



November 21, 2023 | 1

Digital Equity Plan Summary

VCBB Board Meeting
Nov. 21, 2023



Agenda

1. Needs and Barriers
2. Goals
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6. Alignment with Existing Priorities
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8. Timeline
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10. Accountability
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12. Stakeholder Engagement

Needs & Barriers

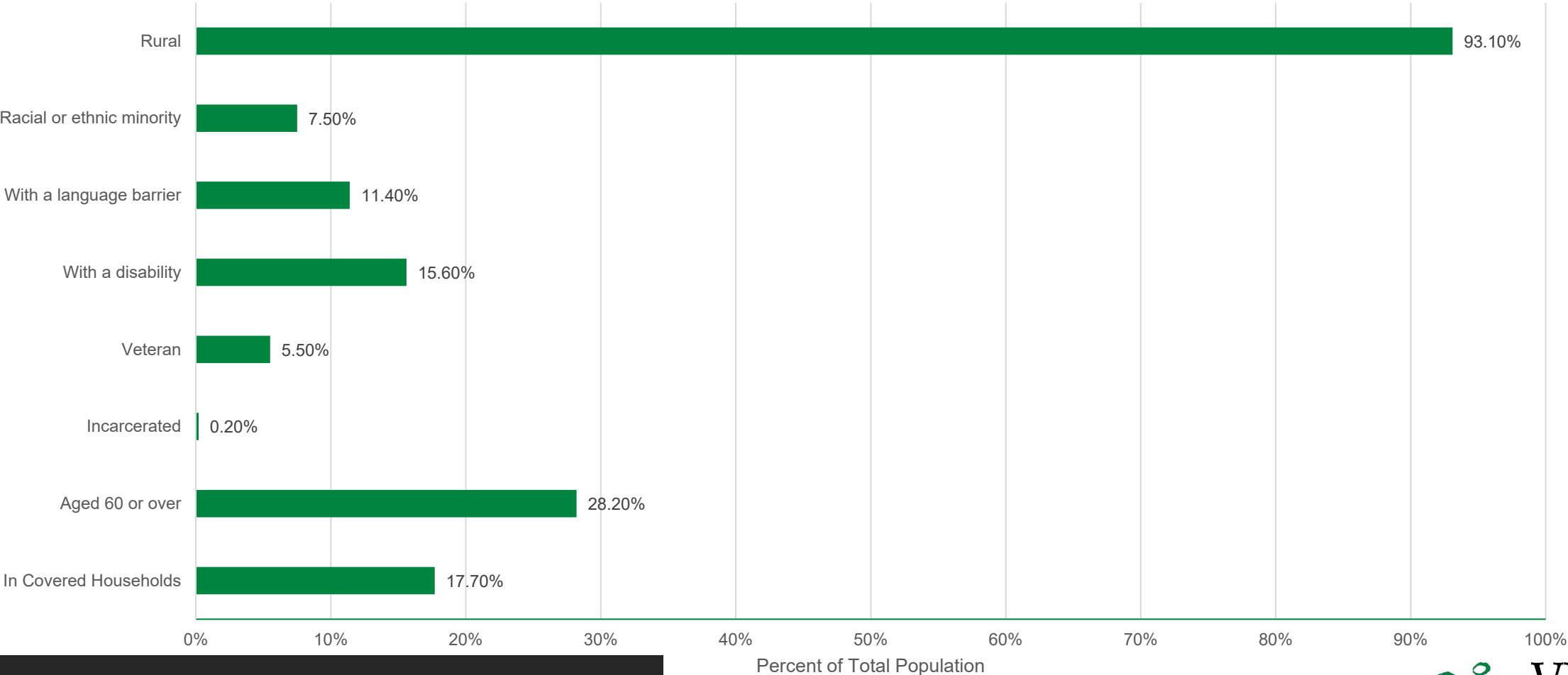
Broadband Availability: Broadband service is not available in area.	Broadband Affordability: Service is available but too expensive. Unaware of resources to help with service cost (e.g., ACP). Mistrust of subsidies.	Device Access: Don't have / can't afford a device that meets needs. Lack of awareness of resources available. Mistrust of subsidies/low-cost devices.	Relevance: Don't see the need/value in signing up for and paying for broadband service and/or assistive technologies.	Digital Literacy: Don't have the skills, confidence to use Internet, information technology meaningfully and productively.
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Some pertinent baseline data:

- **60%** of survey respondents who live in a rural area indicated that broadband service is too expensive
- **82%** of Veteran survey respondents expressed an interest in resources to improve their digital skills
- **45%** of survey respondents who live in low-income indicated the cost of a device is too high

Vermont's Covered Populations as a Percentage of Total Population

Vermont's Covered Populations



Vermont's Goals

Goal 1: Mobilize resources for end-to-end broadband infrastructure deployments to all unserved and underserved locations and Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) in Vermont.

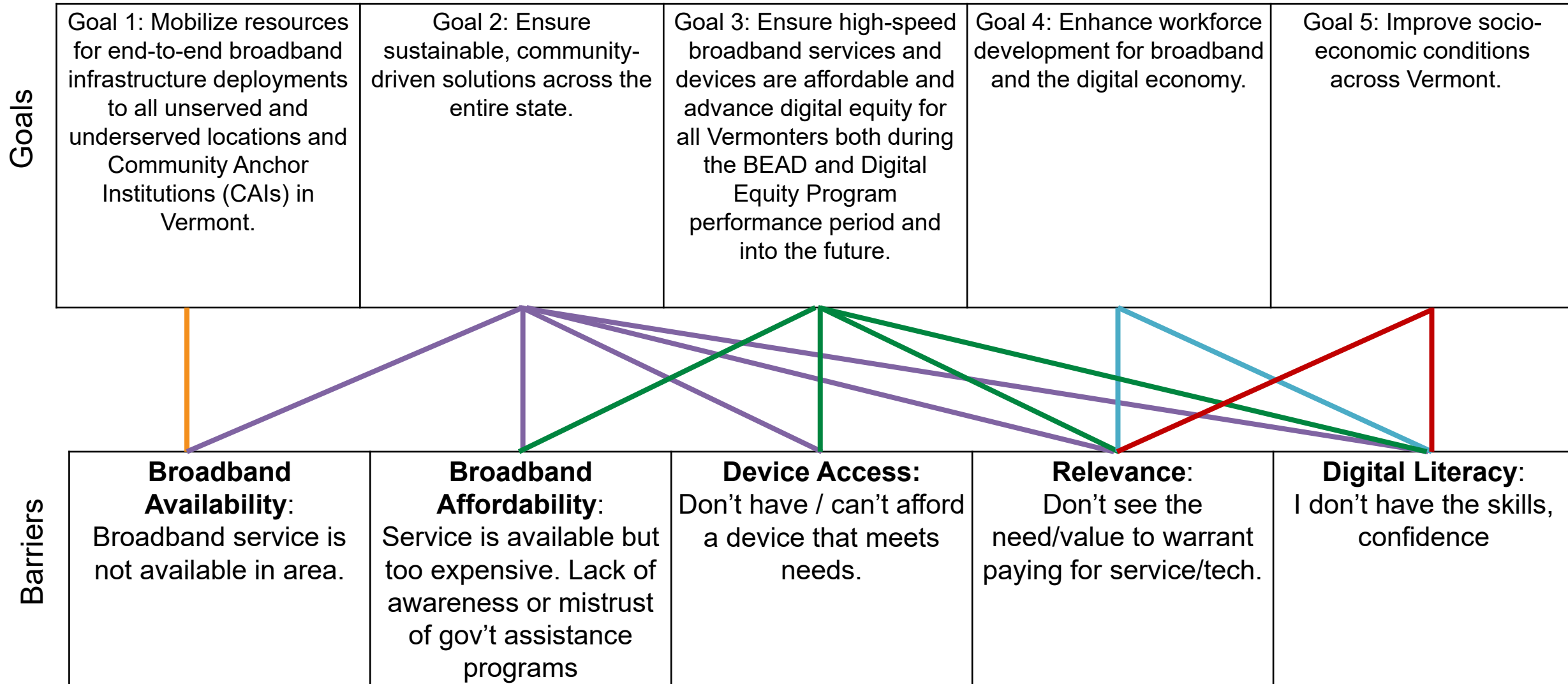
Goal 2: Ensure sustainable, community-driven solutions across the entire state.

Goal 3: Ensure high-speed broadband services and devices are affordable and advance digital equity for all Vermonters both during the BEAD and Digital Equity Program performance period and into the future.

Goal 4: Enhance workforce development for broadband and the digital economy.

Goal 5: Improve socio-economic conditions across Vermont.

How Goals and Barriers Link



VCBB's Role in Summary

- **Visionary:** Set the vision and strategy for advancing digital equity
- **Convenor:** Bring together stakeholders to learn and collaborate
- **Administrator:** Fund initiatives to advance objectives, ensure alignment with BEAD, accountability
- **Data analysis:** Aggregate, analyze, share data on digital equity
- **Advisor:** Help and empower other agencies, local government, CUDs, etc. incorporate digital equity into their services
- **Disseminator:** Disseminate resources for digital equity (e.g., asset inventory, skilling opportunities, broadband service updates)

Goal 1

Mobilize resources for end-to-end broadband infrastructure deployments to all unserved and underserved locations and CAIs in Vermont.

Objectives:

- Leverage BEAD and other available funding resources to remove barriers and foster a competitive and sustainable market for broadband service across Vermont.
- Implement the BEAD grant program (and other funding sources) for reliable and resilient broadband infrastructure deployments to extend 100/100 Mbps or better connectivity to all on-grid unserved and underserved locations, 100/20 Mbps or better connectivity to all off-grid locations, and 1/1 Gbps or better connectivity to all CAIs.
- Assist subgrantees in securing funding from additional sources for broadband infrastructure deployments.
- Ensure every town in Vermont has at least one CAI with access to symmetrical gigabit Mbps broadband service.

Highlights of core activities:

- Pursue additional funding sources to supplement BEAD and Digital Equity Act programs.
- Support CUDs, ISPs, and other entities to pursue funding opportunities for expanded broadband deployment and other digital equity initiatives.
- Work with community partners and ISPs to install equipment to enable Wi-Fi signals outside buildings people experiencing housing insecurity frequent for services

Barriers Addressed: Broadband availability
Covered Populations: All

Goal 2

Ensure sustainable, community-driven solutions across the entire state

Objectives:

- Design and implement BEAD and Digital Equity grant programs that invest in infrastructure and digital equity initiatives with community support.
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with community stakeholders to identify opportunities for the VCBB to support and coordinate initiatives.
- Ensure BEAD- and Digital Equity-funded initiatives include commitments to future equipment upgrades and continued universal service coverage.
- Assist communities with strategies and resources to ensure broadband affordability and accessibility, along with connecting communities with digital skilling resources.
- Support local champions and community organizations to help their community members find and use the affordability and skilling resources they need.

Highlights of core activities:

- Continue stakeholder engagement and establish a public feedback mechanism about the digital equity plan and funded activities.
- Establish a digital navigators program modeled after Vermont's Health Ambassadors
- Establish a train-the-trainer model to assist other state agencies and non-governmental organizations to incorporate digital equity resources into their outreach efforts.
- Publish and disseminate to each CAI materials describing digital equity resources
- Establish a device loaning program with libraries to allow Vermonters to check out/in a computer, tablet, or assistive technology.

Barriers Addressed:

Broadband availability and affordability, device access, relevance, digital literacy

Covered Populations:

All

Goal 3

Ensure high-speed broadband services and devices are affordable and advance digital equity for all Vermonters both during the BEAD performance period and into the future.

Objectives:

- Ensure all households with an income level at or below 150 percent of the poverty line have access to a low-cost broadband service option.
- Promote the ACP and other related resources for broadband affordability and adoption.
- Assist communities with strategies and resources to ensure broadband affordability and accessibility, along with connecting communities with digital skilling resources.
- Establish a coordinated effort with other state agencies to promote digital inclusion across Vermont.
- Promote the accessibility and inclusivity of digital public services.
- Ensure all Vermonters have access to accessible, multi-lingual, community-based technical support.
- Ensure every Vermont household with a student living in it has a connected device and assistive technology (if needed)

Highlights of core activities:

- Work with the Department of Education to design and implement a device access program
- Audit and evaluate Vermont's state public services for accessibility and inclusivity.
- Design and implement a grant program for community organizations to upgrade their websites, materials, and online services to ensure accessibility.
- Establish a hotline available to the public for support getting information on digital equity resources, particularly the ACP benefit and digital literacy resources, and a referral to their local digital navigator.

Barriers Addressed:
Broadband availability and affordability, device access, relevance, digital literacy

Covered Populations:
All

Goal 4

Enhance workforce development for broadband and the digital economy

Objectives:

- Increase capacity of education and training programs to develop the talent pipeline.
- Increase industry awareness and involvement in the opportunity created by these programs.
- Promote, target, and recruit participants in Vermont.
- Support for the industry to create sustainable employment opportunities.
- Establish a roadmap of career possibilities for participants in the Workforce Development Programs.
- Encourage the recruitment of a diverse workforce of Vermonters for jobs in the broadband ecosystem, including fiber technicians, flaggers, inspectors, trenchers, tree clearing crews, and electricians.

Highlights of core activities:

- Work with the Department of Corrections to incorporate training opportunities for incarcerated individuals.
- Continue to support the design and implementation of apprenticeship and job training programs in collaboration with the Department of Labor and potential employers.
- Work with employers and workforce development partners to define, document, publish, and disseminate career roadmaps to articulate long-term opportunities for people entering or re-entering the workforce.
- Design and implement a grant program for community organizations to upgrade their websites, materials, and online services to ensure accessibility.
- Establish a hotline available to the public for support getting information on digital equity resources, particularly the ACP benefit and digital literacy resources, and a referral to their local digital navigator.

Barriers Addressed:
Broadband availability and affordability, digital literacy

Covered Populations:
All

Goal 5

Improve socio-economic conditions across Vermont

Objectives:

- Ensure fair labor standards among BEAD subgrantees (in line with Vermont's BEAD Initial Proposal).
- Support workforce development opportunities in broadband related industries
- Empower Vermont residents, agencies, organizations, and businesses with the ability to use technology to study, work, communicate, and access health and other social services.

Highlights of core activities:

- Oversee BEAD subgrantees to ensure accountability for fair labor standards and encourage recruiting from Covered Populations and other Underrepresented Communities and State-supported apprenticeship programs.
- Facilitate public-private partnerships on vocational rehabilitation: Work with technology companies on vocational rehabilitation programs that recruit and skill Vermonters from Covered Populations.
- Develop and promote digital skilling resources focused on in-demand job skills.
- Support CAIs and work with them to develop or expand programs and resources to increase the use of digital access for socio-economic mobility.

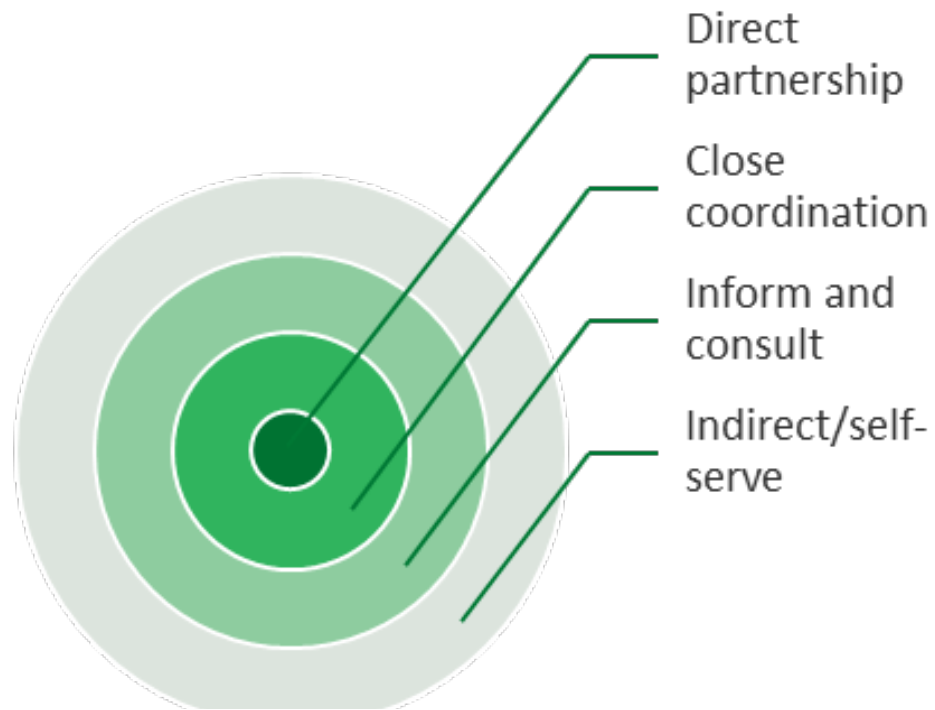
Barriers Addressed:
Relevance, digital literacy

Covered Populations:
All

Alignment with Existing Policies and Priorities

- Vermont's objectives for digital equity intersect with its objectives for education, public services and civic engagement, health and human services, and community and workforce development.
- Priorities of equity, opportunity, and resilience emerge across agencies and sectors.
- The VCBB believes strongly in the correlation between Internet and technology access and positive socio-economic outcomes.

Collaboration and Partnerships



- The VCBB intends to have varying degrees of collaborations in VT
- Types of potential partner organizations
 - Community-based organizations
 - Local Community Anchor Institutions
 - Institutions of higher learning
 - Workforce development agencies
 - Private sector companies

Timeline

2024

- Establish data management function
- Continue stakeholder outreach and engagement
- Establish a Digital Navigators program
- Build upon Vermont Digital Equity Asset Inventory
- Finalize design and partnership approach for implementation
- Award subgrants
- Conduct annual digital equity survey

2025

- Implement program activities, including ongoing oversight of subawards and stakeholder engagement.
- Monitor and evaluate progress towards KPIs
- Maintain Vermont's digital equity dashboard and asset inventory
- Publish evaluation and learning report
- Conduct annual digital equity survey

2026

- Implement program activities, including ongoing oversight of subawards and stakeholder engagement.
- Monitor and evaluate progress towards KPIs
- Maintain Vermont's digital equity dashboard and asset inventory
- Conduct annual digital equity survey
- Publish evaluation and learning report

2027

- Implement program activities, including ongoing oversight of subawards and stakeholder engagement
- Monitor and evaluate progress towards KPIs
- Develop sustainability strategy for program activities
- Maintain Vermont's digital equity dashboard and asset inventory
- Publish evaluation and learning report

2028

- Conduct annual digital equity survey
- Evaluate progress towards KPIs and lessons learned
- Develop the next version of Vermont's Digital Equity Strategy
- Ensure sustainability or close-out of program activities, as appropriate

Monitoring and Evaluation

Key steps to Vermont's approach to monitoring, evaluating, and learning during the implementation of this plan include:

- Establish a data collection, management, and monitoring function to collect more granular data around digital equity in Vermont
- Design data collection practices to enable the VCBB to regularly evaluate the impact of programs towards digital equity outcomes
- Where necessary, establish partnerships and data-sharing agreements with other agencies and organizations that already routinely collect relevant data
- Regularly monitor and evaluate progress towards key performance indicators (KPIs) and utilization of digital equity programs and services by Covered Populations
- Establish a publicly available dashboard that transparently displays Vermont's progress towards its KPIs

Accountability

To ensure transparency and accountability, the VCBB will take the following steps mentioned above and summarized below:

- Establish a virtual dashboard that presents the VCBB's progress towards KPIs and a mechanism for public feedback about programs and resources
- Regular reporting on performance and learning posted publicly.
- Frequent and open communication and engagement with stakeholders and the public.
- All presentations and materials will be in plain language and evaluated for accessibility

Funding and Sustainability

- Vermont's BEAD funds will focus on addressing barriers to broadband *access*.
- Digital Equity Plan and future grant funds will focus on broadband adoption and other digital equity issues.
- VCBB has an objective focused on increasing financial and in-kind resources for digital equity beyond the NTIA grant program
- Through widespread collaboration with community partners and state agencies, digital equity will become institutionalized throughout Vermont's public and community services.

Stakeholder Engagement: Future Opportunities for Public Input

- Monthly office hours with Vermont's Digital Equity Officer
- VCBB Board meetings
- 30-day public comment period on the Digital Equity Plan draft
- Quarterly Digital Equity update and listening session
- Ongoing feedback via letters, emails, and phone calls

Thank you