price that Comcast is charging if they want internet access because there is no other option available.

**Table 4.** Coverage and Competition

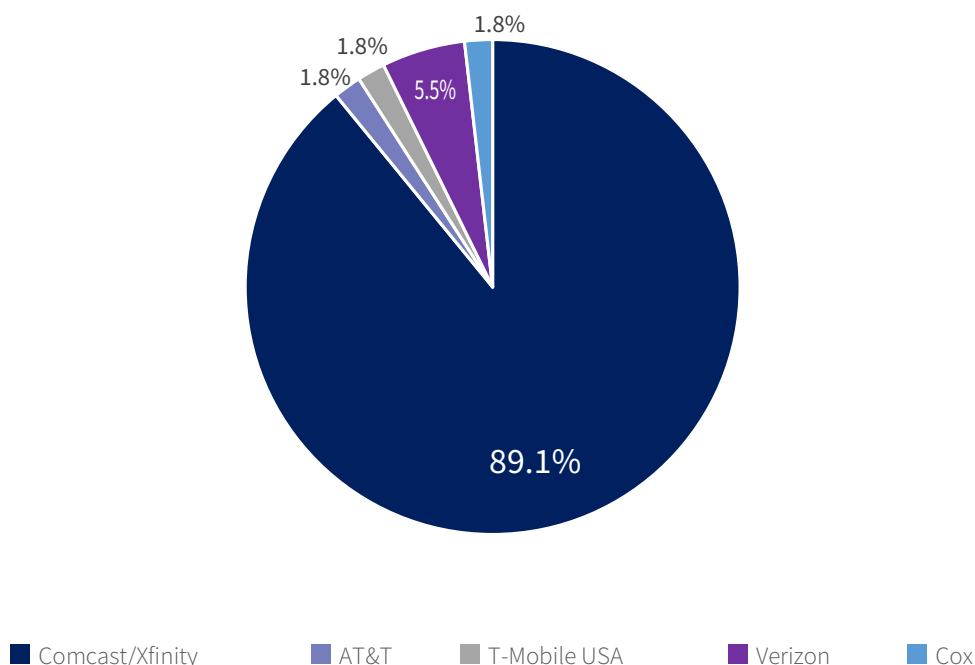
<b>Service Coverage of at Least 25/3 Mbps from 1 or more providers</b>	<b>Service Coverage of at Least 100/20 Mbps from 1 or more providers</b>	<b>Service Coverage of at Least 100/20 Mbps from 2 or more providers</b>
99.45%	99.45%	0.00%

**Table 5.** Number of Internet Service Providers

<b>0 Providers</b>	<b>1 Provider</b>	<b>2 Providers</b>	<b>3 Providers</b>	<b>4 Providers</b>
0.55%	81.99%	17.47%	0.00%	0.00%

Figure 4. Survey Q7: Who is your Internet Service Provider?

## Who is your internet service provider?



The above graph shows the responses to the question “Who is your internet service provider”? The majority of respondents to the survey (49) have either Comcast or Xfinity, which is a subsidiary of Comcast, as their internet service provider. Other respondents noted having AT&T, T-Mobile, Verizon, and Cox as their internet service provider.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) was a federal program created during the Covid-19 Pandemic aimed at alleviating the monthly price of internet for cost burdened households. The program provided households with a \$30 credit off their monthly internet bill, and a \$100 credit towards a device, or \$75 off their monthly internet bill if they were living on tribal lands. Families who were living at or below 200% of the federal poverty line were eligible to participate in the ACP. Other things that constituted eligibility included having at least one member in the household who received a Federal Pell Grant that year, or if they were already enrolled in an assistance

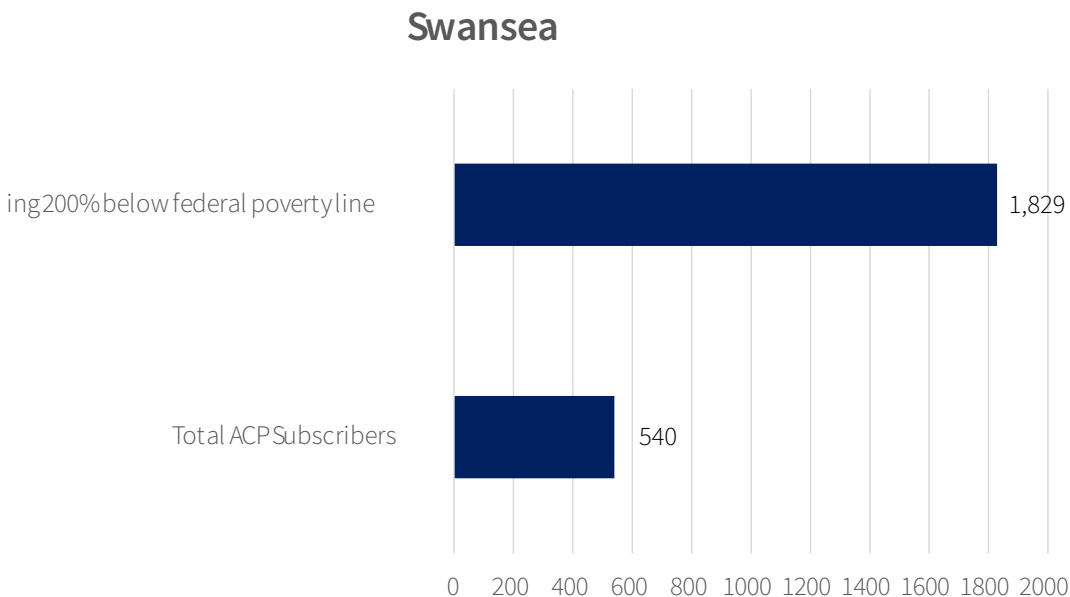
program, such as SNAP or Medicaid. The program ended in May 2024 due to a lack of funding at the federal level.

**Image 1.** ACP Has Ended for Now Website Banner



Households living at or below 200% of the federal poverty line in Swansea (1,829 households) compared with the number of households enrolled in the ACP (540 households) indicate that the program was being moderately used in Swansea. The end of this program means that these households were forced to either start paying more for their monthly internet bill or get rid of their internet if they could not afford it without the ACP.

**Figure 5.** ACP Enrollment vs. Households Living 200% Below the Federal Poverty Line

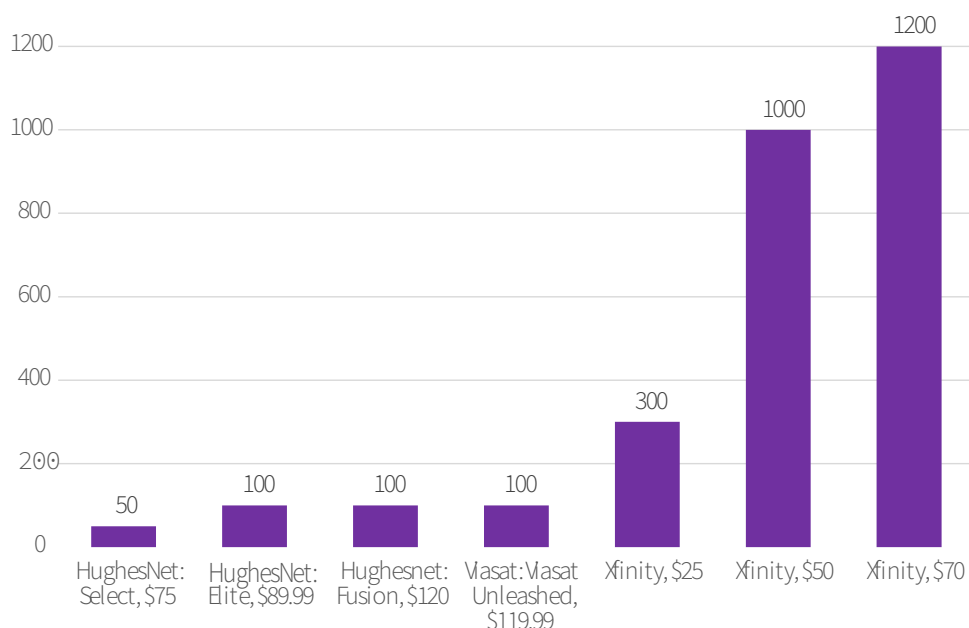


Despite the end of the ACP, there are other lesser-known options that residents can utilize to obtain cheaper internet prices. The Comcast Internet Essentials Program offers 50 Mbps for \$9.95 a month or 100 Mbps for \$29.95 a month (Internet Essentials Plus). To participate in this program, people must qualify by currently participating in certain assistance program.<sup>6</sup> As of the end of 2022, in Swansea, 800 households had utilized the Internet Essentials Program. This demonstrates a need for an affordable internet option in the Town.

Additionally, the Universal Service Administrative Company's (USAC) Lifeline Program provides a discount of \$9.25 a month off of phone, internet, or bundled services for qualified participants. Participants can qualify via income or participating in another government assistance program.<sup>7</sup> While these programs both provide some relief in the price of a monthly internet bill, neither are a true replacement for the ACP.

The graph below shows the cost of each plan available at a sample address in Swansea compared to the maximum download speed (in Mbps) provided by the plan. In SRPEDD's research, the average cost of a monthly internet subscription at a sample address was \$78.57. Additionally, the average cost people noted that they pay for their monthly internet subscription on the digital equity survey was \$148.33.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 6.** Internet Service Packages Available at a Sample Address in Swansea



<sup>6</sup> Xfinity, Internet Essentials Web page

<sup>7</sup> USAC Lifeline Support Web page

<sup>8</sup>Note: While this question asked people what their monthly internet cost was minus the cost of other services in their bundle, people may have answered with the cost of their entire bundle including phone and cable rather than their internet cost alone.



# Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD)

The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program's goal is to build high-speed internet connections to all unserved and underserved communities in Massachusetts, and across the United States. The purpose of the BEAD Challenge Process is to help catalogue unidentified broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) in the state. This process allowed eligible entities a chance to dispute the status of “served” (a location with an internet speed of 100/20 Mbps), “underserved” (a location with an internet service slower than 100/20 Mbps), or “unserved” (a location receiving internet service slower than 25/3 Mbps) BSLs. This process did not take affordability into consideration, it is only about the speed of the service.

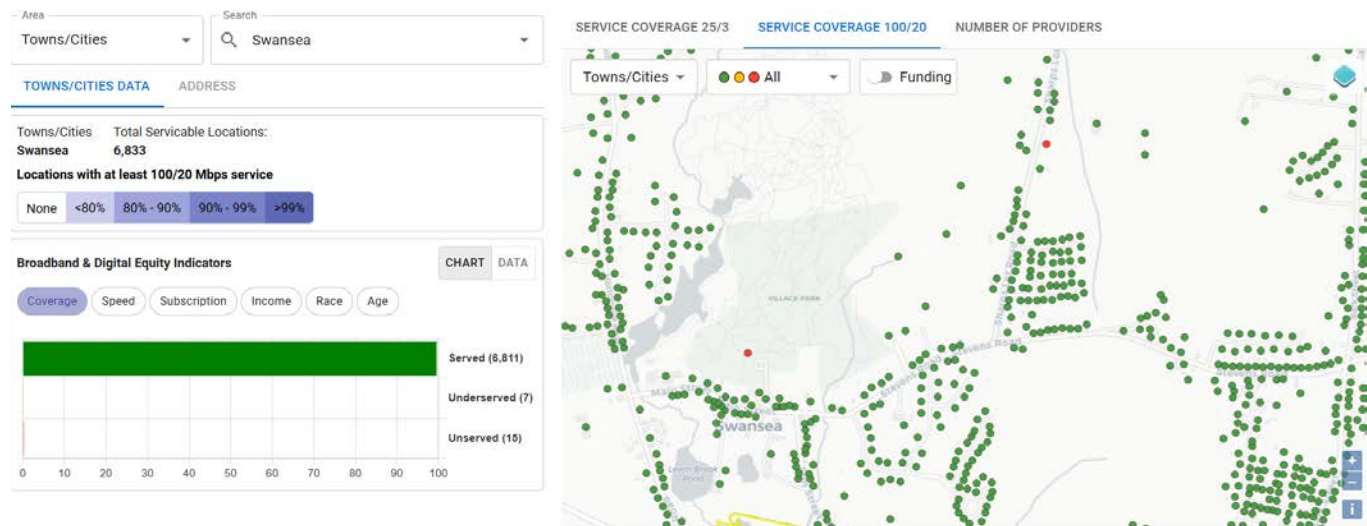
According to MBI's BEAD Map, as of February 2025, seven locations are underserved and fifteen locations are unserved in Swansea, making them eligible for BEAD deployment process. Despite this, no locations had BEAD challenges submitted.

Below is an overview of the types of BEAD Challenges:

- “Availability: Service shown isn't available or service is currently available but isn't shown
- Speed: Service speed is slower than advertised that the location can be classified as underserved or unserved
- Latency: The round-trip latency of the broadband service exceeds 100 milliseconds (ms)
- Data Caps: The only service plans marketed to consumers impose an unreasonable capacity allowance
- Enforceable Commitment: Federal, state, or local funding is already paying to connect this location (or this location will be left out)
- Planned Service: Privately funded construction is underway to connect this location (this location will be left out)
- Community Anchor Institution: Location is (or is not) in one of the CAI categories defined in the Massachusetts State Challenge Process.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Massachusetts Broadband Institute, “Bead Challenge Process”, 2024

Image 2. MBI's BEAD Dashboard for Swansea

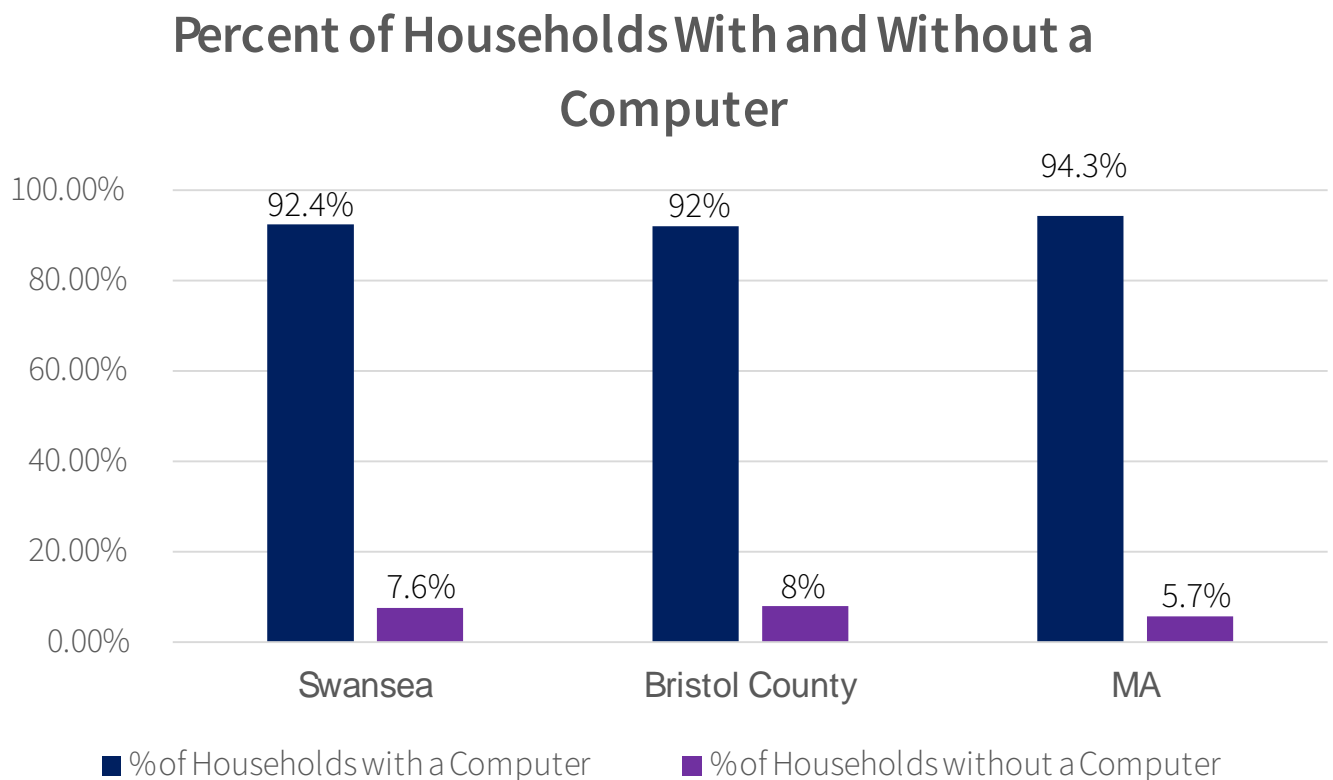


In summary, BEAD challenge information in Swansea suggests that there are some locations in Swansea that are eligible for BEAD funding to deploy better broadband to these locations. However, challenges were not submitted for any of these locations. To further explore Swansea's BEAD challenge data and map, visit the MBI website [here](#). Additionally, all unserved and underserved locations in Swansea are not eligible for BEAD funding because they will all be served by Comcast through [MBI's Gap Network Program](#).

# Device Access

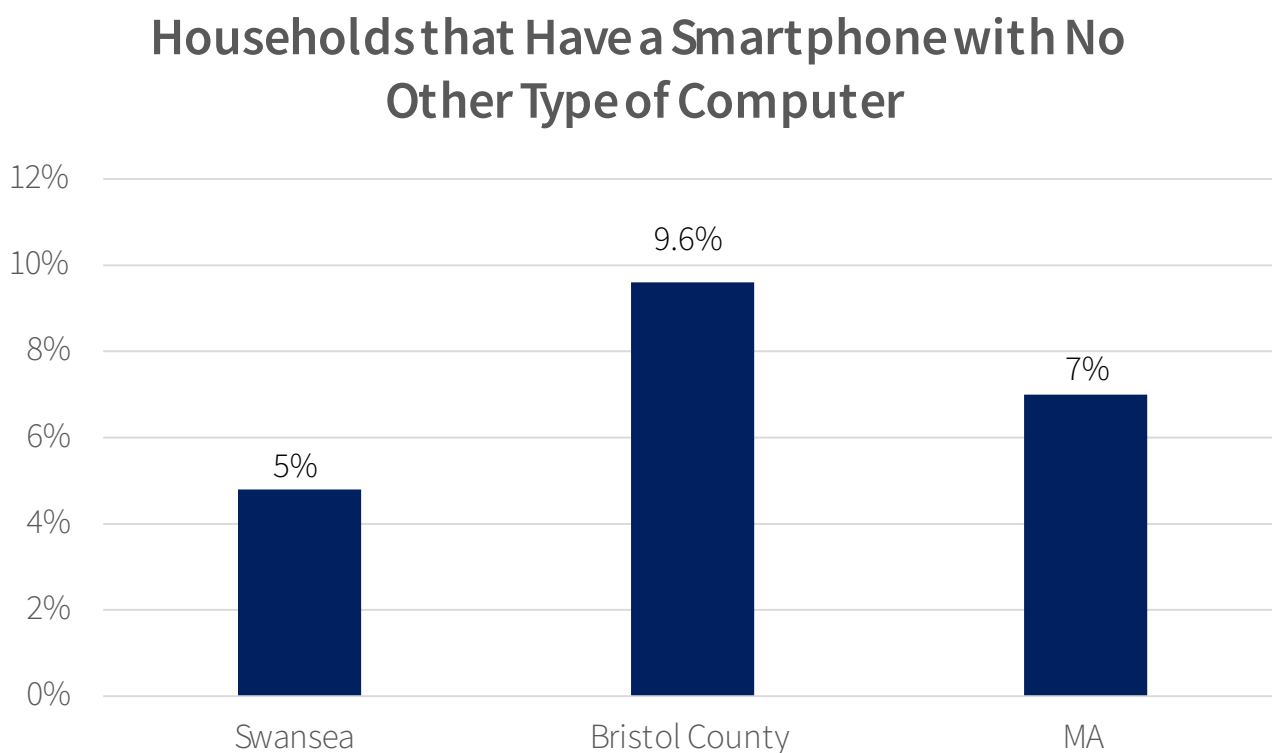
Most households in Swansea do have access to a computer. According to US Census data, 7.6% of Swansea households do not have a computer in their home. This figure is roughly the same in comparison with 8% of households in Bristol County, but higher than the 5.7% of households in Massachusetts, which do not have a computer in their home.

Figure 7. Households With & Without a Computer



Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, Swansea

**Figure 8.** Households that Have a Smartphone and No Other Type of Computer



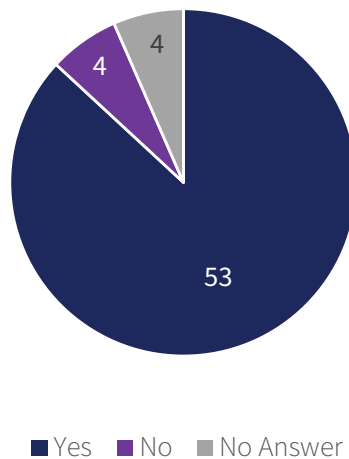
Source: American Community Survey, S2801: Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions

In Swansea, 5% of households have a smartphone with no other type of computer. Though many Americans are shifting to rely more on smartphones to access the internet (this is notable among the 65+ population), certain websites and software limit what can be done on a smartphone, and in some cases, only work properly on a laptop or tablet.<sup>10</sup> Access to a computer can open opportunities to an adult learner who wants to pursue higher education, or to an elderly person who lacks access to transportation and therefore cannot visit or interact with their healthcare provider in person.

<sup>10</sup>Pew Research Center, “Mobile Fact Sheet”, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>, 2024

**Figure 9.** Survey Q 16- Does everyone in your households have access to the computer devices they need to meet their everyday needs for internet use?

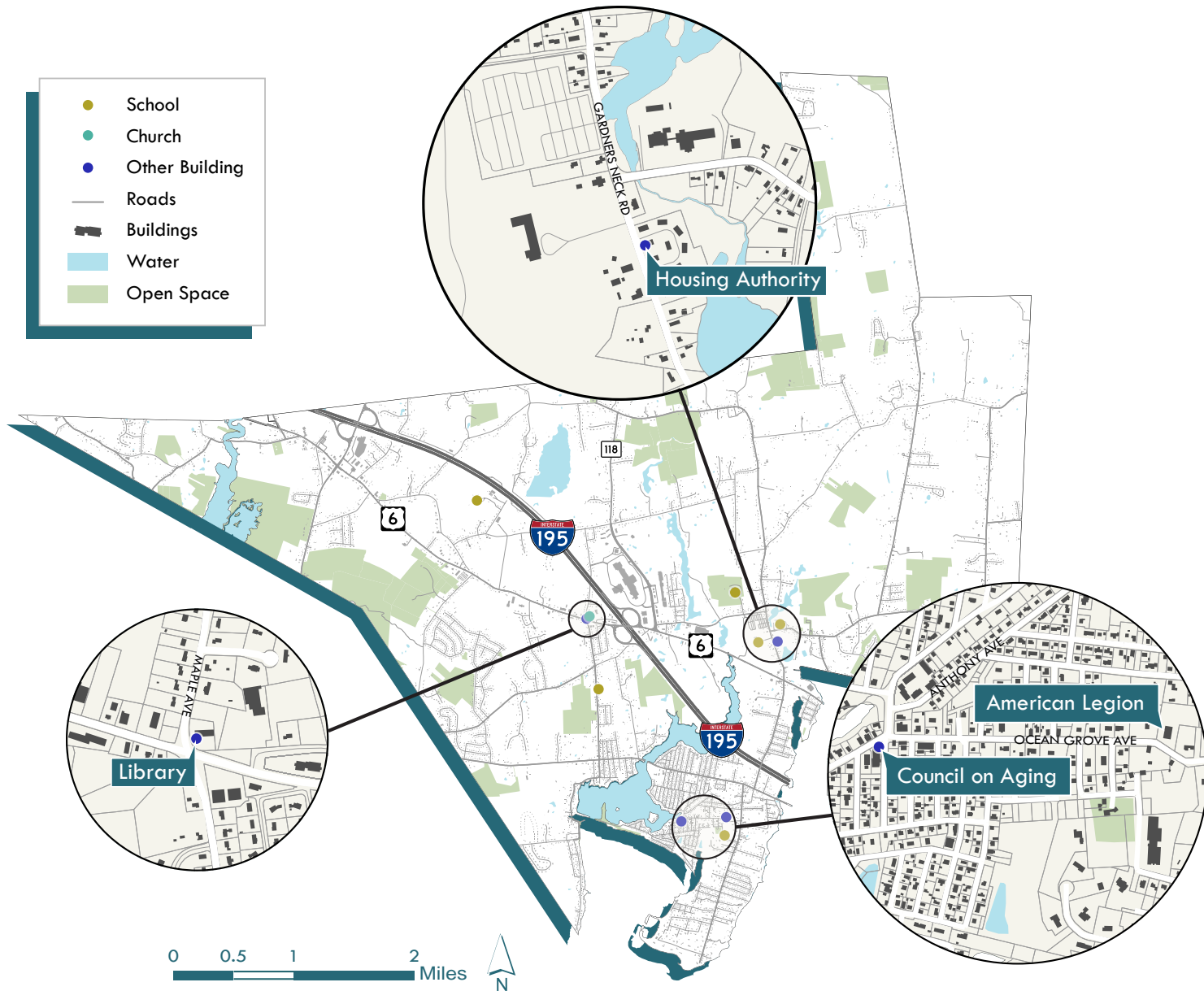
**Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?**



In the digital equity survey, most residents (53 out of 61 survey respondents) noted that they do have access to the devices necessary to meet their everyday needs for internet use. It is important, however, to note the importance of the third pillar of digital equity – having the ability to safely navigate and trouble shoot devices. Though it is difficult to measure digital literacy competency, insights gained through cataloging and speaking with managers of Swansea’s digital equity assets help paint a better picture of what the state of digital literacy is in Swansea.

# Digital Equity Assets

Map 2. Community Anchor Institutions in Swansea





As part of SRPEDD's work with MBI in Fall 2023, staff compiled a list of digital equity assets throughout the Southeast region of Massachusetts. A digital equity asset is anything that supports or promotes digital equity. These can include things such as device distribution programs, digital navigators, any relevant plans, or other programs supporting digital equity.

## Swansea Public Library

During the initial regional asset mapping phase, staff was able to identify one digital equity asset in Swansea - the Swansea Public Library, which offers free public Wi-Fi. Additionally, during the planning process, the Swansea Public Library applied for and received a PLA Digital Literacy Grant. The library is using this grant to increase digital literacy amongst Swansea residents using DigitalLearn training materials. They are currently offering weekly digital skills classes, each one focused around a different topic; an overview of current planned sessions is:

- Outsmart Online Offenders: Cybersecurity Basics
- Windows Wizard: Computer Basics
- Email Made Easy
- Mobile Magic: Android Devices
- Mobile Magic: Apple Devices
- Cyber Sleuthing: Internet Basics
- Meet Me on the Web: Video Conferencing Basics

Along with offering these digital skills classes, the library will also be using funds to purchase laptops and tablets to be used in the library. The library also has future plans to hold more robust AI (artificial intelligence) and cybersecurity trainings.

Image 3. Swansea Public Library



The remainder of this section details assets that SRPEDD staff identified during the digital equity planning process.



## Swansea Council on Aging

During the project's public engagement process, staff learned that the Swansea Council on Aging occasionally offers digital skills classes; they also have devices for seniors to check out and use. The Council on Aging currently has twenty Samsung Tablets that they allow patrons to check out for a month at a time, six iPads that they use for classes at the Council on Aging, and six Kindle tablets that are used for the Council's book club.

Image 4. Swansea Council on Aging





## American Legion

Additionally, staff discovered during the public engagement process that the American Legion offers a computer for veterans to use.

Image 5. American Legion Post 303, Swansea MA



## Swansea Housing Authority

While not explicitly a digital equity asset, the Swansea Housing Authority is an important community asset and resource for many members of covered populations in Swansea. Their priority is housing elderly residents, disabled residents, and veterans; residents of Housing Authority sites are charged rent that is 30% of their net income, which includes utilities except cable and telephone. They operate Martin Court, Federal Scattered Family Sites, and a Group Home. Martin Court is specifically for people 60 or older, or people under 60 with a qualified disability. There are also six scattered family sites throughout Swansea, which are for low-income families.<sup>11</sup> Martin Court is participating in MBI's Residential Retrofit program which will provide high-speed internet access for all 64 units at this location.

Image 6. Swansea Housing Authority Logo



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<sup>11</sup>[Swansea Housing Authority](#)

# Outreach and Public Engagement Process

The public engagement process for this plan involved a variety of in-person on-the-ground engagement; it attempted to disseminate information and gather feedback in popular areas around Town. The following section describes the community planning process that informed this document.

## Project Kick Off

In early Summer of 2024, SRPEDD staff kicked off the public engagement process with a Steering Committee formed by the Town Planner. At this meeting, committee members were introduced to digital equity as a concept and assisted in creating strategy to meaningfully target underserved populations in the community. Throughout the planning process, the Steering Committee assisted in organizing tabling events, hosting the digital equity charette, and connecting SRPEDD staff with local champions. Members of the Steering Committee represented:

- Swansea Public Library
- Swansea Council on Aging
- Swansea Community Television

## Department Head Questionnaire

Information was gathered from town staff through a detailed questionnaire for department heads. The intent was to better understand how the state of internet use in their departments affects their ability to assist residents with 1:1 help and civic participation.



*Represented Departments/Boards:*

- Community Development
- Treasurer
- Board of Assessors
- Library
- Administration
- Police

## Surveys and Online Engagement

The project survey was distributed through MBI and promoted at in-person events and key communication platforms online. To increase the number of survey responses; SRPEDD offered an incentive. Anyone who filled out a paper survey was entered to win a \$25 gift card to Audrey's, a local Swansea restaurant. The project received a total of 61 responses on the digital equity survey which assisted in understanding the state of internet affordability and town demographics.

SRPEDD also hosted a project web page with information about why and how the digital equity plan was being conducted. This page was regularly updated with event information and invited residents to participate in the online survey.

## Community Pop Ups

Tabling and community pop-ups allowed staff to engage with residents directly to hear more nuanced takes on digital equity needs. At all in-person events, staff spoke with residents about digital equity and ongoing planning efforts in Swansea. Residents were given flyers with information about the plan, paper surveys, QR codes to access the plan website and the online version of the survey, along with pens and sticky notes to leave feedback about internet service in the town on informational boards. This section describes the various community pop-ups that project staff held.

## **Stony Creek Farmer's Market**

On Sunday September 15th, staff tabled at the Stony Creek Farmer's Market with information and surveys for the Digital Equity Plan. Staff found that most attendees to this Farmer's Market resided outside of Swansea, therefore were not relevant to give feedback for this plan.

## **Tabling Outside Senior Card League**

On the evening of Wednesday October 9th, staff set up a table outside of the Senior Card League at the First Christian Congregational Church. Similar to the Stony Creek Farmer's Market, many attendees of the event were not Swansea residents. Despite this, staff were able to get some feedback about the overall cost and speed of internet in Swansea.

## **Swansea Public Library Halloween Carnival**

Staff set up a table at the Swansea Public Library Halloween Carnival on Saturday, October 19th. At this event, the most common comment that staff heard from attendees was that the cost of their monthly internet bill is too high and there are not enough internet service providers in Town.

## **Swansea Public Library Digital Equity Presentation**

On Thursday October 10th, staff held a digital equity presentation at the Swansea Public Library.

## **Tabling After Mass at First Christian Congregational Church**

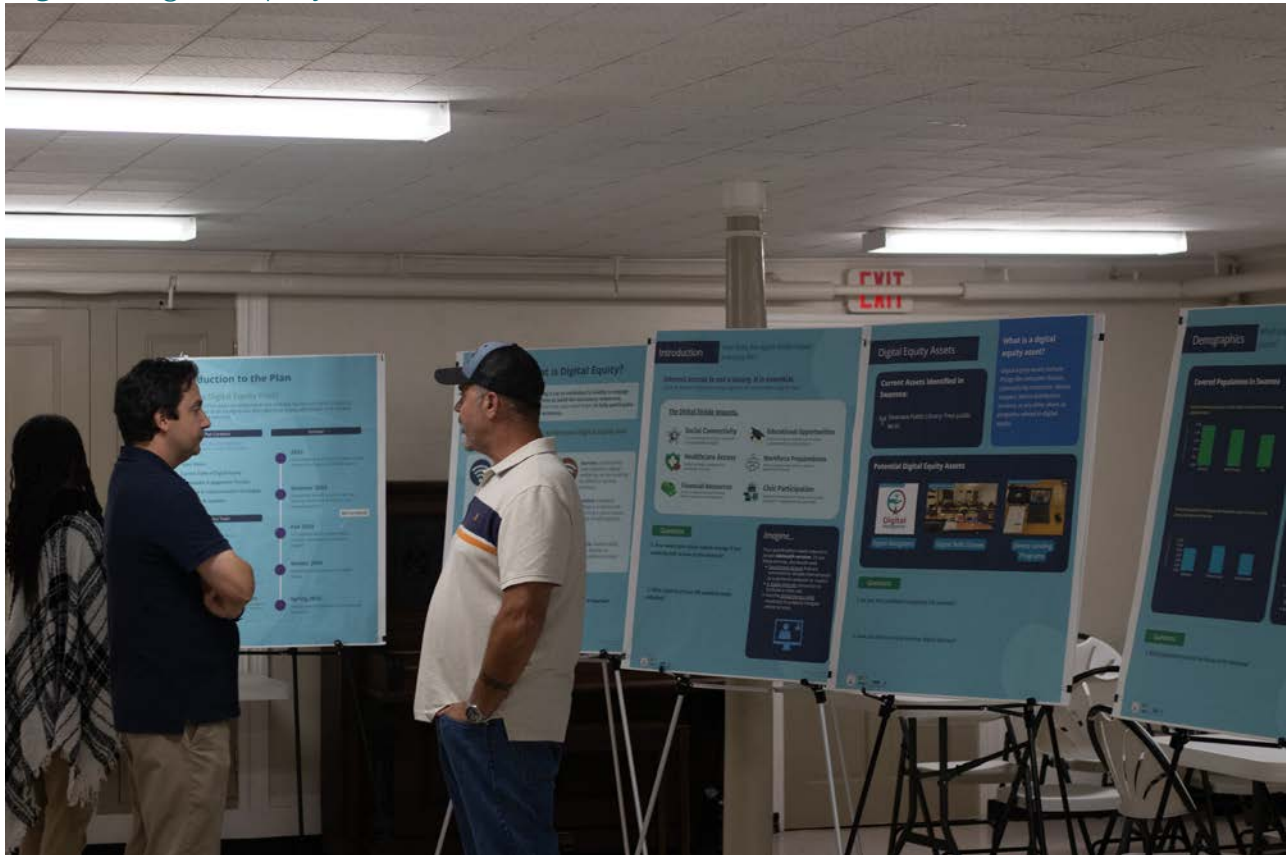
On Sunday October 20th, staff went to talk to members of the First Christian Congregational Church after their morning mass. This was one of the most productive public engagement events of the plan, with many members of the congregation staying after mass to have coffee and discuss their internet service.

## **Digital Equity Charette**

The Digital Equity Charette was held on Thursday September 26th at the First Christian Congregational Church. At this event staff gave a short presentation about the plan and displayed a series of boards discussing the findings of the planning process up

until this point and prompted for feedback with various questions related to the three pillars of digital equity. Materials from this event can be found in the appendix of this plan.

**Image 7.** Digital Equity Charette



## Virtual Digital Equity Charette

Following the in-person portion of the digital equity charette, staff held a virtual portion of the charette in the form of two drop-in sessions. One session took place on Monday October 28th from 6-8pm and the second session took place on Wednesday October 30th from 1-3pm, both via zoom. Despite advertising efforts, staff experienced no turnout at these virtual events.

## American Legion Meeting

On Monday December 16th, staff attended the monthly meeting of the American

Legion Post 303 in Swansea to discuss the digital equity plan and what it can do for veterans, and hear feedback from veterans. This was one of the most successful avenues of public outreach for this plan.

Image 8. American Legion Meeting



## Council on Aging Holiday Event

On Thursday December 12th, staff attended the Swansea Council on Aging's Holiday event to present introduce the digital equity plan and seek feedback. Staff spoke 1:1 with seniors about issues ranging from digital competency to high internet costs.

# Stakeholder Interviews

As part of the public engagement process, SRPEDD staff reached out to relevant community leaders to hear their experience serving residents and to garner a better understanding of the state of digital equity in Swansea- particularly from experiences interacting with underserved populations. These conversations provided important insights to digital equity initiatives being led throughout the town. Staff interviewed:

- Kevin Serpa, Veterans Agent
- Laurie Pimentel, Council on Aging Director
- Karen Gale, Interim Pastor, First Christian Congregational Church

# Community Needs / Covered Populations

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) recognizes the eight groups listed below as covered populations regarding digital equity:

- Low Income Households
- Aging Individuals
- Incarcerated Individuals
- Veterans
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Individuals with a Language Barrier
- Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- Individuals who live in a rural area

In Swansea, two of the eight groups, seniors and veterans were identified as the most relevant groups for this plan due to their prevalence in the community. Still, Swansea also contains other relevant populations, including individuals with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and those who may not speak English as a first language; these groups will also benefit from digital equity initiatives. The following section outlines the prevalence of covered populations in Swansea and their needs.

## Veterans

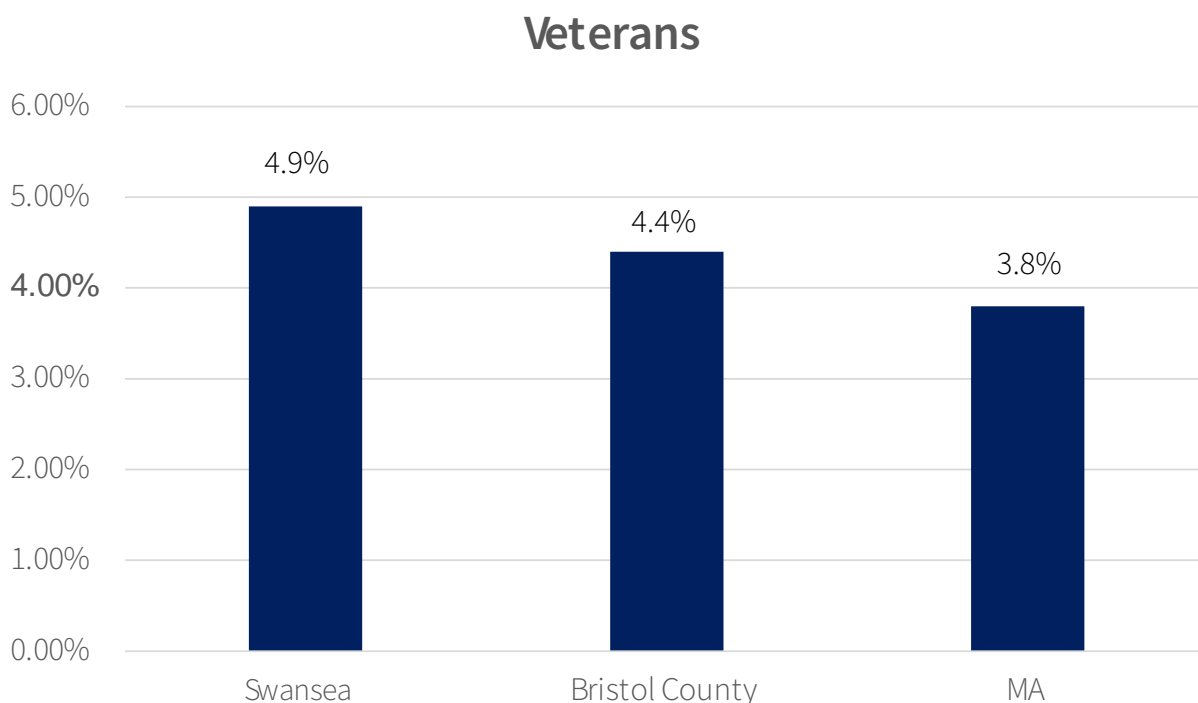
In Swansea, 4.9% of the population identifies as a veteran, compared to 4.4% of the Bristol County population and 3.8% of the Massachusetts population. In Swansea, we were able to successfully engage with a number of veterans and get their input for this



plan, including by interviewing Kevin Serpa, the town's Veteran's Agent, presenting at the December monthly meeting of the American Legion, and talking about the plan with members, alongside passing out surveys.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, 15% of veterans nationwide do not have an internet connection at home. Lacking an internet connection prohibits veterans from accessing online tools that are meant to help them thrive. For example, veterans who utilize the Veterans Administration for healthcare have access to HealtheVet, an online patient portal that allows veterans to refill prescriptions, message their care team, manage their appointments, and download their health information. For veterans who need help utilizing these services, they can visit one of the VA's Virtual Health Resource Centers (VHRCs). These centers teach veterans and their families how to use virtual health care tools. Unfortunately, there are only three VHRCs in Massachusetts - two in Boston and one in Brockton.<sup>12</sup> This means that the Town of Swansea should prioritize providing veterans in the town with the digital skills training necessary so they can utilize tools like this to the best of their ability.

**Figure 10.** Veterans in Swansea



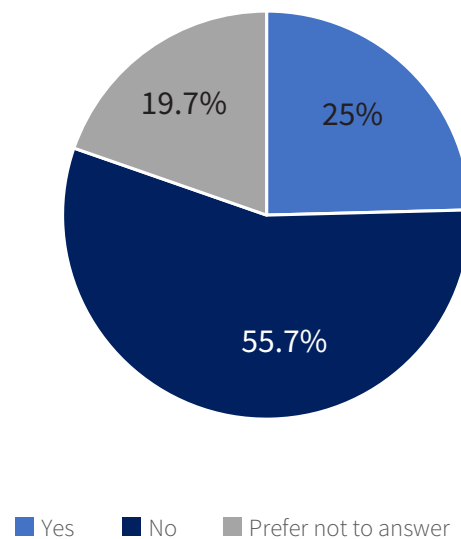
Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, Swansea

<sup>12</sup> [VA, Virtual Health Resource Centers](#)



**Figure 11.** Survey Q 41 Did you serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces?

### Did you serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces?



The above chart shows the responses to the survey question “Did you serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces?”. Twenty five percent (15 out of 61) of survey respondents answered yes that they did serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. Thanks to the American Legion welcoming staff to speak at a monthly meeting, staff were able to reach a substantial number of veterans with this planning process.

## Aging Individuals

Swansea has a growing aging population. Of its residents, 22.6% are over 65, which is higher compared to 18% of Bristol County and 18.1% of the state. Across the Southeast region, populations are aging, and this remains true in Swansea. Throughout the public engagement process, it was commonly mentioned that seniors would be the ones to benefit the most from digital equity programming and planning. From 2000 to 2023, the median age in Swansea rose by 4 years, from 40 to 44. More than half of survey respondents (67%) are over the age of 60.

**Figure 12.** People Over the Age of 65 in Swansea

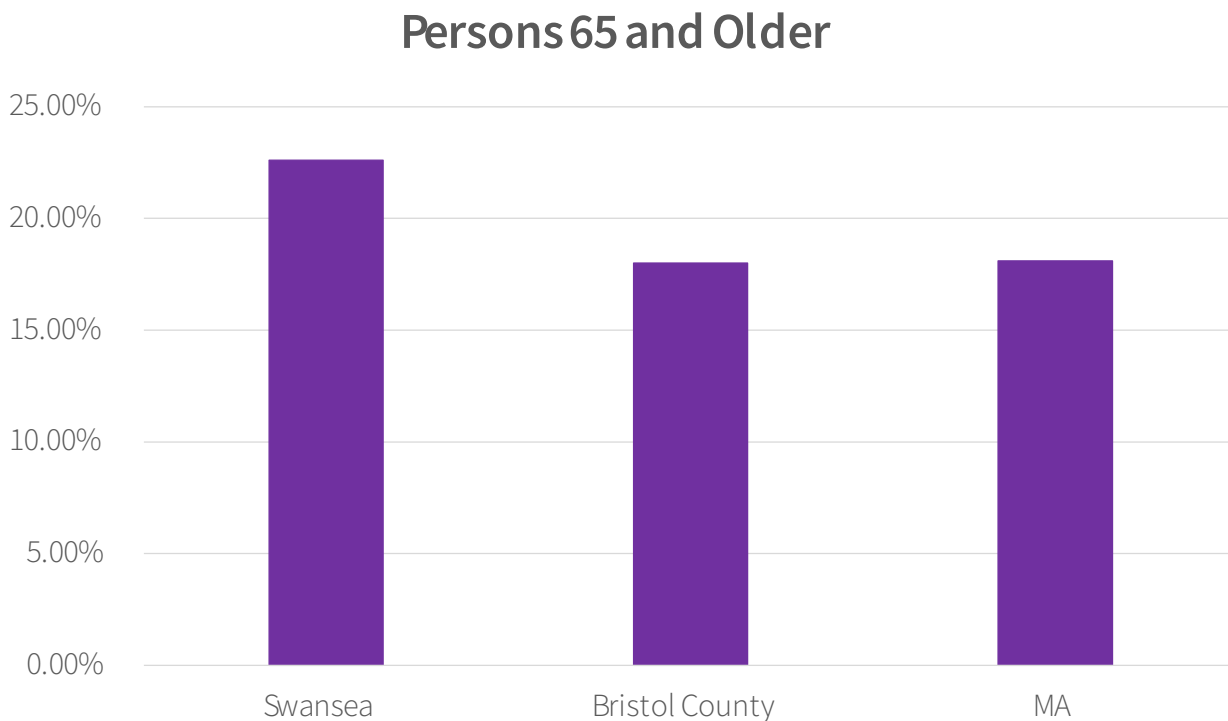


Figure 13. Age Distribution in Swansea

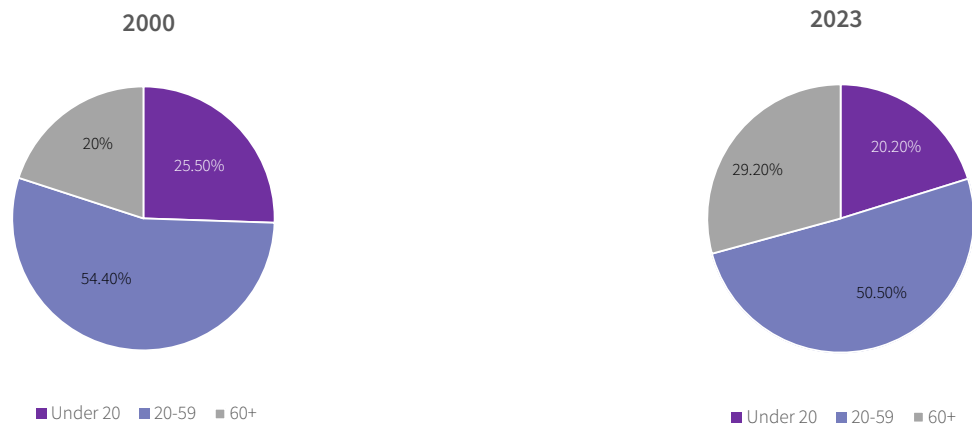
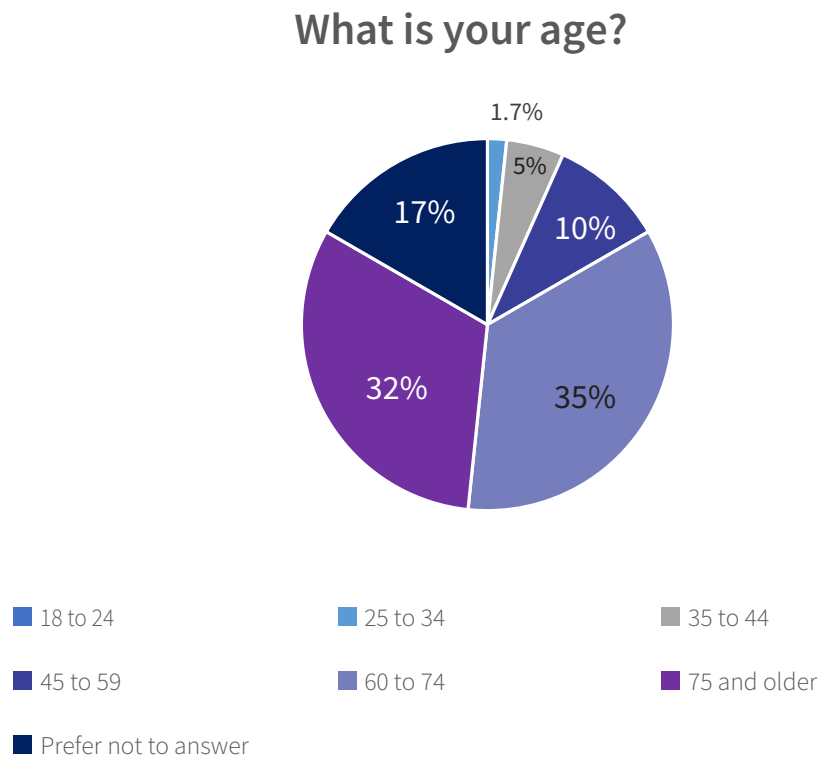


Figure 14. Survey Q29- What is your age?



# Statistics on Other Covered Populations

Below is an outline of other underserved communities that are present in Swansea.

## *Low-Income Households*

In Swansea, the median household income is \$110,975, compared to \$80,628 in Bristol County and \$96,505 in Massachusetts. Alongside this, 3.2% of Swansea households are living below the poverty level, compared to 11.4% of Bristol County Households and 10.4% of Massachusetts households.

## *Individuals with Disabilities*

In Swansea, 9% of people under the age of 65 have disability status, compared to 10.5% of people in Bristol County and 8.1% of people in Massachusetts.

## *Individuals with a Language Barrier*

In Swansea, 13.9% of people over the age of 5 speak a language other than English at home; this compares to 22.1% in Bristol County and 25.3% in Massachusetts.

## *Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group*

In Swansea, 10.2% of residents belong to a racial or ethnic minority group; this compares to 22.2% in Bristol County and 31.2% in Massachusetts.

# Key Findings

The following section is a summary of key findings shaped by the entire engagement process and data review.

## Key Anchor Institutions Face Hurdles

The Library and COA are Swansea's main providers of Digital Equity programming. Both entities have successfully harnessed the resources available and have provided excellent digital equity programming but still face distinct hurdles.

### COA

The Council on Aging Director has prioritized digital literacy trainings for seniors via technology classes, 1:1 help, and a tablet lending program. There is a clear interest for the programming from the seniors but lack of staff availability. In the past, students from the high school have volunteered to help with tech classes but scheduling made it difficult (though there is hope to restart this program).

The COA has 20 Samsung Tablets, 6 iPads, and 6 Kindles used for technology classes and a lending program. The director indicated that the distribution process can sometimes seem obsolete since seniors who check out the devices typically don't have Wi-Fi at home. While there could also be an accompanying hot spot distribution program – the COA is unable to purchase any due to not having a credit card.

### Library

Swansea's Town Library is in a temporary location at the First Congregational Church but will be moving into a new facility in late 2025. Prior to this, Swansea's Town Library hosted a half hour technology help time block, had desktops available for public use and Wi-Fi hotspots available for check out.

The change of location has not stopped staff from expanding their digital literacy programming. During the planning process, the town library was accepted into the PLA Digital Literacy Workshop Incentive Program and is continuing to work on building

their digital equity programming. A series of digital literacy classes are now available at the Town Library.

## **Digital Literacy is needed for existing and impending concerns.**

Conversations with stakeholders and community members made clear that there is a desire to learn how to adapt and navigate the internet at various skill levels and for various day-day tasks.

## **Adapting to a New ‘Class of Seniors’**

Like other aging communities in the Commonwealth, stakeholders and Town Staff recognized a general lack of digital literacy skills among seniors. During 1:1 conversation, some seniors seemed uninterested in basic computer skill classes, but many expressed wanting more advanced classes claiming they already understood a lot of what was being offered. Similarly, Swansea’s Veteran agent shed light on the importance of still addressing the needs of ‘younger’ seniors still in the workforce particularly since they need the skills to apply to jobs online.

## **Social Interaction, Civic Participation and Resources**

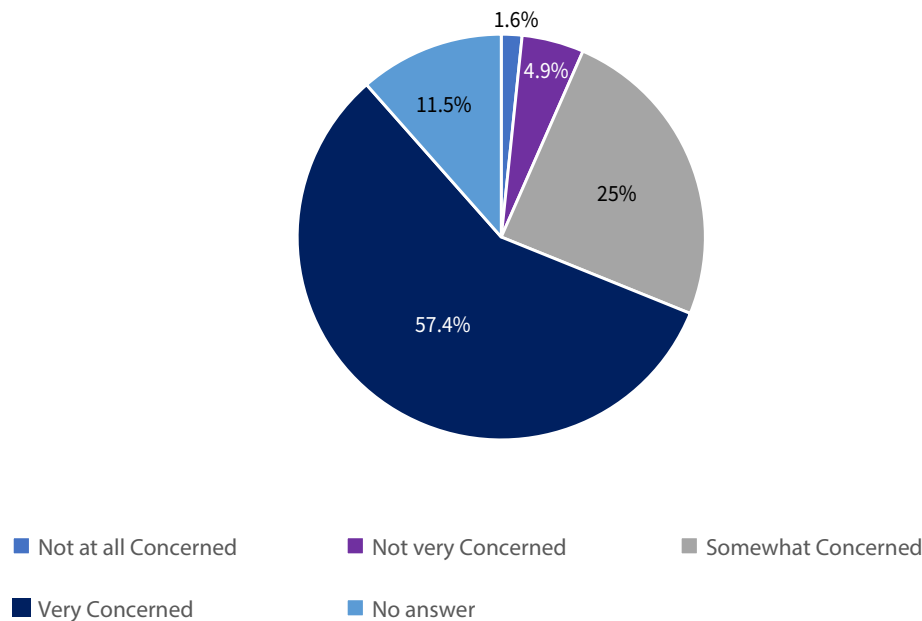
Residents and stakeholders also pointed to increase loneliness and lack of connection with the community because of digital inequities. Low-income families, seniors or others are unable to access resources online or connect with community organizations on communication platforms because affordability and competency.

## **Cyber Security and AI**

During stakeholder interviews, the digital equity charette, and responses to the digital equity survey, one common theme was concern about internet safety and cyber security. An interesting point that came up during the engagement process was that people are worried about the rising presence of artificial intelligence (AI) and what that means for internet safety.

**Figure 15.** Survey Q 24- How concerned are you about internet safety?

### How concerned are you about internet safety?



## High Costs Associated with Poor Service

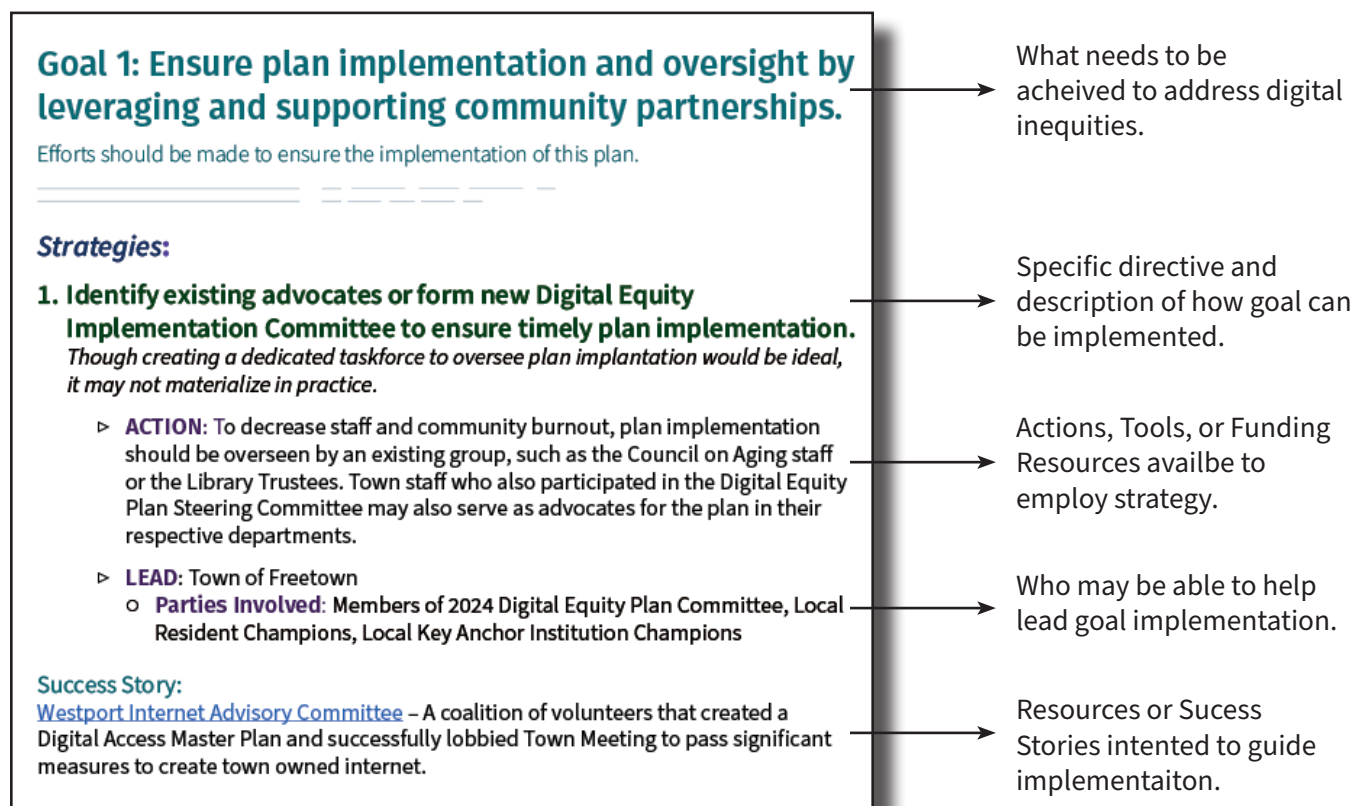
During the public engagement process, staff heard from many Swansea residents that there is a lack of competition in the town when it comes to options for internet service providers. Many residents state that Comcast is the only option they have for internet service in their household, forcing them to pay for Comcast regardless of the price. Residents also expressed disdain for the service they were provided with Comcast – particularly residents in Ocean Grove.

# Recommendations

Swansea can leverage state, federal, and community resources to implement the goals presented in this plan. The following section outlines goals and strategic recommendations that the Town can take in order to increase digital equity based on current data and key findings found throughout the engagement and research process.

These recommendations are organized by four general goals – the first of which outlines steps the community can take towards closing the digital divide and three which correspond to a specific digital equity pillar. Each goal provides strategies that may include action items, tools, success stories, and other steps Swansea can take to lead and fund digital equity initiatives.

Image 9. How to Read Recommendations Layout (example from Freetown MDEP)





## Goal 1: Create more opportunities for underserved communities to access fast and affordable internet.

### *Strategies:*

#### 1. The Town of Swansea should repursue a Municipal Fiber Grant.

- ▷ Action: Given the completion of this Municipal Digital Equity Plan, the Town should use the findings to repursue a Municipal Fiber Grant. The Town should also consider submitting a regional application with a neighboring community to access more funds and strengthen the overall application.
- ▷ Implementation Tools: [Municipal Fiber Grant Program](#): The Massachusetts Municipal Fiber Grant Program provides funding for municipalities to support the closing of gaps that exist in current municipal fiber networks.
- ▷ Lead: Town Administrator
  - Parties Involved: All Town Departments, SRPEDD, Potential regional partners - Somerset, Dighton, Rehoboth.
- ▷ Timeline: Ongoing, Continue to apply each grant cycle.

Success Story: [Seekonk, MA](#): Received \$168,597 in 2024 to connect municipal facilities to their existing municipal fiber network.

#### 2. Increase access to affordable broadband.

- ▷ Action: Swansea can utilize Comcast's Internet Essentials Partnership Program. This program allows towns to purchase a certain number of Internet Essentials internet plans and provide them to residents free of charge. The Town can work with the school district, American Legion, Public Library, Council on Aging, and other relevant town institutions to determine how many subscriptions would be necessary to meet the needs of the Town's residents.

- ▷ Implementation Tools: [Comcast Internet Essentials Partnership Program](#)
- ▷ Lead: Town Staff
  - Parties Involved: Community Anchor Institutions
- ▷ Timeline: Intermediate

Success Story: [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania](#): Pittsburgh Public Schools identified 1,000 families in the district that did not have internet in their home, and through the Comcast Internet Essentials Partnership Program, they were able to provide these households with a year of free internet.

### 3. Create more spaces for residents to access free public Wi-Fi.

- ▷ Action: The Town of Swansea should explore opportunities to create more spaces for residents to access free public Wi-Fi, aside from the library. This can include things such as public outdoors areas having Wi-Fi available, such as the Town Beach area, Veterans Memorial Green, and the Little League area. This would not only allow residents stronger access to free Wi-Fi, but it would also allow Swansea Community Television to live stream various events, such as Little League games, creating a stronger community.
- ▷ Lead: Town of Swansea
  - Parties Involved: Swansea Community Television.
- ▷ Timeline: Long term

Success Story: [Wicked Free Wi-Fi](#): The City of Boston has a free outdoor Wi-Fi network, which aims to advance the City's state of digital equity by providing free internet to all people. They are currently expanding the program, and there will be an estimated 130 access points to connect to the free Wi-Fi.

#### 4. Pursue MBI's Residential Retrofit Program for Swansea Housing Authority sites.

- ▷ Action: The Swansea Housing Authority should pursue inclusion in MBI's Residential Retrofit Program. As of June 2025, Martin Court, located at 100 Gardner Neck Road is participating in the Residential Retrofit Program. Since Swansea's Housing Authority sites especially serve veterans, elderly, and disabled individuals, this goal should be a priority for the Town. The Town should prioritize pursuing Residential Retrofit for all housing authority sites, in addition to Martin Court.
- ▷ Implementation Tools: [MBI Residential Retrofit Program](#): This program provides residents of public and affordable housing properties a lower cost, higher speed internet option. Grants are made directly to internet service providers to build the fiber infrastructure into affordable housing buildings with a minimum service capability of 100/100 Mbps. The image below this strategy shows an overview of the Residential Retrofit process.
- ▷ Lead: Swansea Housing Authority
  - Parties Involved: Town Administrator, MBI
- ▷ Timeline: Immediate, interested housing operators must submit an expression of interest to MBI by March 28, 2025, and all projects must be substantially completed by December 2026.

Success Story: [Preservation of Affordable Housing](#): According to the MBI Housing Operator Webinar in October of 2024, a representative of the Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), states that at one of their locations where they have utilized the Residential Retrofit program, residents only pay \$16 a month for 300mbps symmetrical internet service.

Image 10. MBI Residential Retrofit Program Process



## Goal 2: Ensure plan implementation by leveraging and supporting community partnerships.

### *Strategies:*

#### 1. Identify an existing group or form a new Digital Equity Implementation Committee to ensure the plan is implemented.

- ▷ Action: To decrease staff and community burnout, plan implementation should be overseen by an existing group, such as the Council on Aging staff or the Library Trustees. Town staff who participated in the Digital Equity Plan Steering Committee may also serve as advocates for the plan in their respective departments.
- ▷ Lead: Town of Swansea
  - Parties Involved: Members of the 2024-2025 Digital Equity Plan Committee, Local Resident Champions, Key Anchor Institutions
- ▷ Timeline: Immediate

Success Story: [Westport, MA Internet Advisory Committee](#): A coalition of volunteers that created a Digital Access Master Plan and successfully lobbied Town Meeting to pass significant measures to create town owned internet.

#### 2. Work with the Town of Somerset to coordinate the Towns' digital equity efforts.

- ▷ Action: The Town of Swansea should work with the neighboring Town of Somerset to coordinate their digital equity efforts; partnering in this way may increase access to funding opportunities and the resources necessary to best support the collective needs of both communities. Since Swansea and Somerset are neighboring towns that have both completed an MDEP, there is likely overlap in covered populations and the digital equity needs of both communities.

- ▷ Lead: Town of Swansea, Town of Somerset
- ▷ Timeline: Immediate, the towns can begin coordinating their digital equity efforts as soon as they see fit.

Success Story: [Tech Tuesdays at Gill-Montague Senior Center](#): This Council on Aging, which serves multiple towns, was awarded the Enhancing Digital Literacy for Older Adults Grant through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs to purchase devices and provide digital skills classes to seniors in the area.

### **3. Swansea's Town departments that provide community services - particularly the COA and Library - should increase collaboration to effectively meet residents' digital equity needs.**

- ▷ Action: Town departments, such as the Library and Council on Aging, should continue to work together to combine their resources to effectively meet the digital equity needs of Swansea residents. Sub tasks include:
  - Cross Promotion - If one entity is offering a digital equity related program, town departments should work together to advertise the program to the residents that they regularly work with.
  - Sharing Resources - Entities should work together to share resources if there are roadblocks to procurement. For instance, the COA is in need of more hotspots to lend out and the Library has them available for lending.
- ▷ Parties Involved: All Town Departments
- ▷ Timeline: Departments should work together to begin coordinating their efforts as soon as possible.

## Goal 3: Ensure all Swansea residents, especially covered populations, have access to adequate devices that meet their needs.

### *Strategies:*

#### 1. Ensure adequate device access in all relevant public spaces.

- ▷ Action: The Town of Swansea should make sure that all relevant public spaces, particularly ones that serve covered populations, have devices (laptops, desktop computers, or tablets) for the public to use.
- ▷ Implementation Tools: [MBI Digital Equity Implementation Fund](#)
- ▷ Lead: Town of Swansea
  - Parties Involved: Public Library, Council on Aging, American Legion
- ▷ Timeline: Intermediate

Success Story: [Computers at Norton Town Hall for Online Permitting](#): Norton Town Hall offers numerous public computers for residents use to access the Town's electronic Permit Management System.

## 2. Utilize a public communications campaign to guarantee all residents are aware of public devices.

- ▷ Action: The Town, in partnership with the Town Departments should create and coordinate a public communications campaign, utilizing print and social media to ensure that all residents are aware of the locations of public devices for them to utilize. Special consideration should be given to ensure that covered populations are targeted with this campaign.
- ▷ Implementation Tools: [MBI Digital Equity Implementation Fund](#)
- ▷ Parties Involved: All Town Departments, American Legion
- ▷ Timeline: Intermediate, the Town can begin advertising the current offerings of the Council on Aging and Public Library, and continuously update the communications campaign as the town grows its number of digital equity assets.

Success Story: [GoDigital Easthampton](#): A social media campaign that shares information about digital equity in Easthampton, including sharing information about affordable internet plans, digital literacy classes, and information about devices.



## Goal 4: Assist vulnerable and underserved populations in safely and effectively navigating the internet and provide resources for troubleshooting digital devices and the internet.

### *Strategies:*

#### 1. Pursue a shared digital navigator between the Town of Swansea and the Town of Somerset.

- ▷ Action: To strengthen their efforts, the Town of Swansea should partner with the Town of Somerset to pursue a shared digital navigator.
- ▷ Implementation Tools:
  - [MBI Digital Equity Implementation Fund](#): The Towns' can utilize MBI's Digital Equity Implementation Fund to split the cost of hiring a digital navigator to serve both towns.
  - [Lead for America/American Connection Corps Fellow](#): The Towns can work together with MBI to explore being a host site for a Lead for America/American Connection Corps (ACC) fellow to serve the two Towns as a digital navigator.

#### ○ Lead: Town of Swansea

- Parties Involved: Town of Somerset, Somerset Library, Somerset Council on Aging, Swansea Public Library, Swansea Council on Aging
- ▷ Timeline: Intermediate, the Towns should begin coordinating their efforts as soon as possible, without placing a burden on Town staff.

Success Story: [Connecticut State Library](#): In Connecticut, eight libraries received a \$250,000 grant to split to create a regional digital navigator sharing plan.

## 2. The Town of Swansea should partner with the Town of Somerset to have students from both towns involved with teaching digital skills to seniors.

- ▷ Action: Swansea Public Schools and Somerset Public Schools should collaborate to create a program to have students from both towns involved with teaching digital literacy skills to the towns' seniors. The Towns can utilize spaces such as the Joseph Case High School to bus seniors to and provide a space for students to offer digital skills classes and general device support to seniors.
- ▷ Implementation Tools: [MBI Digital Equity Implementation Fund](#)
- ▷ Lead: Swansea Public Schools
  - Parties Involved: Somerset Public Schools, Somerset Council on Aging, Swansea Council on Aging
- ▷ Timeline: Intermediate, the Towns can begin coordinating their efforts at the start of the 2025-2026 school year.

Success Story: [Seniors E-Connect, Toronto Public Library](#): This program pairs teenage volunteers with seniors to teach the seniors computer skills.



# Conclusion

**Thanks to the collaboration and willingness of Town staff and residents, the project team was able to develop meaningful goals and strategies. These goals can bring Swansea closer to providing affordable, fast internet and devices, and the digital literacy skills necessary to utilize the internet properly, for all residents, especially those who are members of a covered population.**

**Readers are encouraged to look through the glossary and appendix for additional definitions and details.**



# Glossary

**AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP)-** This was a program created during the pandemic to ensure that everyone had access to broadband in their households. The program provided households with a \$30 credit off their monthly internet bill, and a \$100 credit towards a device, or \$75 off their monthly internet bill if they were living on tribal lands. The program ended in May 2024.

**BROADBAND-** Internet that has speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps. On March 14th, 2024 the Federal Communications Commission raised “the Commission’s benchmark for high-speed fixed broadband to download speeds of 100 megabits per second and upload speeds of 20 megabits per second.”<sup>1</sup>

**BROADBAND SERVICEABLE LOCATION (BSL)-** A residential location or business where internet can be installed.

**COVERED POPULATIONS-** The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) recognizes the eight groups below as covered populations regarding digital equity: low income households, aging individuals, incarcerated individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and individuals who live in a rural area.

**DIGITAL EQUITY-** The condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy

**DIGITAL EQUITY ASSET-** Any services, programs, classes, documents, organizations, etc. that support or promote digital equity. For example, device distribution programs, digital navigators, and relevant planning documents are digital equity assets.

**DIGITAL LITERACY-** The skills necessary to use technology and navigate the internet, such as the ability to maintain devices, communicate effectively online and evaluate

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Communications Commission, “FCC Increases Broadband Speed Benchmark”, 2024

online information and security risks.

**DIGITAL REDLINING-** According to the Boston University School of Public Health, digital redlining is “discriminatory disinvestment in broadband infrastructure that disproportionately affects people of color, low-income communities, and rural populations, worsening disparities in access to healthcare, social services, education, and employment for these populations.”<sup>2</sup>

**HOTSPOT-** Intel defines a hotspot as “a physical location where people can access the Internet, typically using Wi-Fi, via a wireless local area network (WLAN) with a router connected to an Internet service provider.”<sup>3</sup>

**JITTER-** A measure of network performance that refers to the irregularity in the time it takes for a data packet to travel from its source to its destination, potentially leading to disruptions and inconsistencies in the flow of data.<sup>4</sup>

**LATENCY-** A measure of network performance referring to the time it takes for a data packet to travel from its source to its destination.

**SPEED TEST-** Measures the speed at which data transfers back and forth from a web server to a device via a router in megabits per second (Mbps).

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<sup>2</sup> Jillian Mckoy, “Combating Digital Redlining ‘Is Imperative for Advancing Health Equity’”, 2024

<sup>3</sup> Intel, “What is a Hotspot- WiFi Hotspot Definitions and Details”

<sup>4</sup> LiveAction, “Jitter vs Latency: Unraveling the Nuances in Network Performance”

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Department Head Questionnaire

### Responses Overview

Active

Responses

6



Average Time

248:59



Duration

266 Days



1. What is your full name and role?

6

Responses

Latest Responses

"Mark Foley Chief of Police"

"Mallory E. Aronstein, Town Administrator"

"Jocelyn Tavares, Library Director"

...

2. What department do you oversee?

6

Responses

Latest Responses

"Police"

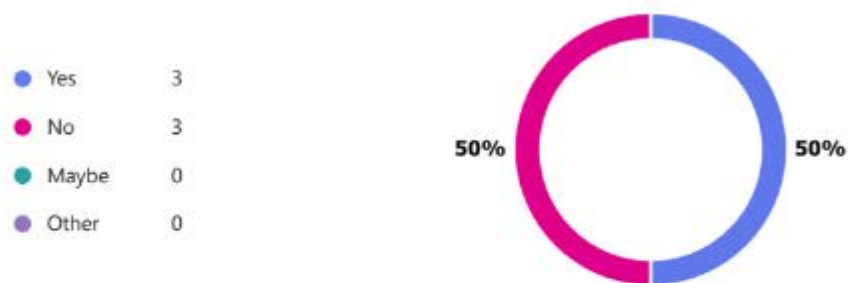
"Manage day to day functions of the town"

"Library"

...



3. Would you consider your department a Community Anchor Institution?



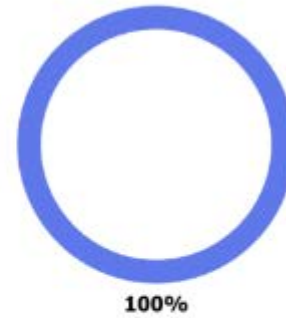
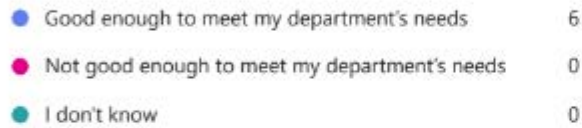
4. Where is your department located?



5. Please select all the ways your department accesses the internet.



6. How well does your department's internet service work?



7. Is there any concern about the privacy or safety of your department's data?



8. Do residents need to interface with an online portal or other web-based tools to access your department's services?

6  
Responses

Latest Responses

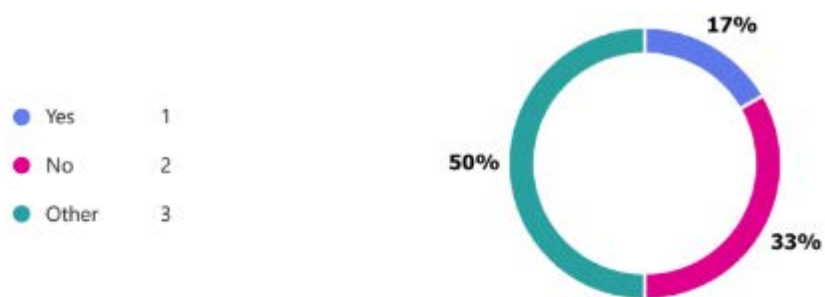
"sometimes"

"No, but we are planning to expand our epermitting offering."

"Their account information can be accessed online or by app..."

...

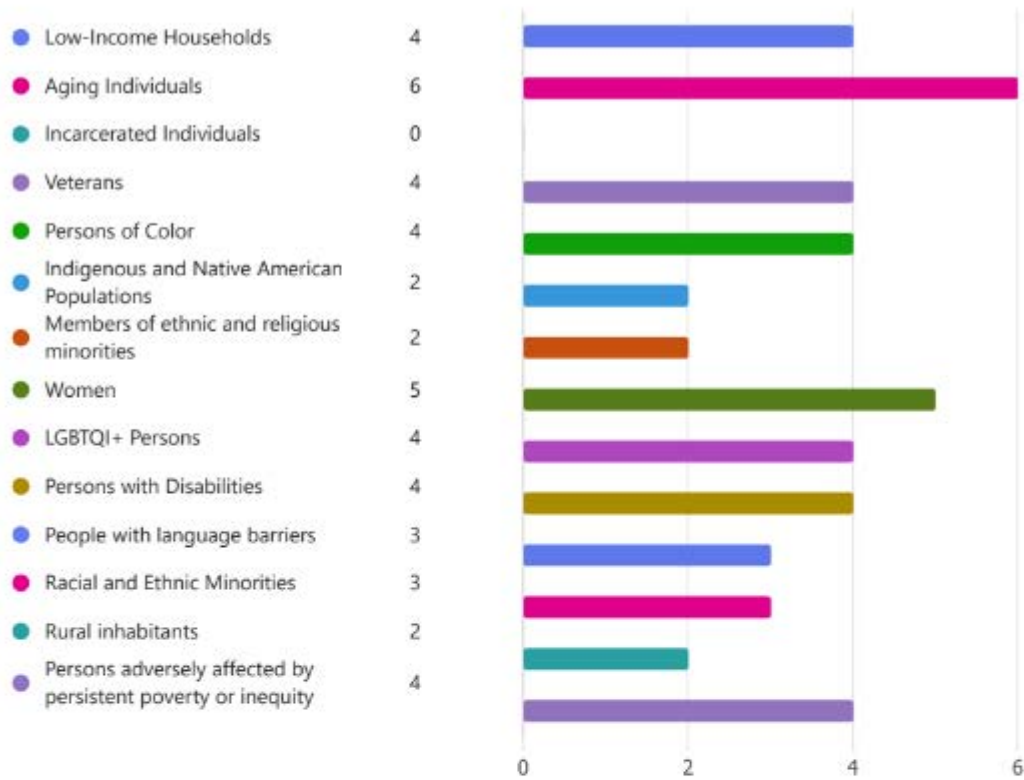
9. Do residents need help navigating online portals or other web-based tools when accessing your department's services?



10. Do you or your staff have the capacity to help residents navigate online portals or web-based tools?



11. Which of the following target populations does your department interface with regularly?



12. Are there specific or general geographic locations in Swansea you feel lack adequate internet access?

5  
Responses

Latest Responses

"The infrastructure need replacing throughout the entire tow..."  
 "I am not sure - still learning neighborhoods, but I would ex..."  
 ...

13. Which of the following factors needed for digital equity are residents in Swansea in the greatest need of?



14. What types of digital equity programs/initiatives do you think Swansea residents could benefit from?



15. Does your department currently host or facilitate any digital equity programs/initiatives?



16. Is there anyone in the broader community who you think should be included in the discussion of digital equity in Swansea?

4

Responses

Latest Responses

"Laurie Pimentel, Council on Aging Director; seniors living in ..."

"I think schools have a better sense of some family's need m... "

...

# Appendix 2: Digital Equity Charette Boards

# WELCOME

## Swansea Digital Equity Plan Workshop

First Congregational  
Church  
6 PM - 8 PM





# Introduction to the Plan

## What is a Digital Equity Plan?

A Digital Equity Plan seeks to understand and address barriers to digital access to ensure residents of all backgrounds and ages have a fast, affordable, and reliable connection to the Internet.

### Plan Contents

Digital Equity Plans may vary based on community members' needs. These plans typically contain:

-  Town Vision
-  Current State of Digital Equity
-  Stakeholder Engagement Process
-  Objective & Implementation Strategies
-  Evaluation & Updates

### Project Team

#### SRPEDD

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#### Town of Swansea

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Assistant Town Administrator / Community Development Director, Town of Swansea

#### Massachusetts Broadband Institute

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

### Timeline

#### 2023

Asset Mapping and Municipal Digital Equity Program promotion in SRPEDD region

#### Summer 2024

Stakeholder kickoff, project branding, steering committee formation, and charette planning.

**We're Here!**

#### Fall 2024

Promotional events, digital equity charette, and existing conditions analysis

#### Winter 2024

Digital equity plan writing and open houses.

#### Spring 2025

Finalize plan and present to the Board of Selectmen.



## Introduction

# What is Digital Equity?

Digital equity describes **a community's (or an individual's) ability to engage with the internet**, and involves **efforts to build the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills** in communities that may need them **to fully participate in online aspects of our society or economy**.

**There are three main ways to understand digital equity and barriers to digital access:**



**Connection:** Having a fast, affordable, and stable connection to the internet.



**Devices:** to access education, career development, socialization, and more.



**Literacy:** using technology, maintaining devices, evaluating online information and security risks.



**Barriers:** connectivity interruptions, digital redlining, or the inability to afford or access services.



**Barriers:** outdated software, a device not matching a users needs, or lack of affordability.



**Barriers:** limited skills, fear or shame, or inaccessible trainings.

## Questions

**1. How do you think digital equity might impact people or communities in Swansea?**



MBI



Data sources: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

## Introduction

How does the digital divide impact everyday life?

**Internet access is not a luxury. It is essential.**

Lack of access impacts many aspects of our modern day to day.

### The Digital Divide Impacts..



#### **Social Connectivity**

Communicating with family or friends on social media or email.



#### **Educational Opportunities**

Online learning for students and the ability to pursue adult learning resources.



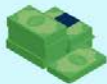
#### **Healthcare Access**

Access to health records and telehealth services.



#### **Workforce Preparedness**

Ability to apply to jobs online or prepare application materials.



#### **Financial Resources**

Access to online banking, financial literacy resources and assistance.



#### **Civic Participation**

Staying informed about voting, online public meetings or engagement opportunities.

### Questions

**1. How would your daily routine change if you suddenly lost access to the internet?**

**2. What aspects of your life would be most affected?**

### *Imagine...*

Your grandmother needs internet to access **telehealth services**. To use these services, she would need

- Functioning devices that are connected to reliable internet (such as a personal computer or router).
- A stable internet connection to facilitate a video call.
- And the digital literacy skills necessary to properly navigate online services.



MBI



Data sources: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

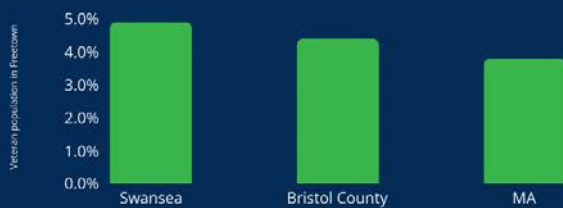


## Demographics

Which populations typically lack internet access?

### Covered Populations In Swansea

Swansea's Veteran population is slightly higher compared to Bristol County and statewide trends.



Swansea's population of individuals with disabilities under 60 is lower than the county, but higher than the state.



### Digital Equity Act

The Digital Equity Act of 2021 identifies 8 covered populations that have historically experienced lower rates of computer and internet use. The covered populations named in the legislation include:

#### *Populations Covered by the Digital Equity Act*

- Persons who are 60 years of age or older
- Veterans
- Persons with disabilities
- Rural residents
- Members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- Individuals with a language barrier, including those who are English learners or have low literacy levels
- Individuals living in households with incomes not exceeding 150 percent of the poverty level
- Incarcerated individuals

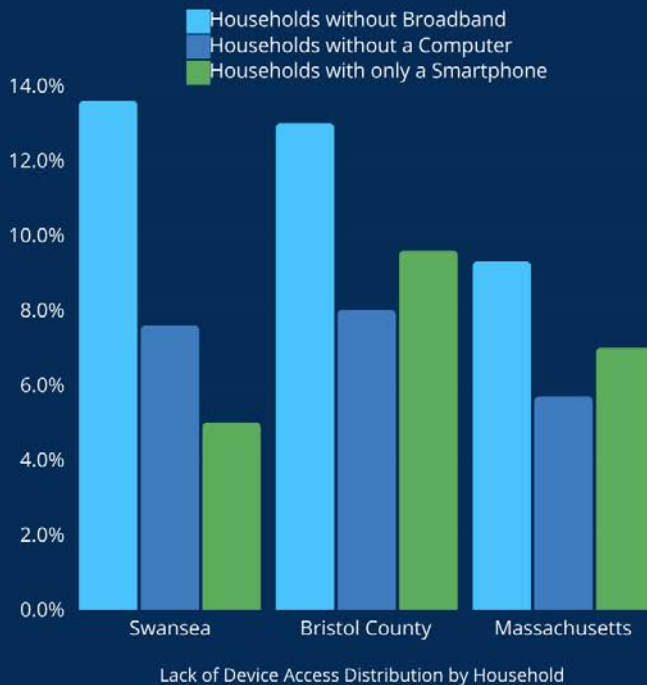
### Questions

1. What populations should we focus on for Swansea?

## Device Access

Who needs computers or routers?

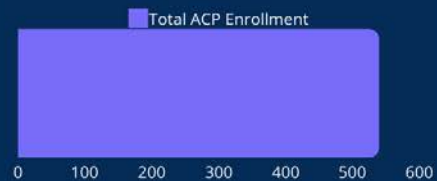
A higher percentage of Swansea households lack access to a device compared to Bristol County and the state.



## Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

This recently defunct public program helped ensure that households were able to afford broadband and provided a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for eligible households on tribal land.

Recent ACP Enrollment data shows about a quarter of Swansea residents below the 200% of the poverty line took advantage of the program.



## Questions

1. What device do you use to access the internet?

2. Do you have adequate access to a device at home?



MBI



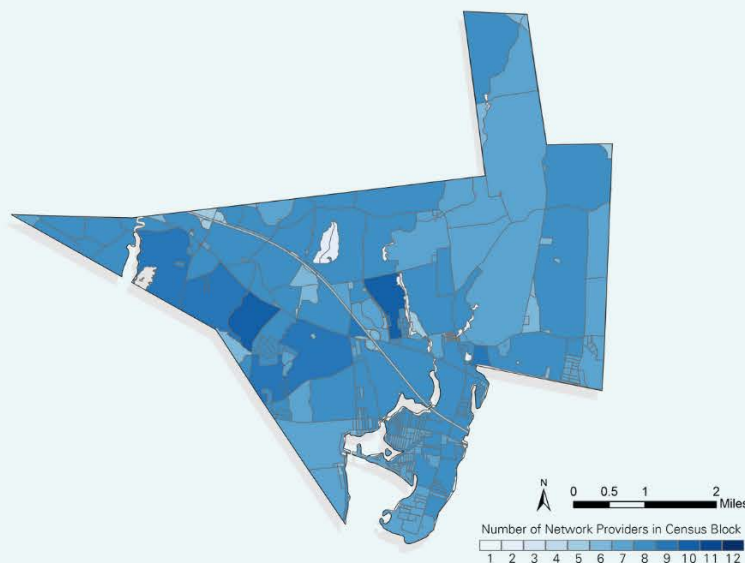
Data sources: American Community Survey, 2018-2022.

## Internet Service Providers (ISPs): Coverage

Is your connection reliable?

All of Swansea has access to broadband internet speeds, but only 17.47% of the town has access to broadband speeds from more than one provider.

Network Providers in Swansea, MA

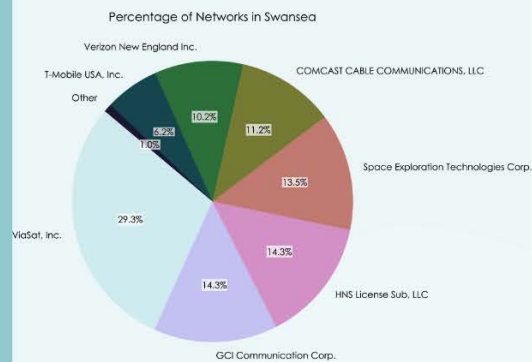


Coverage in Swansea by Number of Providers

## Questions

1. Do you have a steady and reliable internet connection?

While there are options for residents, 81.99% of Swansea households only have 1 option.



ISPs Distribution in Swansea

\*Note: This chart represents only 82% of ISPs in Freetown

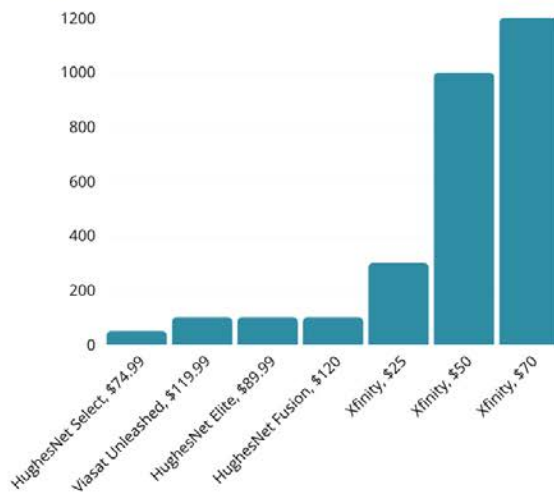


Data sources: Federal Communications Commission

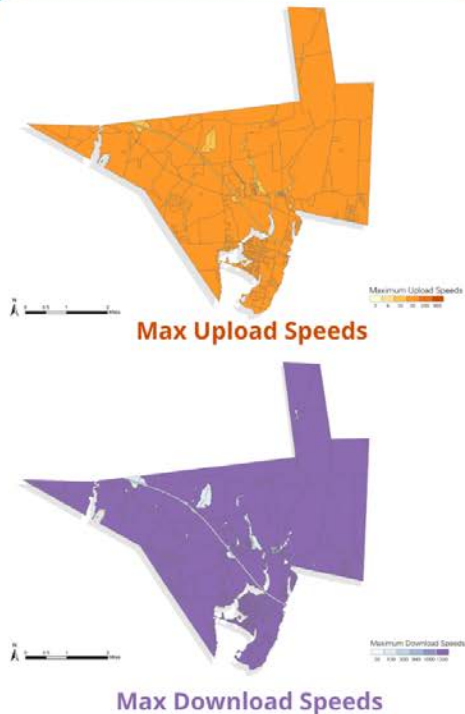
## Internet Service Providers (ISPs): Speed and Affordability

Is your connection fast and affordable?

The average price of an internet plan in Swansea is \$78.57.



Service packages found at Sample Address in Freetown  
by Max Download Speed



### Questions

1. Do you struggle to pay your internet bill?

### What do speed tests tell us?

**Download Speed** - How fast information travels to you. It may affect how fast it takes to download large files or show pages with many pictures.

**Upload Speed** - How fast information can transfer from you. It affects things like your ability to participate in a virtual doctor's appointment.



Data sources: Federal  
Communications Commission



## Digital Equity Assets

### Current Assets Identified in Swansea:

 Swansea Public Library: Free public Wi-Fi

### What is a digital equity asset?

Digital equity assets include things like computer classes, cybersecurity resources, device support, device distribution services, or any other plans or programs related to digital equity.

### Potential Digital Equity Assets



Digital Navigators



Digital Skills Classes



Device Lending Programs

### Questions

1. Do you feel confident navigating the internet?
2. How can the town help improve digital literacy?

## Next Steps

What we've heard so far and what we need from you!

### Previous Engagement:

- Town Department Questionnaire
- Digital Equity Steering Committee
- Public Workshop

### Current Key Takeaways

- Internet cost is a significant barrier for some residents.
- While most Swansea residents have adequate devices and service, some do not. There also may be a need for digital skills classes

### Upcoming Engagement

- **12/16:** Presentation at American Legion Meeting



## Take the MBI Statewide Survey



[srpedd.org/swansea-digital-equity-plan](https://srpedd.org/swansea-digital-equity-plan)

Scan the QR Code to visit the project page and take the survey!



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