

Informing a Regional Approach to Digital Equity

Old Colony Planning Council Bridging the Digital Divide - 8/22/2022

Josh Eichen, Program Manager for Partnerships

Agenda

- **MBI Overview**
- **Defining Digital Equity**
- **Measuring Digital Equity Gaps**
- **MBI Pilot Programs**
- **Federal Funding Outline**

Presentation Goals

- ★ **Establish a shared understanding of concepts related to Digital Equity**
- ★ **Outline the future State and Federal Broadband / Digital Equity funding**
- ★ **Tee up deep dives by Jenny and James!**

Whose Job is it to Solve the Digital Divide?

- **Planners**
- **Libraries**
- **School Districts**
- **IT Directors**
- **Housing Authorities**
- **Healthcare Providers**
- **Workforce Boards**
- **Community Based Organizations**
- **Elected Officials**
- **Private Sector????**



Defining Digital Equity

Digital Equity:

Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

– *National Digital Inclusion Alliance*



Image Source: Detroit Community Technology Project

Determining Factors of Digital Access



Connection

**Fast
Affordable**



Adequate Device

**Router
Personal Computer /Laptop**



Literacy

**Use of Technology
Ensuring functioning equipment
Evaluating quality of information and privacy risks**

Digital Equity Gap Implications

Digital Equity Gaps Impact:

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

And more...

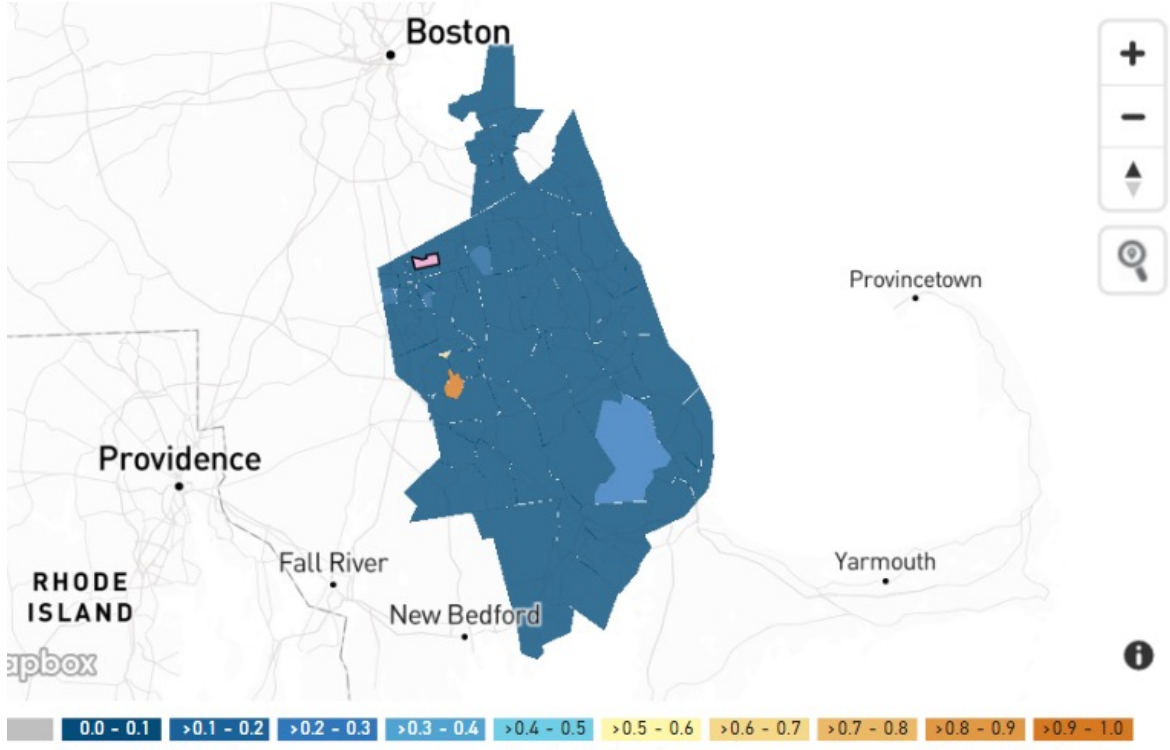
"There is increasing evidence demonstrating a strong relationship between broadband access, Internet adoption, and health outcomes. As such, fostering digital equity and health equity are inextricably intertwined"

- FCC Connect2Health Task Force

Measuring Digital Equity Gaps - Connectivity

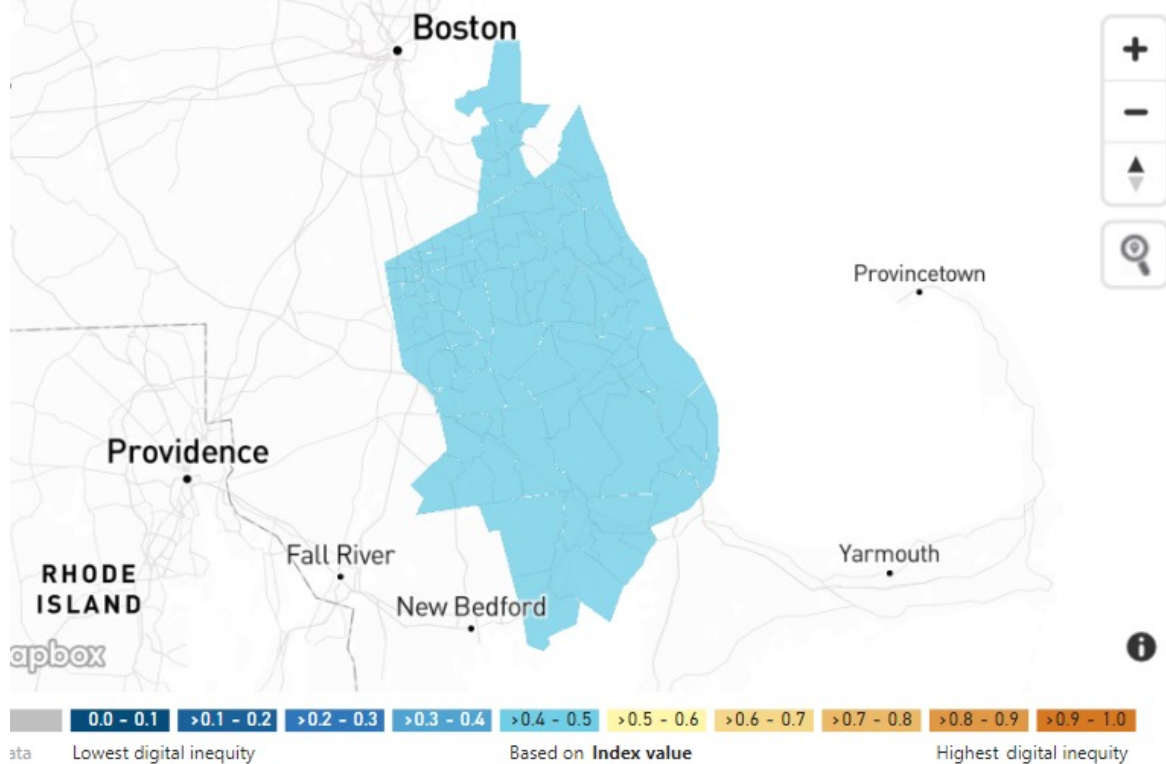
Is Broadband Access Available?

FCC data estimates ~3,800 (2%) of households in Plymouth County do not have access to broadband internet



Is Broadband Access Fast?

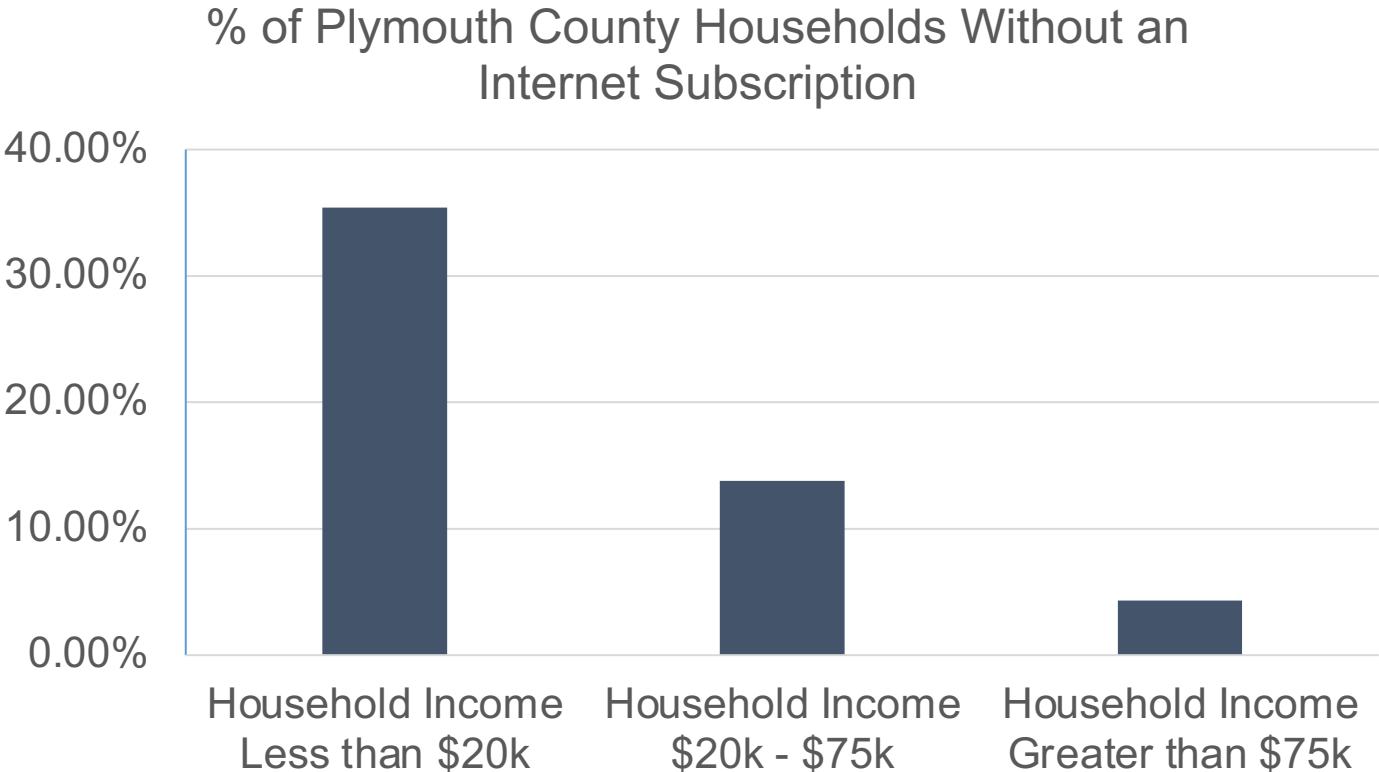
Microsoft data indicates ~38,000 (20%) of households in Plymouth County do not use internet at broadband speeds



Measuring Digital Equity Gaps - Affordability

Is Broadband Access Affordable?

**~19,455 (~10%) of
Plymouth County
Households Lack an
Internet Subscription**



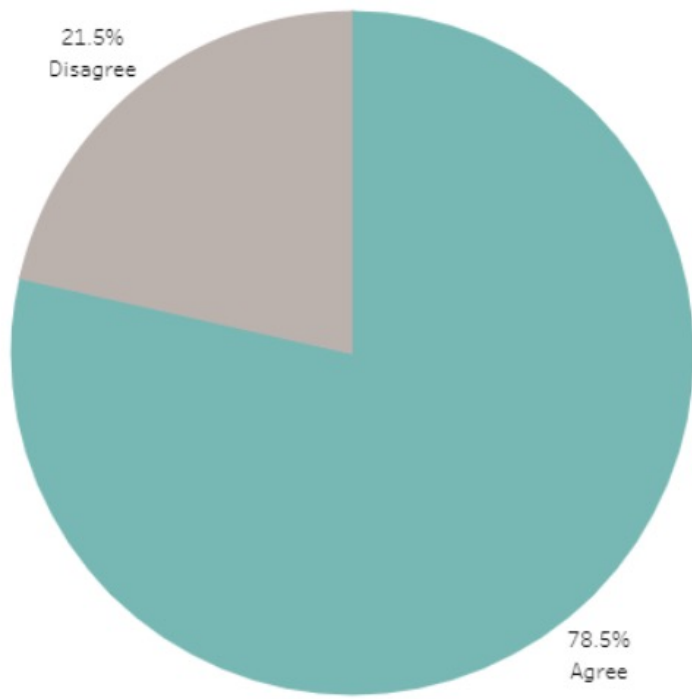
Measuring Digital Equity Gaps - Literacy

1. There is no standard way to assess Digital Literacy
2. Digital Literacy Exists Along a Continuum

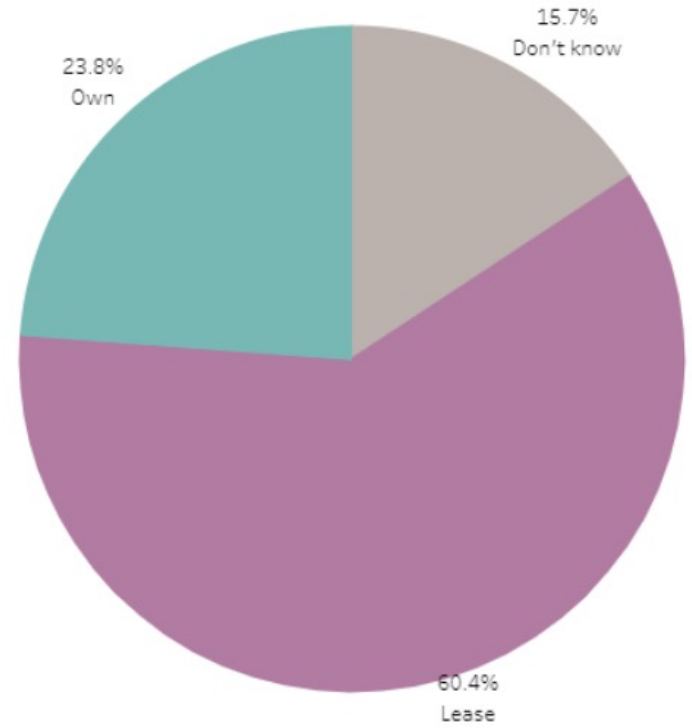


Measuring Digital Equity Gaps - Devices

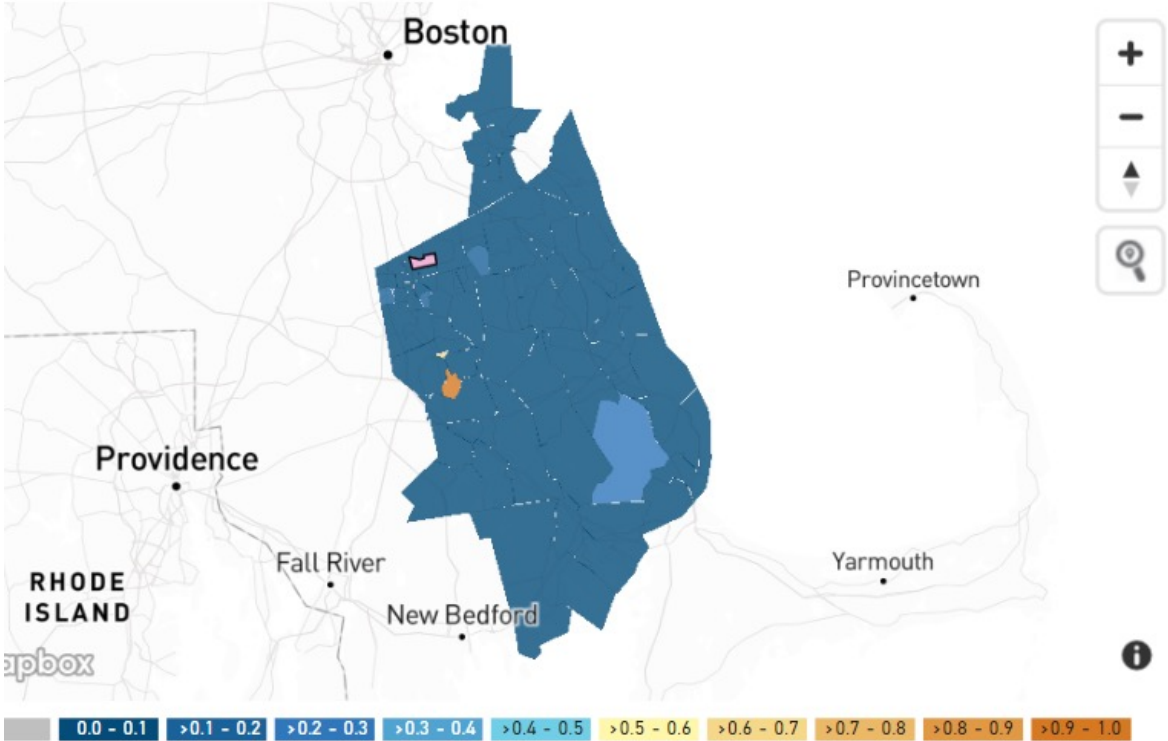
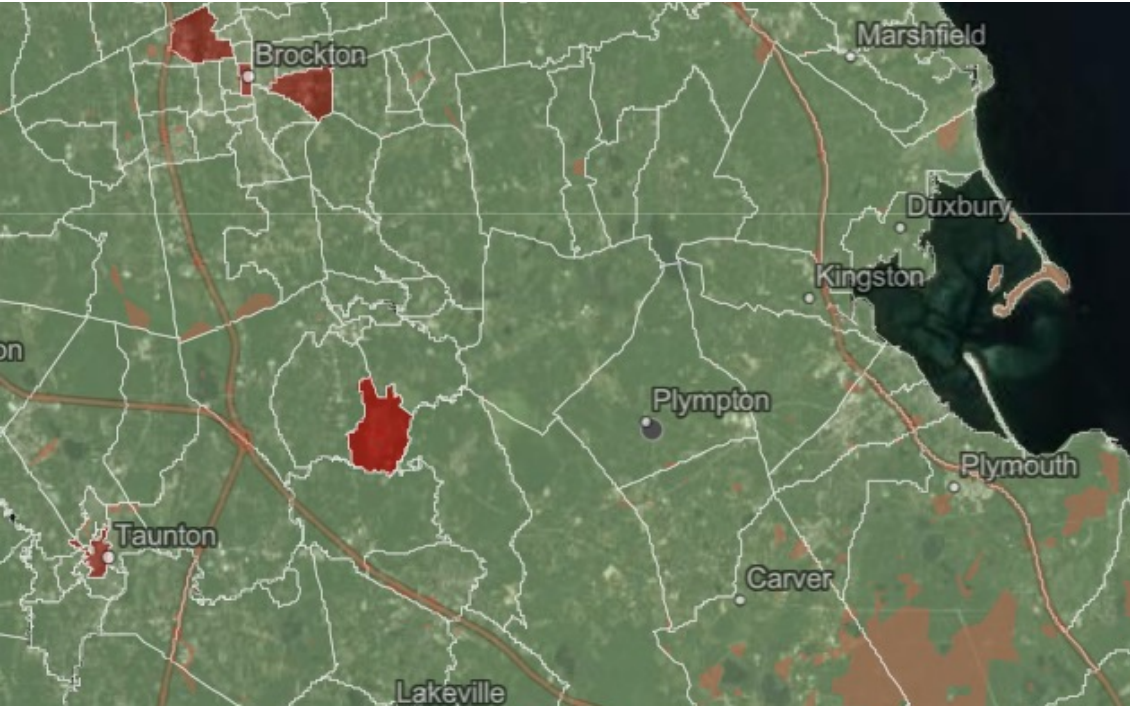
People in my household always have access to a computer if they need one:



Do you own your households WiFi Router or lease it from the internet service provider?



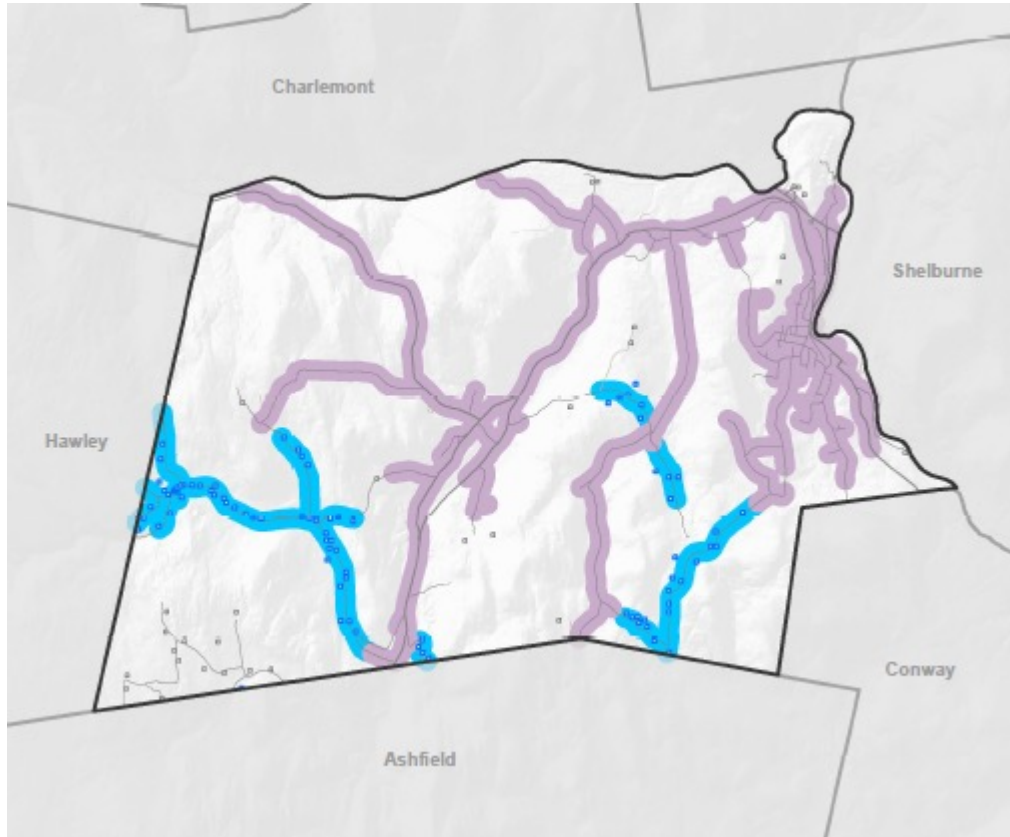
Measuring Digital Equity Gaps – Regional Planning Resources



[NTIA Indicators of Broadband Need Map](#)

[Microsoft Digital Equity Dashboard](#)

How MBI is Working to Bridge the Digital Divide – Data Mapping



- MBI is leading an effort to collect and map data to identify communities that have (1) gaps in physical infrastructure; and/or (2) deficiencies in reliability and quality of service.
- MBI released RFP for data mapping services in January
- Project launch in April

MBI's data collection and mapping effort will:

- Identify remaining pockets of unserved homes
- Prepare the Commonwealth to participate in the challenge process for the updated broadband coverage maps that will be released by the FCC; and
- Inform targeted investments in broadband infrastructure projects in the Commonwealth

How MBI is Working to Bridge the Digital Divide – Regional Partnership Pilot Initiatives



MBI is Currently Supporting Pilot Digital Equity Initiatives for:

- Free WiFi for public housing residents and in low income neighborhoods
- Telehealth navigators
- ACP outreach and enrollment
- Device distribution
- Improved infrastructure in libraries

Apartment WiFi Internet Access



Chelsea Housing Authority – Prattville Apartments

- Partnership between the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, City of Chelsea, and Chelsea Housing Authority
- 128 Units of family housing - expected to receive no barrier, free internet by November 2022
- Housing authority purchases 1 high speed connection. WiFi access points are then linked in common areas to provide in unit service.
- Requires procurement of:
 - 1GB enterprise symmetrical internet service via fiber build to premise*
 - Network vendor and manager to configure and maintain system**
 - Cabling contractor to install cables***

ACP Outreach and Adoption



Image Source: MACIR Senior ACP Outreach Event

Make it Haverhill and Moroccan American Connections in Revere (MACIR)

- Small pilots have had an outsized impact, over 50 households registered to date.
- Training community members to support ACP enrollment.
- Targeted outreach to specific populations including seniors, families with school aged children, and non-English speakers.

Digital Equity Funding Landscape

State ARPA Digital Equity Funding

Legislature approved **\$50M** for digital equity and broadband adoption. Mass Broadband Institute, with the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, is developing digital equity programs and initiatives.

Federal Digital Equity Act

Component of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), designates **\$2.75 billion** to be focused on Digital Equity activities.

Massachusetts Allocation has not yet been determined.

Established for planning & implementation of programs that promote digital equity, support digital inclusion activities, and build capacity related to the adoption of broadband

Digital Equity Funding Landscape

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program

\$42.45 billion – Allocated across US States and Territories - Massachusetts allocation has not yet been determined

Formula-based grant program for US States and Territories - BEAD aims to close the access gap for unserved and underserved areas of the country. Program has provisions for non – capital activities focused on digital equity.

BEAD program requirements include workforce development planning, MWBE procurement, and high labor standards.