A COMMONWEALTH CONNECTED:

How Digital Infrastructure and Access are Transforming Lives

MBI
MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE
at the MassTech Collaborative

Photos courtesy of Mass League of Community Health Centers (top) and UMass Lowell (bottom)

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Executive Summary

While the digital divide was present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it cast a spotlight on the need for connectivity and digital inclusion. During a time of isolation, the critical need for internet to address connectivity and the ability to access resources became apparent. For hundreds of thousands in Massachusetts, this deepened existing inequities, further exposing a need for internet connectivity.

Prominent connectivity barriers faced by residents include affordability, the ability to access devices and a knowledge of how to navigate the internet. Barriers like these inhibit residents' ability to access vital resources such as telehealth, education, career opportunities and more.

As part of the state's commitment to provide the tools and opportunities required to thrive in a connected world, the Healey-Driscoll administration, through the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech), launched the Digital Equity Partnerships program in 2021. The $58-million program is a historic investment funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and includes nine lead organizations across the state. They are:

- AgeSpan, on behalf of the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative
- Baystate Health, on behalf of the Alliance for Digital Equity
- The City of Boston
- Tech Goes Home
- The Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
- The Metropolitan Area Planning Council
- The Metro North Workforce Investment Board
- UMass Lowell
- Vinfen, on behalf of the Human Services Alliance for Digital Equity

Since the program's inception, these organizations have implemented similar models to address the full "digital inclusion equation" including reliable internet access, user-friendly devices, practical digital skills, and trusted support. This coordinated effort has spurred into action over **100 local subgrantee organizations** across the state, reaching residents through trusted community organizations such as clinics, public housing, workforce programs, libraries, and aging and disability services networks.

The Digital Equity Partnerships program has provided a coordinated effort to empower residents across the Commonwealth and has yielded the following results:

- **Getting residents online:** Expanded building-wide Wi-Fi to serve over **5,300 households** in affordable and public housing.
- **Devices for opportunity:** Distributed over **16,000 new and refurbished devices** to ensure residents have the tools needed for work, health care and education.
- **Skills for the future:** Provided hands-on digital literacy training to more than **24,000 people** across the state.
- **Navigation for health:** Facilitated **16,958 patient encounters** to ensure digital barriers do not stand between a patient and their care.
- **Closing the affordability gap:** Enrolled over **8,000 households** in affordable internet programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and LifeLine Program, which also providing vital navigation support to help residents maintain their connection and transition to new, low-cost options when the federally funded ACP program was discontinued.

The ACP, announced in 2021, provided access to discounted broadband subscriptions through participating internet service providers for eligible low-income individuals across the country. The program, which ended in 2024 due to a lack of Congressional funding, had over 23 million households enrolled at the time of its conclusion, including 367,884 in Massachusetts.[1] Across the Commonwealth, 982,000 households were eligible for the program, based on the Federal Communication Committee's criteria for participation.

This report details the profound impact of that investment, including stories and data to showcase that the Massachusetts' approach is transforming lives, strengthening communities and building essential infrastructure for a connected Commonwealth.

The Digital Equity Partnerships program moved Massachusetts beyond the experimentation stage. The stories and data in this report prove the models we have tested — from clinic-based navigation to apartment Wi-Fi — are no longer theoretical. They are operational, tested and deeply embedded in the real institutions that serve residents every day.

[1]Universal Service Administrative Company. (n.d.). ACP enrollment and claims tracker. Retrieved March 13, 2026, from https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state

AgeSpan on behalf of the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative

AgeSpan is working to reduce isolation for older adults and empower thousands to access health care, services and social connection online.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** AgeSpan, Inc.
- **Key Partner:** Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative (MHAC)
- **Partners:** Seven aging services access points (ASAP) and four community-based organizations
- **Geography Served:** 73 cities and towns across Massachusetts
- **Priority Populations:** Older adults, particularly low-income aging individuals and caregivers
- **Program Model:** One-on-one or group-based digital literacy and navigation delivered through a statewide aging network

The Need: Digital Equity for Older Adults

As essential services and life necessities continue to shift online, many older adults are at risk of being left behind. For individuals who grew up without the internet or access to a computer or smartphone — particularly those facing financial, health, mobility or vision challenges — the lack of digital understanding can deepen isolation and limit access to health care, transportation, benefits and social connection.

AgeSpan and MHAC recognize digital inequity among older adults is rarely about a single barrier. It is often a combination of limited access to devices or internet service, low confidence using technology, and a lack of trusted and tailored support. Addressing this gap requires meeting older adults where they are — geographically and emotionally — to offer learning environments that are welcoming, practical and responsive.

The Approach: A Networked, Community-Based Model

With grant funding from the Digital Equity Partnerships program, AgeSpan partnered with MHAC to activate a statewide network of seven ASAPs and four community-based organizations to advance digital skills for older adults. Rather than relying on a single delivery model, partners offered a range of support including one-on-one training, small group classes, tech cafés, computer labs, office hours and home visits, allowing each organization to tailor programming to local needs.

This flexible approach emphasized real-world application over abstract instruction. Training focused on everyday goals: communicating with family, participating in virtual classes (e.g., yoga, craftwork), attending telehealth appointments, paying rent online and arranging transportation. As community needs evolved, partners adapted programming to introduce device-specific trainings, foundational keyboard and typing classes, smartphone office hours and emerging topics such as AI.

Impact at a Glance

Throughout 2025, AgeSpan used their grant funding to reach older adults across the Commonwealth at an increasing scale. Use of digital navigator services among older adults has rapidly increased, almost doubling the service utilization in the last quarter compared to prior quarters:

- **3,059** older adults gained basic technology skills
- **3,467** older adults received digital skills training tailored to specific personal goals

Participants used their new skills to attend telehealth appointments, book travel, manage benefits, apply for housing, pay bills online and connect socially — often for the first time. The steady increase in participation reflected growing community trust and the expansion of outreach and referral efforts.

Human Impact: Confidence, Connection and Joy

For many older adults, learning technology is about more than functionality — it's about gaining confidence and independence. One participant shared that these services helped her book a flight to Colombia on her own, describing the experience as, "one of the happiest moments of my life."

In another organization, an older adult who initially doubted her ability to learn new technology attended Chromebook training. With encouragement and support, she not only gained confidence but eventually became a volunteer assistant helping other participants who were struggling and transforming from learner to leader.

These moments capture the focus of AgeSpan's work: digital equity as a pathway to dignity, connection and renewed purpose. Whether writing personal stories, applying for jobs or engaging with their community online, participants consistently described AgeSpan's and its partners services as empowering.

What This Work Revealed

AgeSpan and its partners uncovered several insights that are shaping digital equity efforts for older adults statewide:

- **Flexibility is essential:** Older adults benefit from different formats accommodating for varying levels of skills, confidence and learning styles. Offering multiple entry points increases participation and success.
- **Strong partnerships require time and sustainability:** Building effective referral pathways and collaborative programs with councils on aging, housing sites and community organizations proved essential and resource intensive. As demand grew, volunteer shortages highlighted the need for intentional strategies, such as partnerships with local colleges, to expand capacity and sustain community-based work.
- **Digital skills require lifelong learning:** Programs must continuously adapt as technology changes — balancing foundational skills with emerging tools like AI to meet learners where they are.

Baystate Health and the Alliance for Digital Equity

The Alliance leads a network of hundreds of organizations across Western and Central Massachusetts to deliver coordinated, community-led solutions to address local digital inequities at scale.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** Baystate Health on behalf of the Alliance for Digital Equity
- **Geography Served:** Western and Central Massachusetts (83 communities across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire and Worcester counties)
- **Partners:** More than 200 community-based organizations, municipalities, libraries, housing authorities, media centers and nonprofits
- **Priority Populations:** Low-income households, older adults, people with disabilities, immigrants and English language learners, rural residents and people experiencing homelessness
- **Program Model:** Regional coalition providing shared program and service-delivery infrastructure, coordination and leadership for digital equity

The Need: When the Challenge Is Bigger Than Any One Organization

Digital inequity in Western and Central Massachusetts is shaped by geography, broadband infrastructure gaps, economic inequality, language access barriers, and the realities of rural and small-town life. These challenges vary widely from community to community and no single organization, sector or service model can address them alone.

Residents experience the digital divide differently depending on where they live and who they are. At the same time, the organizations serving them — libraries, housing providers, nonprofits, municipalities and schools — often lack the coordination, resources or shared systems needed to respond effectively. Without regional alignment, efforts are at risk of being fragmented, duplicative or short-lived.

The Alliance for Digital Equity was created to meet this challenge head-on by strengthening local efforts through collaboration, shared infrastructure and trust.

The Approach: Field-Building Through Networked Leadership

With funding from the Digital Equity Partnerships program, the Alliance for Digital Equity deepened and expanded a three-county regional coalition designed to build the field of digital equity. Housed by Baystate Health, the Alliance is a collective of multi-sector, community-focused organizations working toward digital access for all. It functions as the backbone, aligning strategy, building capacity and enabling partners to do their work more effectively together.

In 2024, the Alliance sharpened its focus on digital navigation as the key connector across the digital ecosystem by linking connectivity, device availability and digital skills through trusted, community-based one-on-one support. Rather than delivering services directly, the Alliance invested in what coalitions do best:

- Training and supporting a regional network of digital navigators
- Creating shared systems for device and hot spot distribution
- Establishing common tools for measurement and learning
- Convening partners to coordinate efforts, share lessons and adapt quickly

This approach proved critical as the federal ACP ended. Where isolated programs might have stalled, the Alliance enabled rapid regional adaptation and community-led responses.

Impact at a Glance

Throughout 2025, the Alliance translated regional coordination into measurable, community-level outcomes:

- **3,355** individuals supported through digital navigation services
- **1,013** residents gained digital skills tailored to specific needs
- **915** devices distributed, including laptops and Chromebooks
- **83** communities served
- **68** organizations and municipalities funded
- **50-plus** digital navigators connected through a regional peer network

Beyond direct outputs, the coalition itself became a multiplier. A recent survey showed **78% of Alliance members collaborate outside of formal meetings,** signaling durable relationships and long-term capacity for continued impact.

Human Impact: When Networks Make Change Possible

The Alliance's approach translated into real, everyday improvements for residents across the region. Older adults learned to manage telehealth appointments independently. Immigrant families built foundational digital skills that supported education and workforce participation. A formerly unhoused resident used digital literacy training to secure stable housing and move forward with their employment goals.

One resident shared that being able to schedule a telehealth visit without asking family for help made them feel "independent again." An older couple used newly acquired digital design skills to promote their small family restaurant—turning digital access into an economic opportunity.

These outcomes were not the result of a single program, but a coordinated ecosystem working together — local trust paired with regional support.

What This Work Revealed

The Alliance's experience offers powerful lessons about coalition-based digital equity work. It revealed:

- **Coalitions are infrastructure.** When done well, they create shared systems, reduce duplication and enable local organizations to scale impact.
- **Networks adapt faster than stand-alone programs.** Regional coordination allowed partners to pivot quickly as federal policy and funding shifted related to the ACP.
- **Trust is the foundation.** Relationships — not just resources — make collaboration effective and resilient.
- **Digital Navigation thrives in ecosystems.** Shared training, peer support and common tools strengthen navigators and the communities they serve.

City of Boston

The City of Boston's Department of Innovation and Technology leveraged public infrastructure and targeted investments to connect tens of thousands of residents to affordable internet, digital skills and trusted community-based support.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Entity:** City of Boston's Department of Innovation and Technology
- **Role:** Municipal government and stewardship of citywide digital equity strategy
- **Geography Served:** City of Boston
- **Partners:** Boston Housing Authority, 36 community-based organizations, city agencies, libraries, and transit and public-space partners
- **Priority Populations:** Low-income households, immigrants, older adults, people with disabilities, public-housing residents, youth, veterans, formerly incarcerated residents and others facing systemic barriers
- **Program Model:** City-led coordination paired with grantmaking, public infrastructure investment and direct resident support

The Need: Digital Equity in Massachusetts' Most Diverse City

- Boston is often seen as a resource-rich city. But, for many residents, digital inequity remains a daily reality. Affordability, access to reliable devices and limited digital skills continue to limit participation in education, employment, health care and civic life.

City data and national surveys show that tens of thousands of Boston households lack a laptop or consistent broadband access, even as more services move online. Residents in neighborhoods such as Dorchester, East Boston, Hyde Park, Mattapan and Roxbury experience disproportionate impacts tied to income, language access, age and disabilities.

The City of Boston entered the Digital Equity Partnerships program to distribute resources, build capacity for local organizations and remove barriers.

The Approach: Stewardship, Coordination and Targeted Investment

With Digital Equity Partnerships funding, the city advanced a three-pronged strategy centered on internet access, device availability and digital skills, while strengthening the ecosystem of organizations closest to residents.

Rather than delivering all services directly, the city focused on what municipal government does best. Boston coordinated across departments, invested in community-based organizations through grantmaking and leveraged public spaces such as libraries, public housing and transit hubs to deliver digital access. This approach allowed them to stretch limited resources across multiple strategies and meet immediate needs while building longer-term capacity.

Key initiatives included:

- A $1.4-million Digital Equity Fund supporting 36 community-based organizations delivering digital navigation, telehealth programming and device refurbishment

- Citywide outreach and enrollment efforts that connected 50,712 households to the federal ACP before it ended
- Expansion of the city's Wicked Wi-Fi to high-traffic, transit-oriented neighborhoods
- Digital literacy programming within Boston Housing Authority communities, tailored to meet residents' needs

Impact at a Glance

During the past year, the City of Boston translated coordination and investment into citywide outcomes:

- **52,273 users** connected through newly expanded Wicked Wi-Fi sites
- **50,712 households** enrolled in ACP — nearly 14% of all ACP enrollments statewide
- **36 community-based organizations** funded through the largest Digital Equity Fund in the city's history
- **Hundreds of residents** received one-on-one digital navigation, skills training and device support

These outcomes reflect the city's ability to activate systems, partners and public assets in response to urgent need.

Human Impact: Bringing City Hall to the Community

In Boston Housing Authority communities, residents often face compounding barriers to digital access including limited income, language access needs, and inconsistent connectivity. Through city-supported digital literacy programming and outreach, residents receive hands-on help learning to use devices, navigate online systems and access affordable internet options.

One resident shared having support available within their housing community made it possible to ask questions they had avoided elsewhere. With patience and in-person assistance, they gained confidence using online tools essential for health care, benefits and communication.

For residents who may distrust government systems or face language and accessibility barriers, human-centered approaches like this example make digital support approachable and effective.

What This Work Revealed

Boston's experience highlighted several lessons relevant to municipalities and policymakers:

- **Cities play a critical coordinating role.** Municipal government can align public infrastructure, funding and partners in ways other organizations may struggle to make those connections.
- **Community-based organizations are essential.** City investment is most effective when it strengthens trusted, neighborhood-level delivery.
- **Demand consistently exceeds available resources.** Even with historic funding levels, the need for affordable internet, devices and skills training remains significant.
- **Public systems must stay flexible.** Rapid policy shifts, such as the end of the ACP, require adaptable strategies and sustained capacity.

Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers

Clinic-based digital navigators strengthen access to care by increasing use of telehealth and health care portals for patients statewide.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
- **Key Partners:** C3, Link Health
- **Implementation Sites:** 12 community health centers (CHC) across Massachusetts
- **Geography Served:** Statewide
- **Priority Populations:** CHC patients, including low-income, uninsured, underinsured and multilingual populations
- **Program Model:** Clinic-based digital navigators, trained staff who provide one-on-one support to patients in learning how to use technology and access the internet for patient portal use and telehealth adoption

The Need: Digital Equity as a Foundation for Health Care Access

As health care systems increasingly rely on digital tools, such as patient portals, video telehealth and remote monitoring, patients without digital access or skills face new barriers to care. For CHCs, which cater to some of the Commonwealth's most underserved populations, this digital divide directly affects health care utilization, continuity of care and patient outcomes.

Many patients experience overlapping challenges such as limited internet access, low digital literacy, language barriers and difficulty navigating complex health systems. Without targeted support, tools like online record systems or videos, telehealth platforms remain out of reach. This only further reduces patients' ability to schedule appointments, access test results, communicate with providers or participate fully in their care. Addressing digital equity in this context is not ancillary to health care delivery; it is essential.

The Approach: Embedding Digital Navigators in Care Settings

With Digital Equity Partnerships funding, the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers implemented a clinic-based digital navigator model across 12 CHCs. Digital navigators were embedded into care teams and workflows to provide real-time, patient-centered assistance in three areas: patient portal enrollment and use, video telehealth adoption, and access to affordable internet.

Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, the League worked closely with each health center to align digital navigation goals with patient needs and organizational priorities. Navigators supported patients during clinic visits, through referrals from providers and via community outreach — often providing assistance in multiple languages. This "warm handoff" approach ensured digital support was integrated into the care experience.

Impact at a Glance

Throughout 2025, the League's use of program funding demonstrated scalable and measurable health system impact:

- **$184,593** in estimated annual household savings through internet enrollment
- **26,944** digital navigation encounters across participating health centers
- **1,668** individuals enrolled in affordable internet programs (i.e., Lifeline)
- **5% higher telehealth utilization** at grant-participating CHCs compared to non-participating centers

Patients supported by digital navigators successfully enrolled in patient portals, completed telehealth visits and gained skills to engage with digital health tools. Most importantly, participating health centers consistently outperformed non-participating centers in telehealth adoption.

Human Impact: Empowering Patients and Families

For many patients, digital navigation opened the door to meaningful participation in their family's health care. One multilingual digital navigator described helping a mother gain proxy access to her child's online medical records account. After learning how to download and use the portal on her phone, the mother expressed amazement at what she could now see and manage, as well as regret she had never been taught computer skills earlier in life. With additional support, she was also connected to a community digital literacy class to continue learning.

In another case, a father seeking proxy access for his son remained at the clinic for over an hour with a Spanish-speaking digital navigator to create his first email account, a requirement for portal access. He left the clinic not only with access to his son's health information but with a foundational digital tool he had never previously had.

These moments emphasize the need for digital equity in health care and the ways in which it empowers patients, strengthens caregiving and builds confidence.

What This Work Revealed

The League's experience implementing digital navigation in health care settings uncovered several critical insights:

- **Staffing models matter for scale and stability.** Relying on a single digital navigator at each CHC created vulnerability when turnover occurred, particularly in large clinics with high patient volume.
- **Peer influence drives adoption better than mandates.** Encouraging providers to use video telehealth and digital tools was most successful when early adopters shared their experiences with colleagues. Peer-to-peer learning proved more effective than top-down directives.
- **Clinic-based support matters.** Embedding digital navigators into care teams builds trust and enables immediate actionable support.
- **People-centered approaches outperform assumptions.** Providers often underestimated patients' willingness or ability to use digital tools with support. Especially in their native language, patients consistently succeeded.

MassHire Metro North Workforce Board and the Digital Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Consortium

MassHire Metro North Workforce Board built a regional system that connects community demand with support from trained digital navigators while preparing those professionals for careers in information technology (IT) and workforce support.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** MassHire Metro North Workforce Board
- **Consortium:** Digital Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Consortium
- **Key Partners:** Massachusetts Association of Computer and Information Resources (MACIR), the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), 12 community-based organizations and municipal partners
- **Geography Served:** Metro North and North Shore Massachusetts
- **Priority Populations:** Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC); immigrant and low-income residents facing barriers to workforce participation
- **Program Model:** Regional digital navigator cohort paired with a centralized ticketing system managing devices, connectivity and digital skills services

The Need: When Digital Access Becomes a Workforce Barrier

Applying for jobs, enhancing professional development and communicating with employers requires reliable devices, internet access and digital fluency. However, for many job seekers in the Metro North and North Shore regions, the digital world required for job attainment and advancement remains out of reach.

At the same time, the organizations serving these residents often struggle to meet the demand for both one-on-one and group engagement to overcome the barriers of the digital divide. Capacity issues stemming from limited staff time, lack of appropriate training or availability of devices, are hurdles for many community-based organizations, workforce development agencies and even some municipal governments.

The Digital JEDI Consortium was designed to solve these problems by mobilizing an ecosystem to address systemic issues.

The Approach: Operationalizing Digital Equity as Workforce Infrastructure

Managed by the MassHire Metro North Workforce Board, the Digital JEDI Consortium functions as a regional digital access ecosystem rather than a single program. Its core tenet is to treat digital access as an operational challenge. At the center of the JEDI Consortium's model is a ticketing system, co-developed with MACIR, that manages requests for digital skills support, technical help, internet access, and equipment refurbishment and distribution. Community members' needs can be logged as tickets, triaged by trained digital navigators and routed efficiently across partner organizations.

Digital navigators are not only service providers, they are workforce participants. Through hands-on use of the ticketing system, case management protocols and IT tools, navigators build marketable skills aligned with careers in IT support, case management and community-based technology roles.

This dual-purpose design allows the Digital JEDI Consortium to meet immediate community needs while building a longer-term talent pipeline.

Impact at a Glance

During the last year, the work of the Digital JEDI Consortium and its partners resulted in the following metrics:

- **5,179** digital service requests managed through the ticketing system
- **2,988** residents receiving digital navigation services
- **305** new and **1,237** refurbished laptops distributed
- **Over 40%** of service requests related to device access demonstrates acute demand
- **22** digital navigators trained across two cohorts

Residents benefitting from the Digital JEDI Consortium reported using devices and digital skills training to complete certifications, study English and apply for jobs independently.

Human Impact: Digital Navigation Skills for Career Advancement

One digital navigator shared that before the ticketing system community members often bounced between organizations trying to find help. With the MACIR-developed platform in place, requests for devices, training or technical support could be logged once and routed efficiently. This resulted in a reduction in confusion for residents and service providers.

One navigator described the experience of working with the ticketing platform as “inspiring.” They went on to note it was the first time they used a professional system designed to track requests, manage workflows and coordinate services across multiple organizations. For navigators like this one, the Consortium transformed digital equity work into a career-building opportunity.

What This Work Revealed

The Digital JEDI Consortium revealed several important insights about scaling digital equity through workforce systems:

- **Systems matter as much as services.** A centralized ticketing platform enables transparency, coordination and accountability across multiple organizations and service types.
- **Managing supply and demand unlocks scale.** Treating devices, skills training and navigation as shared regional resources reduces duplication and increases efficiency.
- **Digital equity can be a workforce pipeline.** Training digital navigators in real-world IT and case-management tools prepares them for advancement while strengthening service delivery and impact to residents.
- **Demand for devices remains acute.** The rapid depletion of laptop and hot spot inventories underscores how foundational device access is to workforce participation.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) laid the groundwork for long-term digital equity by expanding free, building-wide Wi-Fi in public and affordable housing, to create durable internet access independent of individual subscriptions.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
- **Role:** Regional planning agency and program manager
- **Geography Served:** Statewide
- **Partners:** Public housing authorities, affordable housing providers, municipalities, internet service providers and state agencies
- **Priority Populations:** Residents of public and affordable housing, including low-income households, older adults and people with disabilities
- **Program Model:** Apartment Wi-Fi: building-wide internet infrastructure provided at no cost to residents

The Need: Internet Access as Housing Infrastructure

For residents of public and affordable housing, internet access is often unreliable, unaffordable or entirely unavailable. Even when discounted plans exist, residents may face barriers related to credit checks, installation logistics, equipment costs or building conditions that make individual subscriptions difficult or impossible.

MAPC's Apartment Wi-Fi program addresses this by treating internet access as shared building infrastructure, similar to heat or water, rather than an individual consumer product. This approach is especially important in older buildings, where structural constraints and outdated wiring limit traditional broadband options.

By focusing on building-wide solutions, MAPC aims to ensure residents have reliable, high-quality internet access.

The Approach: Planning, Procurement, and Systems Change

With Digital Equity Partnership funding, MAPC expanded its Apartment Wi-Fi initiative from a pilot into a statewide program serving thousands of housing units. Over the course of 2025, the work focused on planning, procurement, partnership development and systems improvement.

Key elements of MAPC's approach included:

- Expanding the program budget from $5.6 million to $14.6 million, significantly increasing the number of housing units and partners served
- Developing new procurement pathways to bundle design, construction, equipment, and services to reduce barriers for housing providers
- Supporting housing partners through complex technical, legal and administrative processes
- Adapting program design based on early site experience, including requiring signal surveys to ensure network quality

This work positioned housing authorities and affordable housing providers to operate and sustain networks well beyond the grant period.

Impact at a Glance

While many participants of the Apartment Wi-Fi program were still in the planning or construction phases at the time of this report, MAPC achieved several foundational outcomes:

- Program expanded to serve more than **5,300 housing units** statewide, with a prioritization on high-capacity partners such as Boston Housing Authority and Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH)
- **Partnerships established** with public housing authorities, nonprofit housing providers and municipalities across the Commonwealth
- **First Apartment Wi-Fi program sites launched** with additional sites designed, surveyed or under construction
- **New procurement and regulatory pathways** established to support future broadband projects

These outcomes reflect progress toward durable infrastructure rather than short-term utilization and lay the foundation for measurable resident impact in the coming years.

Human Impact: Why Apartment Wi-Fi Matters to Residents

Although most participants were not online at the time of this report, housing partners consistently described the urgent need for reliable internet among residents. At one site, residents regularly rely on staff offices or public spaces to attend telehealth appointments or participate in virtual court proceedings. At another, staff observed residents walking long distances to access Wi-Fi for basic tasks.

Housing staff emphasized the Apartment Wi-Fi program would remove those barriers by bringing internet access directly into residents' homes to eliminate recurring costs and logistical hurdles. As one housing partner noted, reliable internet is no longer optional; it is a necessity for daily life.

What This Work Revealed

MAPC's experience implementing the Apartment Wi-Fi program outlined several important lessons:

- **Infrastructure work is time-intensive but transformative.** Planning, procurement and coordination require patience, but enable long-term, scalable solutions.
- **Building conditions matter.** Signal surveys and site-specific design are critical to ensuring usable, high-quality service.
- **Housing providers need support.** Technical and administrative capacity varies widely, and sustained assistance is essential for success.
- **Access alone is not enough.** Resident engagement, digital skills and device access must accompany connectivity to achieve full digital equity.

Tech Goes Home

Tech Goes Home equipped thousands of residents with devices, internet access and practical digital skills by training trusted community educators to deliver high-impact digital literacy programs statewide. At the time of this report, Tech Goes Home announced its wind-down and ceased service delivery.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** Tech Goes Home (TGH)
- **Role:** Statewide digital skills service provider and curriculum partner
- **Geography Served:** Statewide, with emphasis on gateway cities
- **Partners:** Community-based organizations, schools, workforce programs, immigrant-serving organizations, housing providers and correctional facilities
- **Priority Populations:** Low-income households, immigrants, justice-impacted individuals, families, job seekers and educators
- **Program Model:** Train-the-trainer digital literacy programs pairing devices, connectivity and hands-on instruction

The Need: Digital Skills as a Prerequisite for Participation

As education, employment, health care and civic systems have continued to move online, the lack of basic digital skills increasingly limits opportunity. For residents living in gateway cities, newly arrived immigrants and individuals impacted by the justice system, digital exclusion compounds existing inequities. This creates obstacles to securing jobs, supporting children's education, accessing services or successfully re-entering society.

For more than two decades, TGH addressed this challenge by focusing on the full digital inclusion equation: affordable devices, reliable internet access and practical digital skills training. The Digital Equity Partnerships program allowed TGH to expand this work at a moment when demand surged, and new gaps became impossible to ignore.

The Approach: Training the People Communities Already Trust

Using this grant, TGH scaled a field-tested approach centered on training educators and frontline staff embedded in trusted community organizations.

Through its train-the-trainer model, TGH equipped instructors — such as teachers, workforce coaches, youth workers and case managers — with curriculum, professional development and ongoing support. These instructors then delivered digital skills training directly to learners in settings they already trusted such as schools, community centers, housing sites, workforce programs, shelters and correctional facilities.

Program funding allowed TGH to:

- Expand into 13 gateway cities
- Deepen partnerships with immigrant-serving organizations
- Pilot digital skills programming in correctional facilities
- Rapidly adapt curriculum and delivery models in response to emerging needs.

This approach allowed TGH's impact to scale quickly and embed digital literacy into existing systems rather than building new ones.

Impact at a Glance

Throughout 2025, TGH delivered statewide impact at significant scale:

- **3,682** learners served across Massachusetts
- **3,402** technology bundles distributed (laptops or tablets with accessories)
- **2,168** hot spots provided to households without affordable internet
- **74** instructors trained at partner organizations
- Learners reported **improved digital skills and confidence,** including email use, job applications, document creation, online learning and navigation of essential services

Learners applied their newly acquired digital skills to secure employment, support their children's education, access telehealth, manage finances and engage independently with other online systems.

Human Impact: Confidence That Carries Forward

In one TGH-supported class, a participant stepped out briefly to take a phone call from her doctor and came back in tears after learning her cancer had returned. As the class offered support, she shared the time spent learning digital skills had given her strength and purpose during an incredibly difficult moment. She completed her project and graduated with her cohort.

Across programs, instructors consistently observed transformative gains in confidence and independence. Learners who had never used a computer before finished courses able to communicate by email, complete online forms, apply for jobs and support their families' needs — often for the first time.

These moments reflect the heart of TGH's work, digital skills not as abstract competencies, but as tools for dignity, resilience and self-determination.

What This Work Revealed

TGH's experience showed several lessons critical to statewide digital equity efforts:

- **Train-the-trainer models scale impact.** Investing in instructors embedded in trusted organizations allows programs to reach thousands without building new delivery infrastructure.
- **Flexibility is essential.** Learners facing language barriers, housing instability or in a correctional facility require adaptable, multilingual and asynchronous options.
- **Demand far exceeds capacity.** Interest from immigrant communities and gateway cities consistently outpaced available resources, even at scale.
- **Digital skills drive real outcomes.** Learners translated training directly into job opportunities, education, entrepreneurship, health care access and family stability.

University of Massachusetts Lowell

The University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell) is teaching workforce-ready digital skills for both college students and community members through hands-on, community-based training.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell)
- **Partners:** Community-based organizations, libraries, senior centers and immigrant services organizations
- **Geography Served:** Gateway cities and surrounding communities, including Lowell, Haverhill, Fitchburg and Worcester
- **Priority Populations:** Immigrants and English language learners, older adults and economically disadvantaged residents
- **Program Model:** University and community partnerships paired student digital navigators with trusted community-based organizations to improve digital skills and support job attainment and readiness.

The Need: Digital Skills as a Gateway to Economic Opportunity

For many residents, particularly immigrants, older adults and seasoned professionals navigating career transitions, digital skills are no longer optional. Accessing education, securing employment, completing government forms and advancing at work increasingly require comfort with computers, online tools and digital communication.

At the same time, many gateway cities and surrounding communities often lack the staff capacity to deliver sustained, culturally responsive digital skills training. Universities, meanwhile, maintain a pipeline of students eager for hands-on experience but often struggle to connect academic learning with real-world community needs.

UMass Lowell's Digital Equity Partnership grant was designed to bridge both gaps at once, building digital skills for community members while preparing students for meaningful careers in a digital economy.

The Approach: A Two-Way Workforce Development Model

With Digital Equity Partnership funding, UMass Lowell implemented a dual-impact model that treats digital equity as both a community service and a workforce development strategy.

UMass Lowell and Fitchburg State University undergraduate students were recruited, trained and employed as digital navigators and digital skills instructors. These students delivered structured, community-centered digital literacy courses through trusted local partners. At the same time, UMass Lowell invested in public space modernization — upgrading devices, connectivity and equipment at partner sites so training could occur in accessible, welcoming environments.

For students, UMass Lowell's program provided paid, hands-on experience developing transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability and cultural competence preparing them for careers in education, technology, public service and beyond. For digital skill learners, the program opened the door for economic mobility.

Impact at a Glance

During 2025, UMass Lowell's Digital Equity Partnership funding allowed them to deliver measurable outcomes for both learners and student instructors:

- **3,192-plus** community members participated in digital literacy training
- **30-plus** college students employed and trained as digital navigators and instructors
- **15** public access sites updated with equipment and infrastructure
- **18** community partner locations hosted training programs
- Learners demonstrated **significant gains in computer use, internet navigation, document skills and online communication,** based on pre- and post-training assessments

Furthermore, many participants transitioned from mobile-only internet use to confidently working on Chromebooks — unlocking new opportunities for job searching, education and everyday tasks.

Human Impact: Learning Together, Growing Together

In Lowell, a group of engineering students led a multicultural computer skills class at a neighborhood-based organization, working alongside a community translator. Over time, the students became trusted instructors, celebrated by participants with shared meals and ongoing relationships that extended beyond the classroom.

For learners, the impact was immediate and practical. One participant shared learning how to create digital flyers allowed him to promote and sell his woodworking projects. Others reported increased confidence using email, applying for jobs online and accessing services independently.

For students, the experience was equally transformative. It offered real-world teaching, leadership and problem-solving opportunities that could not be replicated in a lecture hall.

What This Work Revealed

UMass Lowell's experience shows several insights relevant to digital equity and workforce development efforts:

- **Digital equity can be a workforce pipeline.** Training students as instructors simultaneously builds community capacity and prepares the next generation of digital equity professionals.
- **Trusted spaces accelerate learning.** Libraries, senior centers and immigrant-serving organizations create environments where learners feel comfortable asking questions and returning for continued support.
- **Internet connectivity and equipment enable participation.** Modernized public spaces are often a prerequisite for effective training, not a supplement.
- **Language access and staffing require intentional planning.** Translation needs and part-time staffing constraints shape what is feasible and must be accounted for early in program design.

Vinfen and the Human Service Alliance for Digital Equity

The Human Service Alliance by Vinfen enables thousands of individuals with disabilities to gain the skills, tools and confidence needed to navigate an increasingly digital world.

Grantee Snapshot

- **Lead Organization:** Vinfen
- **Partners:** Advocates, Behavioral Health Network, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston Center for Independent Living, Clinical & Support Options, Open Sky Community Services and Riverside Community Care
- **Geography Served:** Statewide
- **Priority Populations:** Low-income individuals with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and serious behavioral health conditions
- **Program Model:** Embedded digital navigators, trained staff within human service organizations who provide one-on-one help with devices, internet access and learning how to use technology for everyday needs

The Need: Digital Equity for People with Disabilities

In Massachusetts, people with disabilities face some of the deepest and most persistent digital inequities. Nearly 60% of working-age individuals with disabilities are low-income. Additionally, those individuals are significantly less likely to own internet-enabled devices or go online at all. For the people served by Vinfen, and its partner organizations, digital exclusion is a barrier to health care, housing, employment, education and community connection.

Many individuals face layered challenges such as limited income, accessibility needs, distrust of technology and a lack of support to build digital skills. Without personalized assistance, even when devices or internet are available, digital tools often go unused. Closing this gap requires more than availability, it requires genuine access and sustained, human-centered support.

The Approach: Embedded, Person-Centered Digital Navigation

Vinfen and the Human Service Alliance for Digital Equity have embedded digital navigators directly within trusted human service settings across the state. Fourteen digital navigators provide one-on-one, relationship-based support tailored to individual goals and abilities.

This approach integrates device distribution, digital literacy training and connectivity support into existing service environments. Digital navigators work alongside clinical teams, as well as staff, within day programs and shelters meeting people where they already receive care and services. Throughout 2025, Vinfen also expanded its train-the-trainer model, equipping frontline staff with foundational digital skills so support can extend beyond navigators themselves.

Impact at a Glance

During 2025, Vinfen and its partners delivered digital equity services at significant scale:

- **3,300-plus** digital navigation sessions delivered
- **2,200-plus** hours of direct, one-on-one support provided
- **2,138** individuals served statewide
- **1,593** devices distributed, including smartphones, tablets, laptops and hotspots
- **1,162** individuals received personalized digital skills training

Program participants demonstrated measurable gains in digital confidence and skills, with post-service assessments showing increases across reporting periods. Devices were used to access telehealth, apply for jobs and housing, manage benefits, connect with family, and engage more fully in daily life online.

Human Impact: Reclaiming a Voice Through Technology

One program participant is a nonverbal individual with an acquired brain injury who had long relied on writing to communicate. Two years prior to his participation in the program, he had received an iPad with an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) app. However, without training or ongoing support, the technology went largely unused.

Through a referral to a digital navigator, he received individualized assistance. The navigator customized the AAC app with phrases tailored to his daily routines and needs, trained his support staff on basic technology maintenance, and created visual guides to ensure consistent use. With this hands-on support, the iPad became a functional communication tool rather than an unused device.

As a result, the participant was able to express his needs more independently and engage more fully with those around him, demonstrating how personalized digital navigation can unlock the potential of existing technology and restore agency.

What This Work Revealed

Vinfen's experience implementing digital navigation for people with disabilities found several important insights:

- **Devices alone are not enough.** Without ongoing, personalized support, many individuals cannot fully benefit from technology or internet access.
- **Hands-on navigation builds trust and adoption.** One-on-one relationships are critical, particularly for individuals with complex needs or prior negative experiences with technology.
- **Accessibility features matter.** Leveraging built-in tools such as screen readers, voice commands, and magnification can significantly expand access without requiring costly add-ons.
- **Connectivity, devices, and skills are inseparable.** Loss of affordable internet access, such as the monthly benefit many received from the federal ACP, can quickly undermine progress, even when devices and training are in place.

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