

DRAFT

Town of  
**FALMOUTH**  
Digital Equity Plan



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Town of Falmouth Municipal Digital Equity Plan was made possible through funding from the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech) as a grantee under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. Funding for this statewide program was provided through Massachusetts American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State Fiscal Recovery Funds.

Many community members across the Town of Falmouth played a critical role in developing this plan. Information about participatory entities is available in the Community Engagement chapter. In particular, this plan was developed through a partnership between Town Administration and the Falmouth Broadband Municipal Light Plant (MLP). The Falmouth Public Library, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, and Falmouth Community Veterans Center played a critical role in facilitating inclusive and meaningful community engagement activities.

The Cape Cod Commission was pleased to partner with Falmouth in the development of this municipal digital equity plan and looks forward to supporting implementation strategies and opportunities for regional collaboration.



*Figure 1: Falmouth Town Hall.*

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A stylized map of the state of Massachusetts is centered on the page. The map is filled with a dark blue color and has a white outline. Overlaid on the map and the background is a network of white lines connecting various points, creating a web-like structure. The background is a light blue gradient with horizontal lines and a subtle pattern of white dots and lines. The text "INTRODUCTION & TOWN VISION" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the map.

# INTRODUCTION & TOWN VISION

DRAFT For Public Review – March 2025

# INTRODUCTION

Community members across the Town of Falmouth have long been aware of the critical need for equitable access to the internet and technology. Dissatisfied with their internet options, a group of like-minded and technically oriented individuals began meeting in 2019 to discuss the possibility of a town-wide community-based fiber network for Falmouth. Falmouth's Economic Development and Industrial Corporation was an early supporter of this effort, providing \$50,000 for a feasibility study of such a network.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when many activities related to work, school, public service, and healthcare moved to a virtual setting, inequities were further exposed related to how communities across the nation experience the internet and technology. These inequities constitute the digital divide – the gap between those who have access to, and ability to use, the internet and computing devices, and those who do not.

The ad hoc group of Falmouth advocates would incorporate as the non-profit FalmouthNet, and the EDIC-funded study served as the basis for the creation of the Falmouth Broadband Municipal Light Plant (MLP) under Massachusetts General Law. That action was twice supported by Falmouth Town Meeting and formally adopted in April 2022. Among its early actions after formal establishment at the May 2023 Town Election, was issuing a

## What is 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 is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.”

*National Digital Inclusion Alliance*

## Key components of digital equity include:



**Internet Connection:** Do all populations experience internet connection that is affordable, fast, and reliable? Can all populations access the internet?



**Devices:** Do all populations have devices that are adequate, needs-appropriate? Are devices affordable or otherwise accessible?



**Literacy and Skills:** Do all populations have the ability to use technology and the internet to achieve their needs? Do concerns around trust, privacy, and safety exist?

request for information from parties interested in building a network in Falmouth, and partnering with the Town of Falmouth on a Municipal Digital Equity Plan through a grant with the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.

Today, the ability to engage in the digital world varies broadly across our communities, including the Town of Falmouth. Digital inequities inhibit many from meeting their civic, social, educational, health, and employment needs. As the digital world continues to advance, all community members must have the opportunity to

meaningfully engage with the internet and technology to thrive professionally, academically, civically, socially, and personally. Advancing digital equity will require universal internet connectivity, device adoption, and digital skills.

Digital equity is essential for healthy, engaged, and thriving communities. Municipalities, community organizations, and other actors across our communities have a critical role to play in making digital inclusion a reality for all.

## Project Background

## Project Background

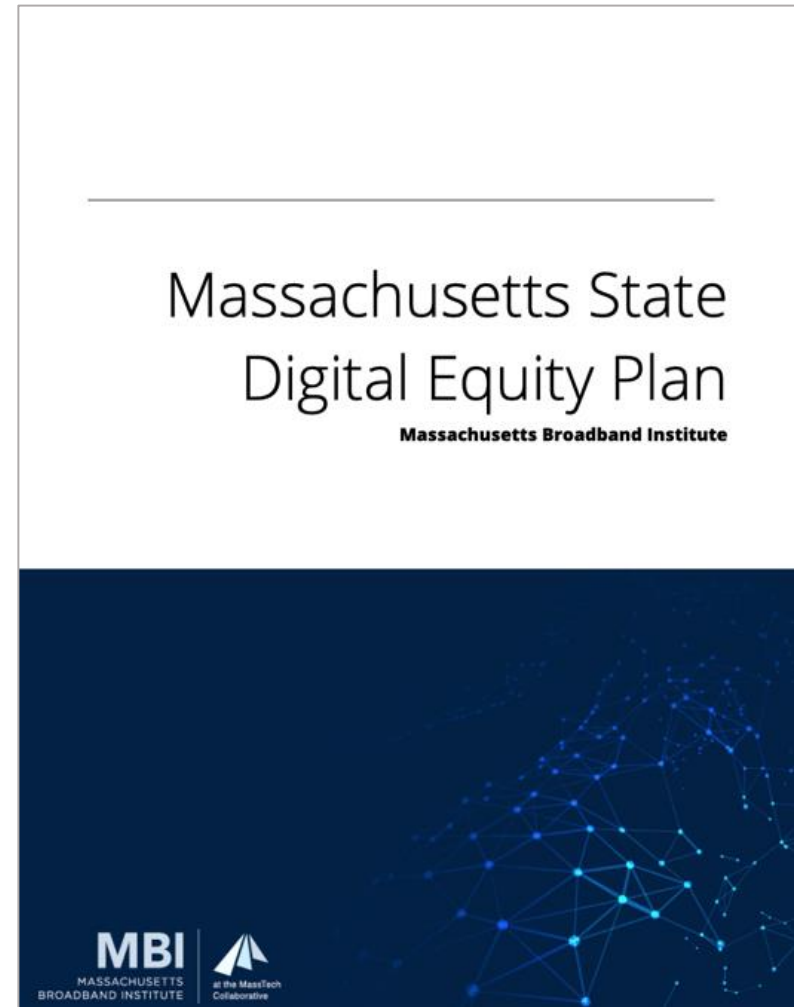
Following the passage of An Act Relative to Immediate COVID-19 Recovery Needs, also known as the Massachusetts “ARPA 1.0” legislation (codified as Chapter 102 of the Acts of 2021), a Broadband Innovation Fund was established to bridge the digital divide as a component of the Commonwealth’s COVID-19 recovery and response efforts.

The [Massachusetts Broadband Institute](#)<sup>1</sup> (MBI), a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, has led the planning process and development of a statewide digital equity plan known as the “[Massachusetts Internet for All Plan](#)”<sup>2</sup>. It is also leading the deployment of roughly \$530 million in state and federal funding to expand high-speed internet access and digital equity programming across the state over the next two fiscal years.

To fully understand local digital equity needs, MBI established a Municipal Digital Equity Grant Planning Program (“Municipal Planning Program”). This program enables municipalities across the state to engage in digital equity planning activities that ultimately yield a town-adopted digital equity plan. Municipalities select a pre-qualified planning service provider, such as the Cape Cod Commission, to support the development of their digital equity plan.

<sup>1</sup> <https://broadband.masstech.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://broadband.masstech.org/mainternetforallplan>





## Massachusetts Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program

# Massachusetts Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program

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Cod Commission, to support the development of their digital equity plan.

## Project Purpose

The Cape Cod Commission (Commission) assisted the Town of Falmouth in this planning effort to assess the digital divide in its community and to develop a Municipal Digital Equity Plan. The purpose of the plan is to understand the current landscape of digital equity in Falmouth, to prepare the town for future funding opportunities, and to help guide equitable implementation to ensure that all benefit from infrastructural and programmatic investments.

The Municipal Digital Equity Plan is designed to accomplish two goals:

- Guide municipal decision-making and investments to increase access, adoption, and usage of the internet for the populations most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; and,
- Prepare municipalities to submit grant proposals to existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities.

The Town of Falmouth Digital Equity Plan includes a community-driven vision for digital equity and inclusion, an overview of existing conditions of the current state of digital equity in Falmouth, a description of the community engagement process, and recommendations and solutions based on the sum of these findings.

## Falmouth's Vision For Digital Equity

Considerations throughout the development of this plan were contextualized through the three primary components of digital equity: connectivity, devices, and skills. This plan also considers community-wide challenges and solutions within this framework.

Recommendations and strategies derived from this plan will lay a foundation for access to future implementation funding, which, in addition to MBI's implementation programs, may be derived from public, philanthropic, or private sources.



# Falmouth's Vision For Digital Equity

## *VISION*

Building on a solid foundation of community awareness, engaged community organizations, and effective programming, the Town of Falmouth will strive for a future where residents are universally connected to affordable and reliable internet and are empowered with the knowledge and skills required to make the most of that connection. Entities across the Town of Falmouth will work collaboratively as a digital equity network to provide effective support for all community members, with programming that meets the needs of the community's most vulnerable populations.

## *GOALS*

To achieve the community's vision, the Town of Falmouth should strive to meet a handful of key, high-level goals.

### BUILD ON EXISTING STRENGTHS

Achieving the above vision will require leadership, collaboration, and forward-thinking from municipal and community leaders. Fortunately, Falmouth is already home to many strong community organizations and municipal departments that are aware of the digital divide. Some of

## Falmouth's Vision For Digital Equity

these entities already provide digital equity services and others are well-connected to community members:

- GOAL 1: Build an effective network amongst these entities to address the digital divide in Falmouth. Community and municipal entities should be organized to function in greater collaboration, deepening their connection to vulnerable communities and participating in regional efforts, to provide a well-structured and responsive continuum of services.
- GOAL 2: Increase local capacity, funding, and resources so these entities can continue to provide, expand, and enhance existing programs, as well as advancing new solutions.

## ENSURE COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE TRULY CONNECTED

Achieving the above vision will require that all community members are equitably able to access the internet.

- GOAL 3: Ensure community members can access an array of internet connectivity options within their homes and across key community locations, prioritizing affordability and reliability of service.
- GOAL 4: Support community members to access and navigate needs-responsive devices, providing access to communal devices in instances where affordability is a barrier to personal ownership.
- GOAL 5: Empower community members to have the digital skills necessary to engage in the digital world and access essential services.





# CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL EQUITY

*Table 1: Key Demographic Information for Falmouth. (Various Sources)*

Setting

**KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

| POPULATION | HOUSEHOLDS | HOUSEHOLD SIZE | HOUSING UNITS | MEDIAN SALES PRICE | HOUSEHOLD INCOME ( <i>median</i> ) | MEDIAN AGE |
|------------|------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| 32,841     | 14,596     | 2.22           | 22,156        | \$750,000 (2023)   | \$92,862                           | 56.8       |

Table 1: Key Demographic information for the Town of Falmouth (various sources)

# EXISTING DIGITAL EQUITY CONDITIONS

## Introduction

Digital equity efforts seek to ensure everyone has the same access and opportunities to the information technology needed for full participation in society, democracy, and the economy. A core element of this planning process was to understand the unique needs of community members across the Town of Falmouth – understanding who lives in the town and what social and connectivity conditions may affect their ability to experience digital equity.

## Setting

Falmouth is the second largest town on Cape Cod, in both population and land area. It has an estimated year-round population of just over 32,800 residents, the second largest town in the region in terms of year-round population. It is bordered by Bourne and Sandwich on the north, Vineyard Sound on the south, Buzzards Bay on the west, and Mashpee on the east.

Reliable internet connectivity is necessary for both the town’s vitality as a regionally important economic center and its attractiveness for year-round and part-time residents, as well as visitors.

Seasonal properties in Falmouth approaches 30% of all units. This presents challenges for municipal infrastructure, such as water and sewer, as they require capacity to handle

peak seasonal needs. The same holds for private infrastructure, such as broadband and cellular services.

As a community, Falmouth is fortunate to have a strong human-based network of providing various forms of digital support services. This is further explored in the :Findings section under “Digital Assets.”

## People

To ensure resources are directed at bridging the digital divide for those who are most in need, the federal Digital Equity Act of 2021 identified certain populations that are more likely to experience difficulty accessing and using broadband internet. These include:

- Low-income households (at or below 150% of the federal poverty level)
- Aging individuals (60 and older)
- Incarcerated individuals
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People with language barriers (limited English proficiency or low literacy levels)
- Members of racial or ethnic minority groups
- Rural residents

In Visions of Digital Equity, the Benton Institute provides a useful outline of how Covered Populations experience the digital divide. While some of these dynamics are described in the section to follow, referencing this report will provide

### Covered Populations

*Defined by Digital Equity Act of 2021*

- ★ Low-income households
- ★ Aging individuals (60 and older)
- ★ Incarcerated individuals
- ★ Veterans
- ★ People with disabilities
- ★ People with language barriers
- ★ Racial and ethnic minorities
- ★ Rural inhabitants

### Underrepresented Communities

*Defined by Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program*

- ★ Indigenous and Native American individuals
- ★ Members of ethnic and religious minorities
- ★ Women
- ★ LGBTQI+ individuals
- ★ Persons of color
- ★ People adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality

People

### AGE DIVERSITY

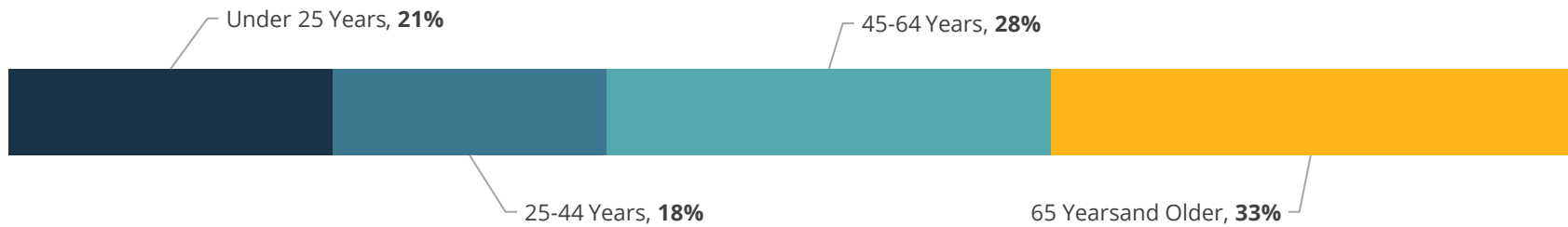


Figure 2: Age Diversity in Falmouth

a more complete understanding of the challenges faced by these populations.<sup>3</sup>

The Broadband, Equity, and Access Deployment Program also identified key populations to consider throughout digital equity planning efforts. These populations are reflected in the “Underrepresented Communities” portion of the table

For the purposes of this planning effort, Commission staff explored data and experiences from populations that are particularly present in the Town of Falmouth, with a focus on Covered Populations.

Covered populations were selected based on the likelihood that they may face barriers to digital inclusion, but they are

not determinative in and of themselves. As is often the case, individuals may fall into multiple covered populations, increasing their likelihood of experiencing digital inequities.

In the section that follows, the individual covered populations will be reviewed first, followed by an analysis of where individuals are likely to experience multiple barriers.

### AGING INDIVIDUALS

For more than half a century, Cape Cod has been a popular retirement destination, resulting in an increase in aging residents. More recently, the Cape has become an increasingly challenging place for young people to live year-round. This dynamic boosts median ages higher than the

<sup>3</sup> [Visions of Digital Equity](#), the Benton Institute for Broadband and Society, August 2023.



state and nation in all 15 towns of Barnstable County. For the Digital Equity Act, “Aging Population” is defined as those 60 and older. A total of 44.4% of Falmouth’s population meets this definition, which is higher than the County (41.7%) and significantly higher than both the state (24.2%) and nation (23.2%).

The county’s median age is high at 55.1 years, and Falmouth hovers around the county median (56.8 years). As with the aging population percentage, this is far higher than both Massachusetts (40.0 years) and the nation (38.7 years).

The U.S. Census Bureau measures the Age Dependency Ratio, which considers the number of individuals in a community who are outside of working years compared with working age individuals. According to this calculation, working age is within the range of ages 18 to 64; those

younger than 18 and older than 65 are dependent on the economically-active segment of the population to some extent. A high Age Dependency Ratio can have implications for social support systems, healthcare needs, and workforce sustainability.

In Falmouth, as with the rest of the Cape, a higher-than-average number of aging residents drives a higher Age Dependency Ratio of 89.7. This means that for every 100 residents presumed to be in the workforce (those aged 18 to 64), there are about 90 outside of it, both younger and older. The State ratio is 58.

Falmouth’s aging population is reflected in other data. More than 60% of all households have at least one person over 65. Close to 42% of households reported retirement income.

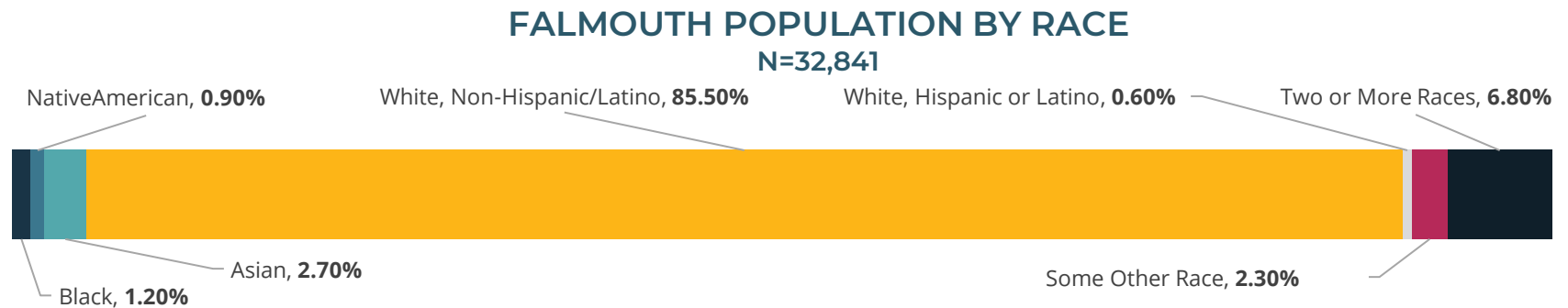


Figure 3: Population by Race in Falmouth

### People

From a digital equity perspective, a larger aging population may represent skills and knowledge gaps in how to use internet-based systems and an understanding of what represents quality internet service. This may be especially true for aging residents living alone without family nearby or strong social networks. In Falmouth, 24.1% of all year-round households are run by someone aged 65 or older and living alone, the vast majority of which are women (20.2%).

#### ***Members of racial or ethnic minority groups***

Falmouth matches the county for racial and ethnic diversity, with 85.5% of its population identifying as White

alone. The second highest percentage of one race is Asian (2.7%), followed by Black or African American (1.2%), Native American (0.9%), some other race (2.3%), and 6.8% as two or more races.

Falmouth’s enrolled student population demonstrates greater racial and ethnic diversity than the town as a whole. This is a trend across most towns in Barnstable County and is indicative of greater diversity in the population of families with school-aged children. Enrollment data indicates that 5.1% of students identify as Black, 1.7% as Asian, 7% as Multiracial, 1.1% as Native American, 10.4% as Hispanic, and 74.4% as White.

Additionally, 11.9% of students speak a first language that is not English.

### FALMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS POPULATION BY RACE

N=2,892

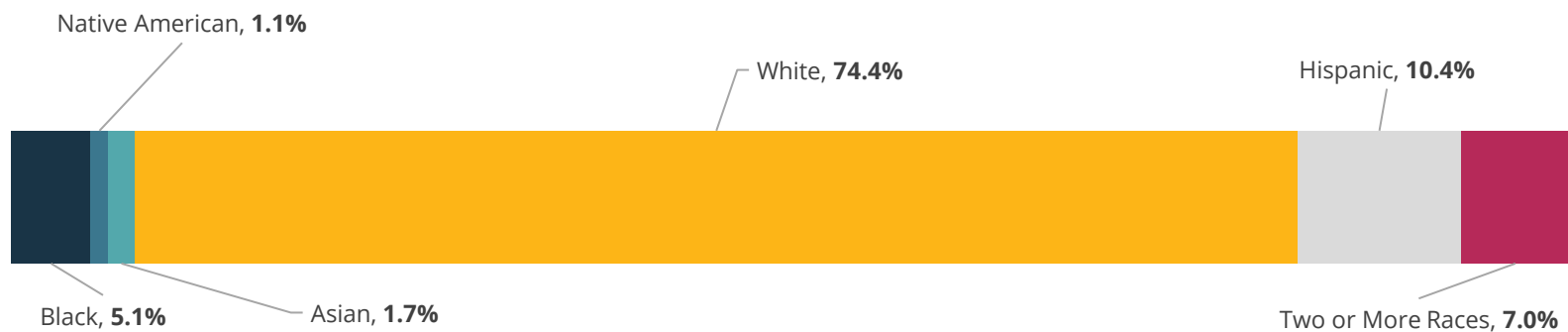


Figure 4: Falmouth Student Population Demographics

## Falmouth Public Schools and Town Demographics

| Town/Falmouth Public Schools   |        |                 |
|--|--------|-----------------|
|  | Town   | 2023-24 Schools |
| <b>Population/Enrolled*</b>  | 32,694 | 2,892           |
| <b>Race</b>  |        |                 |
| <b>White</b>   | 92.60% | 74.40%          |
| <b>Black</b>   | 1.30%  | 5.10%           |
| <b>Asian</b>   | 2.20%  | 1.70%           |
| <b>Hispanic**</b>  | 2.90%  | 10.40%          |
| <b>Native American</b>   | 0.90%  | 1.10%           |
| <b>Multi-race</b>  | 4.40%  | 7.00%           |
| <b>Characteristics</b>   |        |                 |
| <b>First language not English</b>                                      | 9.40%  | 11.90%          |
| <b>English language learner</b>  | 2.90%  | 7.50%           |
| <b>With disabilities</b>   | 18.70% | 24.40%          |
| <b>Low income</b>  | 12.90% | 39.50%          |
| <b>High needs</b>  | N/a    | 53.30%          |
| <b>*Includes all students enrolled, regardless of hometown.</b>        |        |                 |
| <b>** Town includes all identifying as Hispanic regardless of race</b> |        |                 |
| <b>Source: Mass. DESE 2023-24 enrollment by race/gender report</b>     |        |                 |

Table 2: Town of Falmouth and Falmouth Public Schools Demographics

As found in digital equity work in other towns, Falmouth's Public Schools are more diverse than the population at large. This points to greater diversity in the town's younger populations, which should be considered during digital

equity implementation. Significant differences are demonstrated with race and ethnicity, and households with limited English proficiency.

It should be noted that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses different methodologies in its diversity calculations. Nonetheless, Enrollment data for Falmouth Public Schools adds important details to the town's demographic picture.

There is a significant difference between the town's population with a disability (16.5%) and the student population with a disability (24%), but these are not directly comparable, as they are determined by different methods.

The same is true for the low-income category. Recognizing that different methodologies are used, the 300% difference between the town (12.9%) and schools (39.5%) should not be overlooked.

Families with multiple children living in the household may experience heightened challenges with the components of digital equity – for example, four people all trying to access the internet (doing schoolwork, streaming, gaming) at the same time is likely to exacerbate bandwidth.

People

**Income**

**HOUSEHOLDS PER INCOME BRACKET**

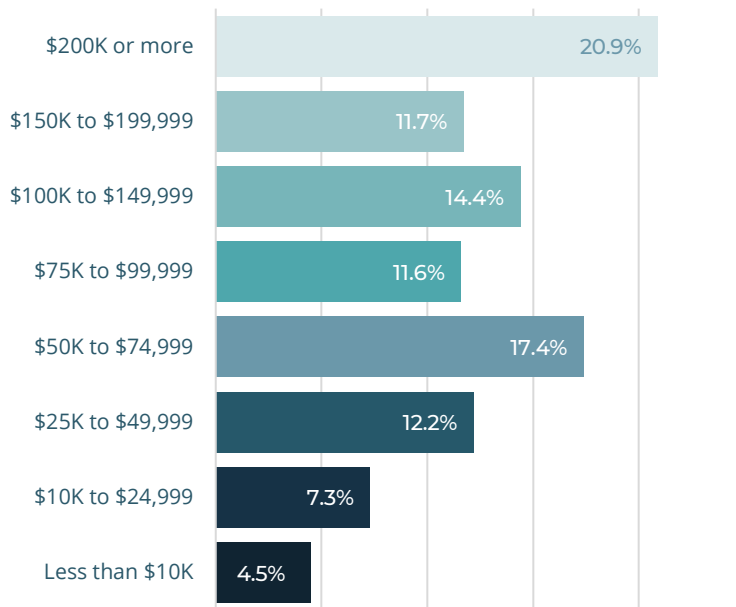


Figure 5: Households per income bracket in Falmouth

Income significantly affects an individual or family’s experience within the digital world, with a greater household income offering the ability to afford high-quality

internet plans, own effective devices, and experience opportunities to advance digital skills. Low-income households may have greater difficulty affording and accessing the internet and technology needed to achieve basic stability or to thrive.

Falmouth’s \$92,862 median household income is slightly below the County’s \$94,452. It includes a lower percentage of households reporting wage and salary earnings (65.1%), which is below the state (79.1%) and the county (69.7%). The lower percentage is in line with a community that has a larger aging population. Correspondingly, the number of households in Falmouth reporting retirement income (36.2%) is also in line relative to the county, and about 50% higher than the state (22.9%).

Household income is uneven geographically within Falmouth, ranging from \$120,000 a year in West/North Falmouth to \$57,000 a year in the downtown/Teaticket area. Some of this disparity can be seen in the covered population data, which will be reviewed together in the “Multiple Barriers” section.

**People With Disabilities**

In June of 2022, the U.S. Department of Labor released a [report](#)<sup>4</sup> describing the intersection between having a disability and internet subscription affordability and access,

<sup>4</sup> Disability and the Digital Divide: Internet Subscriptions, Internet Use and Employment Outcomes, Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, June 2022.

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*“ My Internet is too expensive. ”*

**Resident at a Falmouth Senior Center**

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internet use, and employment outcomes, demonstrating inequities experienced by people with disabilities.

As state in the report, “Working-age adults with disabilities (ages 25 to 64) also reported that cost or affordability was their household’s primary barrier to home internet use at higher rates than working-age adults without disabilities (22.3 percent vs. 18.9 percent).”

A higher percentage of Falmouth residents have a disability (16.5%) than the county (13.8%), state (12.1%), and nation (13.0%). Close to 70% of Falmouth’s population with a disability is aged 60 or older.

Falmouth’s aging population with a disability (25.7%) is higher than county (23.3%), but lower than the state (26.3%), and nation (29.5%) percentages. As noted in the “Aging Individual Section,” the high proportion of older residents pushes the town wide disability numbers higher

than the state and county, but when reviewed by age groups, it is lower for each on a percentage basis.

**Veterans**

As described in “Veterans and Digital Equity: Planning for Success<sup>5</sup>,” published by the Benton Institute For Broadband & Society, “Veterans are more likely than non-Veterans to cite lack of a computer (or an inadequate computer) as the primary barrier to subscribing to an internet service.” The report also notes that affordability and that a majority of veterans are over the age of 65 as other key factors that may leave them digitally behind.

Falmouth’s 8.3% veteran population is higher than the county, state, and nation. Additionally, 24% of Falmouth veterans report having a disability and 83.5% are 65 years old or above. These combined characteristics are likely to lead to heightened digital equity challenges for Falmouth’s veterans.

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<sup>5</sup> [Veterans and Digital Equity: Planning for Success](https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/Veterans-Digital-Equity.pdf), November 2024, <https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/Veterans-Digital-Equity.pdf>

Housing

# Housing

Of the 22,156 housing units in Falmouth, 66% are occupied year-round. A high majority of year-round units are owner occupied (82.7%), with the remaining 17.3% used as year-round rentals, which is lower than the county (19.4%). More than half of these rental households are considered cost burdened, spending more than 30% of their monthly income on housing.

In Falmouth, 28.8% of all housing units are used seasonally. While this is on the lower side for Cape communities, it is high compared to the state and nation. The percentage of

seasonal housing stock in Barnstable County is among the highest in the United States, ranking fifth among 1,000 counties with populations of at least 50,000. In counties with more than 200,000 year-round residents, Barnstable County ranks first in the percentage of seasonal homes.

Understanding Falmouth’s housing landscape supports the identification of barriers to achieving digital equity for residents. For example, internet service providers may develop and maintain broadband infrastructure to align with year-round housing needs, which may not account for seasonal population growth. This may contribute to poor connectivity, particularly in highly seasonal neighborhoods, during peak summer months.

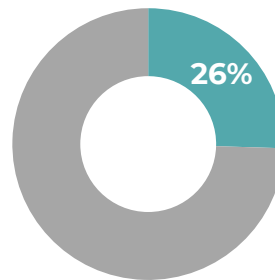
### HOUSING STOCK

Average wages in the town’s largest industries by employment fall well below what is needed to affordably purchase a home at median sales prices (affordably purchase means a household spends 30% or less on housing costs).

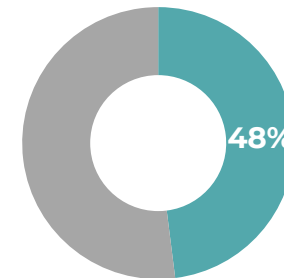
Falmouth’s median household income is \$92,862.

### Housing Cost Burdened

A household is considered cost burdened when housing costs exceed more than 30% of monthly income. *(ACS 2023 5-year Estimates)*



**OWNERS** spending at least 30% monthly



**RENTERS** spending at least 30% monthly

Additionally, housing challenges can serve as an indicator for other digital equity barriers, particularly when considering how the cost burden and the affordability gap may impact a resident's financial stability.

## Connectivity

Massachusetts has among the highest percentages of broadband served locations in the country, meaning its overall number of unserved and underserved locations is relatively low compared to other states, with some exceptions. Falmouth's connectivity profile based on [Federal Communication Commission](#)<sup>6</sup> (FCC) and [Massachusetts Broadband Institute](#)<sup>7</sup> (MBI) broadband maps aligns with the statewide landscape, with wide availability of service.

The past year has seen multiple developments that have already and will continue to change the connectivity landscape in Falmouth and the region.

Through the advocacy of residents and the formation of a Municipal Light Board under Massachusetts general laws, Falmouth has been a leader in advancing competition among Internet providers. There is a correlation between broadband related activity in town and increased attention

from the incumbent provider, Comcast, and new services offered by secondary providers, including Verizon.

Comcast began reporting near 100% coverage in Falmouth for its 2000/200 Mbps service as of December 2023. As of February 1, 2025, this service was offered as low as \$95 per month (introductory 12-months, excluding taxes and equipment). Falmouth is among the first towns on Cape Cod to receive this higher-speed service, and the first with near-universal availability.

Falmouth was also among towns included in MBI's GAP Network Grant awards in July 2024. Verizon was awarded a grant to connect all remaining unserved and underserved Falmouth, Mashpee and Sandwich locations. The company is in line for a \$6.6 million grant and will provide a match of \$7.1 million for a total investment of \$13.7 million across these three towns to connect relatively few homes in the unserved and underserved categories via a high-speed fiber network. The geographic spread of these locations suggests the reach of the new fiber network will provide a robust foundation from which to expand service. This is part of more than \$29 million in Verizon fiber-backed broadband projects authorized in two rounds of GAP funding in eight Barnstable County towns.

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<sup>6</sup> Link to Federal Communications National Broadband Map: <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/area-zsummary/fixed?version=jun2023&geoid=250018>

<sup>7</sup> Link to Massachusetts Broadband Institute Broadband Map: <https://mapping.massbroadband.org/map/>

### Connectivity

At this writing, the Falmouth Municipal Light Board remained in discussion with an independent provider on the possibility of bringing additional competition to the market.

There is no one source to measure or verify available internet speeds, but taken together, current data on the experience of Falmouth internet users indicate pockets of poor performance with broad variability.

In a survey of Falmouth residents conducted by MBI, 45% of respondents indicated that their home internet was “Not good enough to meet my needs.”

Data reviewed from multiple sources and in-person expressions of dissatisfaction during outreach sessions indicate a mismatch between stated availability of broadband and how many Falmouth users experience the Internet.

Table 3: Providers Serving Falmouth by Availability at broadband serviceable locations (BSLs), As of June 30, 2024.

| Provider | Technology     | Advertised Download (Mbps) | Advertised Upload (Mbps) | BSLs   | with Service | % with Service |
|----------|----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------|--------------|----------------|
| Xfinity  | Cable          | 2,000                      | 200                      | 20,894 | 20,821       | 99.7%          |
|          |                | 1,200                      | 35                       |        | 41           | 0.2%           |
| T-Mobile | Fixed Wireless | Min. 100                   | Min. 20                  |        | 9,962        | 47.7%          |
|          |                | Less than 100              | Less than 20             |        | 12,279       | 58.8%          |
| Verizon  | Fixed Wireless | Min. 100                   | Min. 20                  |        | 2,646        | 12.7%          |
|          |                | Less than 100              | Less than 20             |        | 3,267        | 1.8%           |
| AT&T     | Fixed Wireless | Min. 100                   | Min. 20                  |        | 372          | 0.0%           |
|          |                | Less than 100              | Less than 20             |        | 2,087        | 10.0%          |

SOURCE: FCC National Broadband Map Download. <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/data-download>



## Connectivity

MBI provided a year's worth of download speed data from Ookla, a company that provides internet speed data and analysis. This data set covers users' speed tests taken from December 2021 to November 2022, with about 11,800 tests

by more than 2,300 users within the Town of Falmouth (*summary table in Appendix*).

In March 2024, the federal Communications commission updated the definition of "broadband" speeds to those at or over 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. An

Table 4: Types of Household Internet Subscriptions

| Service Type  | Falmouth |         | County |         | State     |         |
|---|----------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|
|   | Total    | Percent | Total  | Percent | Total     | Percent |
| <b>With an Internet subscription</b>                                  | 13,485   | 92.4%   | 96,731 | 93.9%   | 2,539,575 | 91.9%   |
| <b>Without an Internet subscription</b>                               | 1,111    | 7.6%    | 6,250  | 6.1%    | 222,495   | 8.1%    |
| <b>Dial-up with no other type of Internet subscription</b>            | 17       | 0.1%    | 189    | 0.2%    | 3,138     | 0.1%    |
| <b>Broadband of any type</b>  | 13,468   | 92.3%   | 96,542 | 93.7%   | 2,536,437 | 91.8%   |
| <b>Cellular data plan</b>   | 12,376   | 84.8%   | 88,112 | 85.6%   | 2,357,795 | 85.4%   |
| <b>Cellular data plan with no other type of Internet subscription</b> | 1,392    | 9.5%    | 8,437  | 8.2%    | 255,906   | 9.3%    |
| <b>Broadband such as cable, fiber optic or DSL</b>                    | 11,787   | 80.8%   | 86,342 | 83.8%   | 2,241,438 | 81.2%   |
| <b>Satellite Internet service</b>                                     | 450      | 3.1%    | 3,359  | 3.3%    | 83,642    | 3.0%    |

## Connectivity

analysis of these tests shows about 28.3% of all Falmouth tests would qualify as underserved at this updated definition, which is slightly higher than all tests for Barnstable County (27.7%). It should be noted that the timing of these tests predate system updates performed by Comcast since that time. They do, however, reflect speeds experienced by Barnstable residents during the pandemic and suggest a reason for the level of dissatisfaction that led to local action.

In Falmouth and Cape-wide there is a correlation between areas with higher percentages of seasonal housing and lower internet connection speeds. This may indicate that related infrastructure does not account for higher peak season usage, which may degrade overall performance.

While poor connectivity and a lack of competition can be barriers to digital inclusion, they can also exacerbate other factors, particularly for residents with limited digital skills and inadequate access to needs-appropriate technology and devices. This will be addressed in the section on multiple barriers.

### ***Devices and Connections***

The majority of Falmouth households have one or more computing devices (95.6%) and some form of internet connections (92.4%).

Desktop and laptop computers are found in 89.2% of homes, with 3.0% relying on them as their only computing device. Smartphone (89.2%) and tablet (65.2%) adoption is consistent with the county, state and federal percentages.

The number of households with no computers (4.1 %) is consistent with but higher than county (3.4%), and lower than the state (4.9%) and nation (5.2%). It also represents a significant decrease (i.e. more homes with computers) since the start of the pandemic (7.4% in 2019).

Approximately 81.5% of Falmouth households have the possibility of redundant internet access through cellular data plans in addition to their primary internet subscription.

Post-pandemic data demonstrates that the Falmouth' households are trending positively for increased connectivity. A comparison between 2019 and 2023 American Community Survey data shows that more residents have adopted in-home devices and internet subscriptions. This is seen most dramatically in the number of households that rely solely on cellular data plans.

In 2019 data, 14.2% of households had no internet subscription. This decreased to 7.6%, roughly 850

## Connectivity

households by 2023. It seems likely that a majority of these new connections came via cellular data plans. In 2019, 880 households connected solely via cellular plans. In 2023 that rose to nearly 1,400,, with greater concentrations in areas with lower median incomes.

|  | N. Falmouth/<br>W. Falmouth<br>Tract 143 | Falmouth<br>Tract 144.02 | E. Falmouth<br>Tract 145 | E. Falmouth/<br>Seacoast<br>Shores<br>Tract 146 | Davisville<br>Tract 147 | Teaticket/<br>Downtown<br>Tract 148 | Woods Hole<br>Tract 149 |
|--|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Households with More Than One Device</b>      |  |                          |                          |   |                         |                                     |                         |
| <b>Desktop Or Laptop</b>                         | 89.9%                                    | 87.0%                    | 85.3%                    | 87.9%   | 85.0%                   | 69.6%                               | 90.0%                   |
| <b>Smartphone</b>                                | 94.7%                                    | 94.1%                    | 82.8%                    | 93.0%   | 88.9%                   | 82.6%                               | 87.8%                   |
| <b>Tablet/Portable<br/>Wireless Computer</b>     | 64.3%                                    | 69.6%                    | 70.5%                    | 69.7%   | 61.3%                   | 65.1%                               | 69.1%                   |
| <b>Other Computer</b>                            | 1.6%                                     | 4.4%                     | 1.1%                     | 4.7%  | 2.0%                    | 2.8%                                | 2.8%                    |
| <b>Multiple Internet<br/>Options (estimated)</b> | 89.9%                                    | 87.0%                    | 85.3%                    | 87.9%   | 85.0%                   | 69.6%                               | 90.0%                   |
| <b>One Device Only</b>                           |  |                          |                          |   |                         |                                     |                         |
| <b>Desktop Or Laptop</b>                         | 3.5%                                     | 2.0%                     | 4.5%                     | 0.3%  | 2.4%                    | 3.5%                                | 5.3%                    |
| <b>Smartphone</b>                                | 5.6%                                     | 4.7%                     | 4.7%                     | 3.9%  | 5.3%                    | 13.4%                               | 3.5%                    |
| <b>Tablet/Portable<br/>Wireless Computer</b>     | 1.0%                                     | 1.8%                     | 1.1%                     | 1.3%  | 0.0%                    | 4.8%                                | 0.4%                    |
| <b>Other Computer</b>                            | 0.0%                                     | 0.0%                     | 0.0%                     | 0.0%  | 0.0%                    | 0.0%                                | 0.0%                    |
| <b>No Computer</b>                               | 0.8%                                     | 0.4%                     | 7.2%                     | 4.3%  | 6.9%                    | 6.7%                                | 3.5%                    |

Table 5: Household availability and use of computer devices (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates)

## Connectivity

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*Based on available data, it is likely that at least 15% of Falmouth's population face multiple barriers with respect to connectivity.*

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**Multiple Barriers**







Covered populations were used as the lens to examine the likelihood of individuals facing multiple barriers. The town as a whole, and then each of its seven Census Tracts were compared with county, state and national percentages for the six most relevant covered populations in Falmouth – aging population, individuals with a disability, language barrier, race/ethnicity, low income, and veterans.

As is often the case, individuals may be represented across multiple populations. Based on available data, it is likely that at least 15% of Falmouth's population face multiple barriers with respect to connectivity. The highest crossover is in the aging population and individuals with disabilities, but with strong correlations to both income and race/ethnicity in some areas.

As noted earlier, covered populations serve as markers where barriers may be found, but they are not determinative in and of themselves. As is often the case, individuals may fall into multiple covered populations, increasing the likelihood that challenges are faced by these populations.

In the graphics that follow, icons represent each of the covered population. Those shown in red indicate an exceedance when compared to county percentages. Gray and red indicator arrows are also used for state and national percentages, with red again indicating an exceedance to comparison geographies of the tract in question. The more red shown, the greater the number of potential barriers within that geography.

Connectivity

| Town of Falmouth   |                 |   |   |   |
|--|-----------------|---|---|---|
|  Aging Population 60+                   | <b>44.4%</b>    | ▲ | ▲ | ▲ |
|  With a Disability                      | <b>16.5%</b>    | ▲ | ▲ | ▲ |
|  Language Barrier                       | <b>3.5%</b>     | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ |
|  Veterans                               | <b>8.3%</b>     | ▲ | ▲ | ▲ |
|  150% Below Poverty Level               | <b>13.0%</b>    | ▲ | ▼ | ▼ |
|  Diversity Other than White, non-Latino | <b>14.5%</b>    | ▲ | ▼ | ▼ |
| Population   | <b>32,841</b>   |   |   |   |
| Median Income  | <b>\$92,862</b> |   |   |   |

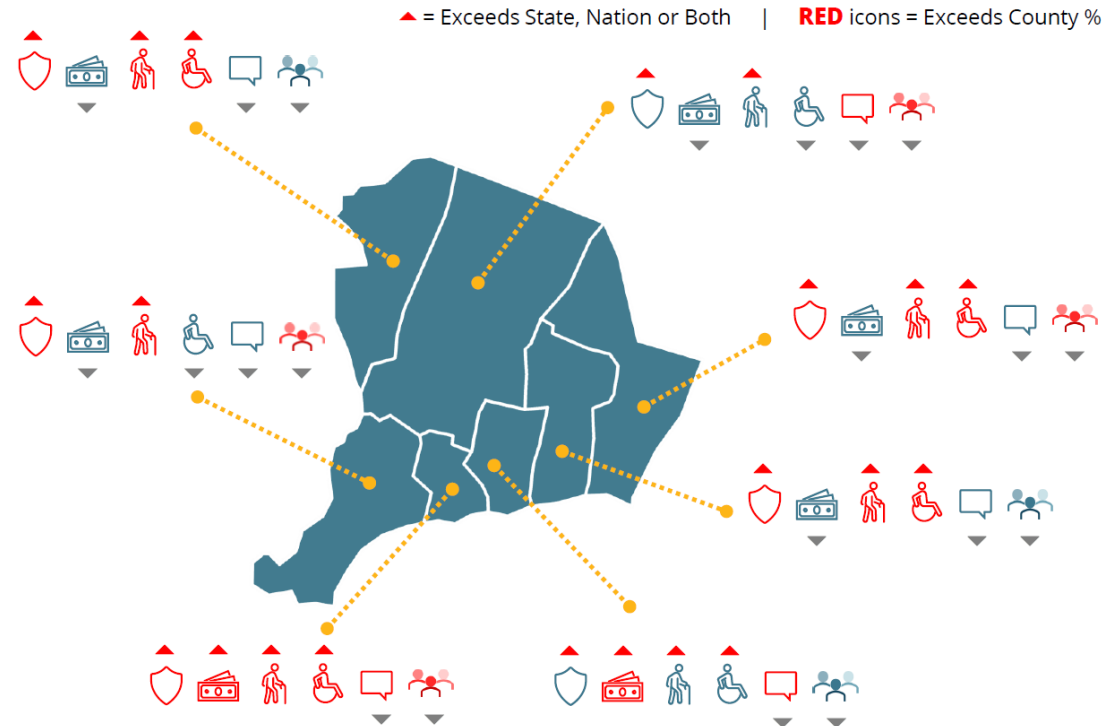


Figure 6: Covered populations in comparison to Barnstable County, Massachusetts and US percentages. (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates)

The populations with the highest level of convergence are aging, veterans and those with disabilities. At the townwide level, these three exceed the county, state and nation. In the smaller geographies, there are varying combinations, but these three remain prevalent, with five of seven Census Tracts exceeding all three.

When the absence of a home Internet subscription is layered in, there is likewise a relationship for lower subscriptions and areas with multiple exceedances to county, state and national percentages in these covered populations.

### Connectivity

This becomes important for developing strategies to reach individuals and households that may face digital equity challenges, and what strategy or combination of strategies are best suited to help meet and overcome them.

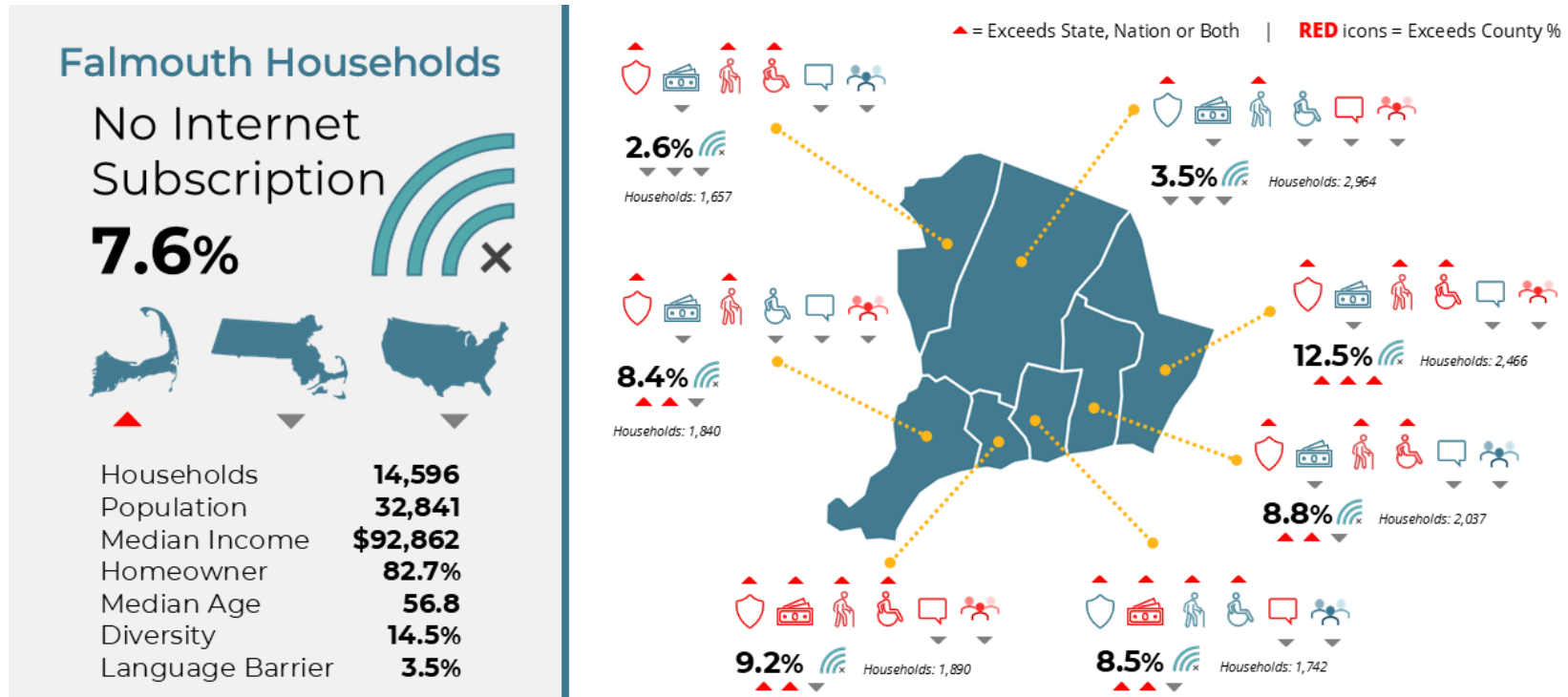


Figure 7: Covered populations and Internet subscriptions in comparison to Barnstable County, Massachusetts and US percentages. (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates)

## Connectivity

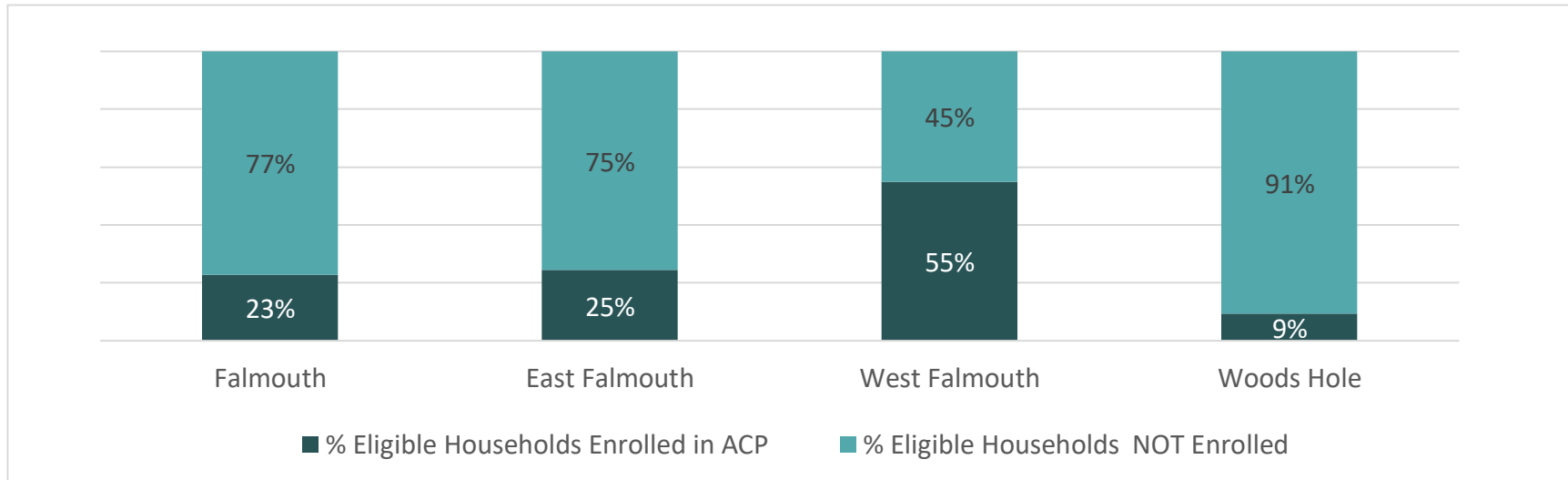


Figure 8: Affordable Connectivity Program Participation in Falmouth.

### ACP and Affordability

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) was an FCC benefit program that aimed to make more affordable the broadband households need for work, school, and more.

While ACP was effectively discontinued in April 2024, the number of participants, and the difficulty reaching those who could qualify, serve as useful indicators for the level of need among Falmouth households.

Affordability was mentioned frequently during in-person outreach and was a concern for 46% of Falmouth respondents to the MBI Digital Equity survey. Survey respondents also indicated that the monthly average

Internet-only bill exceeded \$100. When included in a bundle, the average increased to \$143 a month.

ACP provided:

- Service discount up to \$30/month
- Service discount up to \$75/month on qualifying Tribal lands
- Device discount up to \$100 for a qualifying device

Falmouth had the benefit of local advocates offering assistance to help individuals qualify and enroll in the program. Awareness of the program was also higher in Falmouth than the county and state, with 62% of survey respondents indicating they'd heard of the program. For the county, This number was 49% and 50% for the state.

## Information Gaps

Even so, there was a wide gap in eligible households and those enrolled prior to the program expiring in spring 2024. Roughly 25% of the estimated 3,600 eligible households in Falmouth successfully enrolled. That means that 75%, or approximately 2,700 households that could have benefited during the program's run either chose not to participate, or more likely were unaware of its existence.

The end of ACP creates a financial burden for the families in Falmouth who relied on the subsidy to support their internet connections. ACP eligibility and uptake data remains useful because it can inform an understanding of populations struggling to afford internet access.

## Information Gaps

While many sources were reviewed in the compilation of the above data, information gaps still exist and data will continue to change. Ongoing data collection is a recommended action for the Town of Falmouth in the continued pursuit of advancing digital equity for the community. In particular, Commission staff recommend continued data collection in the following areas:

- The Massachusetts Broadband Institute's Statewide Digital Equity Survey was well taken by residents in Falmouth. However, young families were underrepresented in survey respondents. To better understand the digital equity landscape specific to young families in Falmouth, further

distribution of the survey or a similar survey is recommended.

- This project explored covered populations identified by the Digital Equity Act. However, the federal Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program identified "underrepresented communities" who may also face heightened barriers to achieving digital equity. Continued exploration of data related to the experiences of these populations would benefit future implementation strategies.



# Covered Populations | 2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates


## Town of Falmouth

|  |       |
|--|-------|
|  Aging Population 60+                     | 44.0% |
|  With a Disability                        | 16.0% |
|  Language Barrier                         | 2.7%  |
|  Veterans                                 | 6.8%  |
|  150% Below Poverty Level               | 12.6% |
|  Diversity Other than White, non-Latino | 12.6% |

Population 32,694  
Median Income \$89,809

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What is Digital Inclusion?

 Internet Connection  
Affordable, fast, reliable, accessible.



Process Overview

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Process Overview

Community engagement was central to the development of the Town of Falmouth Digital Equity Plan. Feedback, experiences, and perspectives shared by community members and stakeholders directly inform the Key Findings and Implementation sections that follow.

Municipal and community leaders were gathered at the onset of this project to provide guidance in terms of community engagement and areas to further explore with

the development of this digital equity plan. Commission staff then implemented a series of diverse activities to gather feedback from the Falmouth community. A key goal of this planning process was to engage individuals and organizations representing covered populations—communities who are particularly impacted by the digital divide.

Key community engagement activities included:

- Project kickoff meeting
- Survey distribution
- Stakeholder interviews
- Community pop-up events
- Community workshop
- Targeted feedback collection from key populations
- Outreach to community organizations



105

SURVEY RESPONSES



4

COMMUNITY EVENTS



240+

RESIDENTS ENGAGED

## Project Kickoff

On September 11, 2024, Commission staff facilitated a project kickoff meeting with leaders identified through coordination with Town Administration and Falmouth Broadband MLP. The purpose of the kickoff meeting was to build a shared understanding about the Municipal Digital Equity Plan project, present and discuss data related to existing conditions in the Town of Falmouth, identify local digital equity assets, and elicit feedback related to effective community engagement strategies. This meeting was foundational to subsequent digital equity planning activities.

Meeting attendees included representatives of the following entities:

- Town Administration
- Falmouth Broadband MLP
- FalmouthNet
- Better Broadband 4 Falmouth
- Falmouth Public Library
- Falmouth Public Schools
- Falmouth Service Center
- Falmouth Community Television

## Survey Distribution

Commission staff utilized the Massachusetts Broadband Institute Statewide Digital Equity Survey to gain feedback from residents about their experiences with the internet and technology. The survey link was shared with members of the municipal project kickoff team and was hosted on the project webpage.

Survey responses have been incorporated into State of Digital Equity chapter and have also informed the Recommendations chapter. The complete set of responses are available in the Appendix.

## Stakeholder Interviews

## Stakeholder Interviews

At the project kickoff, attendees identified individuals and organizations that would be critical to engage throughout the digital equity planning process. Participants vocalized the need to prioritize vulnerable communities that are most likely to experience the digital divide, such as the covered populations explored in the previous State of Digital Equity chapter.

With this in mind, Commission staff hosted one-on-one meetings with entities who are committed to supporting these populations. Through these stakeholder interviews, Commission staff shared information about the digital equity planning process and gathered stakeholder perspective. This included: current state of practice, barriers and opportunities to achieve digital equity in Falmouth, vision for digital equity and recommended solutions, and feedback on effective community participation in the planning process. Participating entities included:

- Falmouth Public Library
- Falmouth Human Services
- Falmouth Senior Center
- Falmouth Community TV
- Cape Verdean Cultural Center
- Neighborhood Falmouth
- Falmouth Housing Trust

- Falmouth Housing Corporation
- Falmouth Department of Recreation
- Falmouth ESL classes

Stakeholder feedback has directly informed the Key Findings and Recommendations chapters.

## Community Pop-Ups

Commission staff endeavored to reach community members “where they are at” by offering information and feedback tables at community events and key locations. The purpose of community pop-ups was to inform the community about the digital equity planning process, share an invitation to the community workshop, and gain feedback from residents about barriers and opportunities they experience within the digital world.

Community pop-ups included:

- Falmouth Community Veterans Center: December 4, 2024
- Falmouth Service Center: December 6, 2024
- Falmouth Senior Center: January 8, 2025

Each pop-up event purposefully offered an opportunity to interact with a different segment of the community in order to gain diverse perspectives. While common themes were present in feedback across all three activities, each engagement yielded a unique takeaway in terms of recommendations to better serve the given population.

A summary of feedback received during the community pop-ups is available in the Appendix as requested by the core project team. Feedback from community members through these activities has directly informed the Key Findings chapter.



Figure 9: Community Pop-Up event at the Falmouth Service Center, December 6, 2024

## Community Workshop



Figure 10: Dec. 11, 2024 Digital Equity Community Workshop

## Community Workshop

A public community workshop was held at the Falmouth Public Library on December 11, 2024 at 5:30pm for all community members. As the hallmark activity within the digital equity planning process, the workshop provided a platform for participants to share essential feedback that directly informed the digital equity plan.

Cape Cod Commission staff welcomed participants by providing an overview of the project and background about broadband and digital equity work within a national, statewide, and local context. Commission staff presented data related to Falmouth's digital equity landscape, further explored in the State of Digital Equity chapter of this plan.

The majority of the workshop included facilitated conversation on digital equity barriers and potential solutions. Many workshop attendees represented critical community organizations already playing a role in providing digital equity solutions. This provided a platform for robust and well-informed discussion on how Falmouth can build on already-existing strengths to make meaningful progress for residents who are currently experiencing impacts of the digital divide.

Discussion from the community workshop has directly informed this plan's Recommendations chapter.

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*“ The Library is my go-to! ”*

Resident at a Falmouth Senior Center, referring to the internet and computers

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## Additional Outreach

**Targeted feedback collection from key populations:** To gain insight from covered populations, feedback was requested from additional groups, including families and individuals connected to Better Broadband 4 Falmouth’s ACP support initiative and local English language learners. The goal was to gain greater insight from covered populations. This feedback has been incorporated in the Key Findings chapter.

**Outreach to community organizations:** Falmouth is fortunate to have many well-regarded organizations and groups who support the community. Informing these groups about the digital equity plan and workshop, and requesting their support in spreading the word with their individual community, was a goal of the project team. While not all groups actively engaged with the project, building these connections should benefit future implementation efforts. Cape Cod Commission staff spread awareness about the digital equity plan to the following organizations (beyond those mentioned previously): Falmouth EDIC, Falmouth Housing Authority, Falmouth Housing

Corporation, Falmouth Chamber of Commerce, Community Health Center, the Falmouth Fund, Wellstrong, Belonging to Each Other, Habitat for Humanity, Falmouth Police Department, and many congregations and neighborhood associations across the Town of Falmouth.

**Public comment form:** A comment form was available on the Commission’s project webpage during the project planning period. Public feedback was incorporated into plan development.

**Outreach Toolkit:** A publicity toolkit, including newsletter copy, graphics, social media language, and posters, was available on the online project page and was shared with key stakeholders. Information promoting the community workshop was sent to key locations across town. Examples of outreach materials are available in the Appendix.

**Media:** A press release was issued by the Cape Cod Commission, and the initiative was covered in the Falmouth Enterprise. A segment detailing the project and encouraging attendance at the community workshop appeared on Falmouth Community TV. The goal of media publicity was to increase community awareness about the planning process and opportunities for participation.



The background is a vibrant blue gradient. It features a network of thin white lines connecting small white dots, creating a web-like structure. Overlaid on this are several thick, horizontal, glowing blue bars of varying lengths and opacities, some appearing as bright streaks and others as softer, more diffuse bands. The overall effect is one of digital connectivity and data flow.

# FINDINGS

# FINDINGS

Throughout the digital equity planning process, residents, community members, and local leaders shared their unique perspectives related to digital equity. Individuals reported barriers and challenges to achieving digital equity, as well as assets and strengths that will support the advancement of digital equity into the future. The following section synthesizes feedback shared with Cape Cod Commission staff throughout all community engagement activities outlined in the previous chapter.

## Barriers and Challenges

The barriers and challenges outlined below are categorized within four areas that are essential to achieving digital equity: connectivity, devices, skills, and community. Many challenges have a ripple effect and, in reality, impact multiple areas of digital equity. For example, connectivity challenges in the home will also impact an individual's ability to build the skills needed to achieve personal or professional goals.

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<sup>8</sup> Massachusetts Internet for All Plan: <https://broadband.masstech.org/internetforall>

## Connectivity

### *Widespread affordability challenges across the Falmouth community*

Affordability was the most frequently cited concern of residents when asked about their experiences with internet and devices. Barnstable County experiences the highest internet costs of any county in Massachusetts<sup>8</sup> and, in Falmouth, survey respondents to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute's statewide digital equity survey reported that on average they pay just over \$100 per month for internet service. Staff of local community organizations, such as the Senior Center, shared that internet affordability challenges are experienced by the residents that they serve. Affordability challenges seem to be experienced acutely by covered populations, as reflected in community engagement activities hosted at the Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, and the Falmouth Community Veteran's Center.

There is an intersection between internet affordability challenges, the housing crisis, and the high cost of living on Cape Cod. As noted in the Cape Cod Commission's 2024 Housing Strategy<sup>9</sup>, "Affordability challenges will become more difficult in the coming years with an estimated shortfall of nearly 30,000 homes that are affordable to households earning up to the median household income in

<sup>9</sup> Cape Cod Commission [Regional Housing Strategy](#), p. 26

## Connectivity

2030, an increase from 2020 according to the regional housing needs assessment.”

Falmouth community members expressed worry about balancing high internet costs against other essential needs. Staff at community organizations worry about the ability of their clients to afford all of their essential needs, such as rent, groceries, utility bills (including internet), and healthcare. Staff at community organizations supporting low-income individuals and families reported residents primarily using hotspots to access the internet or paying what they perceived as far too much for a subscription in relation to their other financial needs.

Residents at community pop-ups reflected this sentiment, with one resident sharing that they may need to “forgo other things” as a result of high internet costs. Some residents expressed concern that their internet bills would increase, and they would be left unable to pay. Staff at local community organizations expressed concern that those facing severe financial challenges (such as those who are insecure or unhoused) are less likely to have a reliable internet connection and subsequently may not keep up with the skills needed to gain stability or advance their livelihood.

Residents who were concerned about the cost of their internet service plan were often unaware of more affordable options, such as Comcast Internet Essentials or Comcast NOW. Some residents and practitioners who were aware of affordability options (including the now-defunct

Affordable Connectivity Program [ACP]) commented that these programs are difficult to access.

Internet affordability challenges are also experienced by local businesses and community organizations, such as the Cape Verdean Museum and Cultural Center, who shared that they experience an internet subscription that is unaffordable and unreliable. When local businesses and community organizations struggle with their internet experiences, this can affect their ability to sustain operations, maintain patrons, and even attract new patrons or grow their business.

Affordability challenges may be reflected in a reliance on public Wi-Fi options. Some residents reported primary reliance on public spaces, such as the Falmouth Public Library, for internet access. While this may not account for the majority of residents, public Wi-Fi service is critical for those who do rely on it.

### ***Concerns over lack of internet service provider options***

Community members frequently reported concern about a lack of local competition, which they believe impacts affordability, reliability, and overall service. Some residents reported unreliable internet service, slow internet speeds, and issues with internet service when multiple devices are used in the household simultaneously. Community members shared that they would like to see more local options for internet service.

These findings are similar to those codified in a 2020 report for FalmouthNet, “Feasibility Report for a Community Network<sup>10</sup>” from CCG Consulting. That study also found significant support for an alternative to the existing provider.

“CCG found that broadband customers in Falmouth experience inconsistent speeds and frequent outages and that as many as 61% of residents and many businesses would consider moving to a new broadband network.” (Feasibility Report, executive summary).

### ***Challenges navigating internet service plans and accessing needs-appropriate bundles***

Community members reported challenges understanding what sort of internet service plan they actually require to meet their daily needs. Residents reported that internet service plans are overcomplicated and are not flexible or adaptive to individual needs. Some residents expressed concern that they are overpaying on their internet because they do not understand what speed or services they actually require within their overall bundle or because they are unsure how to implement cost-effective solutions, such as dropping cable service and transitioning to streaming.

Generally, community members did not feel that customer service representatives from internet service providers work in their best interest when selecting a bundle. Community members said that

knowledge and confidence is required to effectively advocate for oneself with customer service representatives. Community members reported a need for unbiased support for identifying an appropriate internet service package.

### ***Inconsistent internet and cellular service in Falmouth***

Community members reported inconsistent internet service and cellular coverage in their homes and across key locations in town. While some residents seemed to experience significant issues, others reported no problems at all.

With regard to internet service, residents reporting service issues shared that speed strength can be unreliable, with some residents suggesting that speed seems slowest when operating multiple devices. Community organizations and businesses echoed concerns about internet reliability.

In terms of cellular coverage, inadequate service includes “dark zones” where coverage does not seem to be present, posing safety hazards and negatively impacting economic, recreational, and social activities. West Falmouth was specifically mentioned by multiple residents as an area with inadequate cellular coverage. Townwide, areas with patchy coverage seem to include key areas of social and economic concern, such as community activity centers, industrial activity centers, healthcare settings, and military and transportation areas.

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<sup>10</sup> High Speed Fiber Optic Network Study — Falmouth EDIC, (<https://www.falmouthedic.org/fiber-optic-network-study>)

## Devices

## Devices

### ***Affordability barriers impact technology ownership***

Community members frequently reported that they use smartphones as their primary device to access the internet. This is often a choice of economics – smartphones seem to be the most necessary device to own and are thereby prioritized when individuals and families are making decisions about technology purchases. This may be at the expense of owning another device, such as a laptop or tablet. In some cases, smartphones may function as the primary device because people may be more familiar with their use than a computer.

Residents and staff of community organizations comment that smartphones are not adequate enough to meet all of their, or their clients, needs. For example, it can be a challenge to complete complex forms on a smartphone, which is often necessary when engaging with governmental agencies (for example, the Registry of Motor Vehicles).

Some covered populations in Falmouth have, or have previously had, access to low-cost or no-cost devices for ownership. For example, the Falmouth Service Center previously distributed devices made available through a Comcast grant. Veterans are able to access affordable devices through assistance programs. While certainly beneficial, individuals did report that these programs can

impact digital autonomy, as they may not be able to select their preferred operating system or technology that best suits their everyday needs. They may also not have adequate training to make the most of the device or to troubleshoot issues as they arise.

### ***Navigating technology transitions and device usability challenges***

Technology transitions were another important issue cited by Falmouth residents that may be impacted by a lack of device affordability.

For example, young students and families may rely on school-issued devices as a primary household device. When students graduate, themselves and their families may be impacted by a lack of device access. If a student is looking to pursue higher education, they may not be able to afford the device needed to fully participate. If a family is relying on the student's school-issued device, they may be left without a needs-appropriate option in the household.

Another example of a difficult technology transition is when populations who lack digital skills are required to upgrade to a new device. This was most often cited by aging individuals, particularly in cases where they had become accustomed to one device (such as a smartphone) and were forced to purchase a new one, such as when a device can no longer accept important safety updates or loses functionality. It can be very challenging to learn and adapt to a new device. While some residents may rely on family

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*“ I am scared of computers. ”*

**Falmouth resident at a community pop-up**

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members or local programs and staff (such as those at the library or Senior Center), these resources are not always readily accessible to address technology questions.

Technology transitions are also necessary when immigrating to the United States. One community member shared feedback about how they were taken advantage of by a fraudulent service when they sought help in using their smartphone. Language barriers seem to exacerbate existing device transition and usability challenges.

Residents also reported the need for increased local support with device setup, troubleshooting, and transitioning data between devices.

## Digital Skills

Internet safety concerns and fear of using the internet

Internet safety was one of the most frequently cited concerns of residents and staff of community and municipal organizations. Internet safety concerns included areas such as:

- Recognizing and avoiding scams
- Cybersecurity
- Maintaining passwords
- Shopping safely
- Keeping personal and financial information secure
- Social media safety, overuse, and mental health impacts
- Advancements with hacking and other security threats stemming from new technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Community members frequently cited concerns around internet safety for vulnerable populations, including aging individuals, English language learners, and youth. As technology continues to evolve, it is difficult to predict what threats may lay ahead and the potential impact of these threats on those who are most vulnerable.

Internet safety concerns may impact an individual's likelihood of using the internet. Some community members cited that they avoid the internet and technology due to

## Digital Skills

safety concerns and fear of the unknown. This may impact an individual's ability to access essential services or fully engage with society.

***Digital skills challenges experienced by covered populations***

Community members across Falmouth reported digital skills gaps. This includes navigating websites, using applications, effectively communicating with others (via text message, email, or other platforms), and troubleshooting computer issues when they arise. Skills gaps were experienced most frequently by covered populations. Challenges that exacerbate skills issues include: English language barriers, transportation and other mobility challenges, a lack of prior experience with technology or a gap in using technology, and a limited understanding of the language surrounding the internet.

Community members also reported a perceived lack of suitable local options for them to increase their digital skills in meaningful ways. Some residents were aware of services currently available (particularly through the Senior Center and the library), though others seemed unaware of any local programming. Many residents reported that they would benefit most from personalized one-to-one support offered in a venue where they already feel comfortable and frequent. For example, residents facing economic hardship reported that it can be difficult to make time for this type of programming as they need to balance busy schedules, so

services would be most impactful if offered by local organizations they are already connected with.

Bridging digital skills challenges was reported to be key to support a healthy local economy. For example, a veteran's services provider suggested that digital skills are necessary for nearly every industry that local veterans are looking to enter when returning to work. Similarly, several immigrants reported the impacts of language and digital skills barriers in their work life.

***Skills challenges impact ability to access essential services***

Community members shared that digital skills challenges impact their ability to access essential services. These difficulties may arise from challenging applications and websites, a lack of community education about how to navigate these sites, or individual skills gaps. Community members reported difficulties with healthcare, pharmacy, education, banking, and shopping and delivery services.

Services that are application based may be difficult for some to use, even in cases when those applications were designed for a specific population to benefit from (for example, veterans reported challenges with healthcare and prescription applications available through the Department of Veterans Assistance).

The intersection between digital skills challenges and access to essential services is particularly acute for individuals with mobility concerns. If an individual is

homebound or has another transportation barrier, they may rely or be expected to rely more heavily on the internet to access essential services and other social resources.

Immigrants reported that language barriers primarily impact their ability to access online essential services. While language selection options may be available for navigating some complex websites, this is not true of all. Generally, some English language learners reported difficulties with job applications, educational website, healthcare portals, and the Registry of Motor Vehicles due both to language and technical barriers.

## Community

*Challenges ensuring that vulnerable populations are aware of existing services and the need to build a stronger network between local practitioners*

Falmouth has a number of existing digital equity strengths and resources, further explored below. However, a significant challenge for the town seems to be connecting existing resources to populations who are most vulnerable and in-need of support – and, ensuring that existing resources are aware of each other for a stronger continuum of local support.

Effective outreach to populations who are most likely to benefit from digital equity services is not easy – it requires meeting communities where they are at and presenting information in a way that will resonate. Municipal and

community organizations may currently lack the capacity (staffing, resources, and funding) to ensure this type of outreach is happening.

While many practitioners were aware of services available through other local organizations or departments, many cited that increased coordination or resource sharing would be beneficial as new solutions are developed.

## Strengths and Resources

The Falmouth community has many strengths and already-existing assets that can provide a foundation for advancing digital inclusion efforts into the future. Falmouth has a broad base of local knowledge and support for digital equity initiatives and a communal spirit of volunteerism. Community members reported opportunities to tap into the wealth of local knowledge from Falmouth's science community.

## Digital Equity Assets

In addition to an engaged citizenry, key organizations were identified through the community engagement process as existing strengths. Many of these organizations will play a critical role in advancing recommendations further described in the subsequent chapter. These are listed below, with a brief description of services provided:



## Digital Equity Assets

- **Better Broadband 4 Falmouth:** previously focused on registering families in need in the now defunct federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Has partnered with community agencies such as the Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Human Services, and Falmouth Public Schools to connect with those experiencing the greatest need. Continues to advocate for improved broadband service in Falmouth.
- **Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands:** provides digital skills courses for aging adults through the Senior Planet curriculum, which includes focus areas such as affordable internet, “cutting the cord”, how to use smartphones, computer basics, and communicating with friends and family. Have interest in expanding courses and digital navigation in Falmouth, if funding became available to do so.
- **Falmouth Community TV:** provides digital skills workshops for residents and businesses, focusing on a variety of areas related to the digital divide. Provides community education through production and distribution of local information. Has interest in expanding digital equity services, if resources were available to address capacity needs.
- **Falmouth Community Veterans Center:** builds strong relationships with local veterans through a variety of programs and one-to-one support offerings. Hosts a computer lab that is open to any local veteran. Has interest in providing increased digital skills services for veterans, with an emphasis on program development by veterans-for veterans, should funding become available.
- **Falmouth Human Services:** while not currently providing digital equity services, this is an organization with strong connections to Falmouth’s covered populations as well as community service organizations. Offers a comprehensive understanding of the Town’s health and human services landscape. Would be willing to partner with local organizations to provide digital skills support such as personalized, one-to-one skills training, which could be hosted in their space.
- **Falmouth Municipal Light Plant (MLP):** was established through town meeting vote to support connectivity, affordability, and connectivity needs in town. This includes negotiations with internet service providers and opportunities to encourage local competition, particularly for residential solutions.
- **Falmouth Public Library:** offers public Wi-Fi with strong internet speeds (Gigabit speed at main Falmouth branch and 200 Mbps in East Falmouth Branch), public computers, 10 ChromeBooks for lending, 13 hotpots for lending between both library branches, a variety of digital resources and

## Digital Equity Assets

collections, one-to-one support with technology in real time with basic computing needs (such as troubleshooting devices, streaming content, web navigation, job searching, using a tablet), and a public printer, copier, and charging station.

- **Falmouth Public Schools:** Falmouth is a one-to-one district for students and devices. Students in grades 1 through 12 have access to their own Chromebooks. School staff report that families experience poor internet connectivity or other connectivity barriers, and families with absolutely no internet connectivity are rare. Like many other districts, the schools offered a T-Mobile hotspot program during the pandemic and continue to own 20 hotspots, which are most often unused. The schools also provide digital citizenship courses for youth. The schools make in-house repairs to devices and recycle old Chromebooks. Currently, repairs are free of charge. School staff have reported that in some cases, school-issued devices are also the primary device in a family's household, which can pose problems for the schools and families alike.
- **Falmouth Senior Center:** offers workshops and classes for Falmouth seniors, including "cutting the cord" and basic internet safety. Partners with Gadgets Made Easy to provide many of these programs. Would like to expand existing offerings and introduce new programs, if resources were available.
- **Falmouth Service Center:** first and foremost, the organization will triage basic needs such as food access. Through this process, they may unearth other barriers that residents experience. Falmouth Service Center previously received a grant from Comcast to provide devices to Falmouth and Mashpee children and their families, supporting 107 families with 200 children with Chromebook devices. The intention is that this will be an annual program. Having a trusting relationship with the community is key to Falmouth Service Center's success.
- **FalmouthNet:** contracted with a consultant for a study of municipal connectivity options. Have advocated for competition in Falmouth for many years and are strong local advocates for connectivity solutions that benefit the community equitably.
- **Local housing resources:** Falmouth Housing Corporation, Falmouth Housing Trust, Falmouth Housing Authority, and Belonging to Each Other are entities that, while diverse in many ways such as governance, funding, capacity, mission, and scope, ultimately provide housing resources to individuals-in-need in Falmouth. Many of these entities expressed interest in the project and would be willing to learn more about affordability resources for residents.
- **Neighborhood Falmouth:** builds strong relationships between aging individuals and volunteers through providing transportation to appointments, support with small home projects,

## Additional Community Strengths

wellbeing visits, and luncheons. Volunteers are trained to visit people in their homes, which is a significant asset. Have tech savvy volunteers who could potentially offer increased technology support for aging residents and would be interested in doing so if funding were available.

- **OpenCape:** is committed to providing digital equity solutions to municipalities, organizations, and individuals across the region. In Falmouth, OpenCape worked with the Falmouth EDIC on a pilot program to connect Main Street with its fiber services at a discount.
- **Town of Falmouth:** offers services and programs for residents, many of which are available online through the town website. Understanding how to best connect with residents through digital platforms and ensuring that residents are able to engage in this way is a town priority.
- **Upper Cape Cod Technical High School:** technology is well-integrated into student academic experience at the school. The school has IT staff available to help students and families with school-related technology needs. Students benefit from technology lending programs for devices and hotspots. Notably, the school has tech savvy students enrolled in Information Technology programs.

Falmouth is home to a number of strong nonprofit organizations who have deep community connections. It will be important to maintain a connection or build a connection with these organizations throughout implementation of this plan to ensure that populations-in-need are aware of local programs. Such organizations include: Falmouth Emergency Services, Falmouth Department of Recreation, Cape Cod Cape Verdean Cultural Center, Falmouth Bike Lab, the Cape Cod Technology Council, Falmouth EDIC, Falmouth Chamber of Commerce, Falmouth's various ESL classes, Volunteers in Public Schools, local congregations and neighborhood associations.

## Additional Community Strengths

*Municipal commitment to advancing digital equity and experience gained through past efforts*

The Town of Falmouth has perhaps the most solid foundation of any Cape Cod Town in terms of knowledge, expertise, and commitment to addressing the digital divide. There are many advocates across Falmouth who are passionate and knowledgeable about digital equity issues, including many who serve on organizations such as the Falmouth Broadband MLP, Falmouth EDIC, FalmouthNet, Better Broadband 4 Falmouth, or who attend regular meetings of the Cape Cod Technology Council.

Falmouth has conducted extensive research related to the digital divide through studies such as the *Feasibility Report for*

## Additional Community Strengths

*a Community Network (2020) and A Comparative Analysis of Proposals for Broadband Competition (2024).*

This bedrock of experience and knowledge from advocates is coupled by municipal and community-based staff with solid content expertise and matched interest in addressing digital inequities. For example, Falmouth's Town Manager was present at both the project kickoff and community workshop and expressed enthusiasm for advancing digital equity in Falmouth, having experience in enacting robust solutions in other communities. The overwhelming support from Falmouth residents for the development of Falmouth Broadband MLP illustrates community-wide awareness of the importance of bridging the digital divide.

Falmouth is also home to many strong nonprofit organizations who are deeply connected to the local community. Many of those organizations are listed in the Digital Equity Assets section above. These entities will be key to connecting covered populations to digital equity solutions throughout implementation.

#### *Regional partnerships and networks*

Throughout the planning process, community members and stakeholders identified already-existing partnerships that could be advanced to further digital inclusion. While this includes partnership examples within the Town of Falmouth, this may also include regional partnerships and peer-learning opportunities.

For example, the library is a member of the CLAMS Library Network, a non-profit cooperative association of libraries from across Cape Cod and the Islands. The mission and

activities of this network are intrinsically linked with digital equity values and goals. The CLAMS Library Network and associated libraries were identified as a regional digital equity asset within the Massachusetts Statewide Digital Equity Plan. Many libraries within the network are offering innovative digital equity programs and resources; continued participation will benefit Falmouth Public Library in advancing their own digital equity strategy. Similarly, the Senior Center is a member of the COAST network which is comprised of COA leaders from across the region. COAST is a member of Healthy Aging Cape Cod which is a network connecting public and private organizations and stakeholders in Barnstable County.

The background is a deep blue gradient. It features a network of thin, light blue lines connecting small white dots, creating a web-like structure. Overlaid on this are several thick, horizontal, glowing blue bars of varying lengths and opacities, some appearing as bright streaks and others as softer, blurred bands. The overall effect is a sense of dynamic digital connectivity and data flow.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

## IMPLEMENTATION

This section provides recommendations and related actions to address the challenges and opportunities outlined in Key Findings and is similarly categorized by four components essential to achieving digital equity: connectivity, devices, skills, and community. Recommendations seek to advance the vision and goals for this digital equity plan as developed by the Town and community members, further described in the Introduction.

This section also provides considerations on how the Town of Falmouth can measure its progress throughout the execution of this plan.

The majority of these recommendations require expanded capacity for key entities. Additionally, in many cases, digital equity cannot be furthered without increased funding. The Funding Opportunities section below describes funding mechanisms and strategies identified by Cape Cod Commission staff.

Generally, recommendations provided to the Town of Falmouth will ring true for municipalities across Barnstable County. Municipal leadership across the region should consider opportunities for peer-learning, cost-sharing, and streamlined strategies. Cape Cod Commission staff are available to support the consideration of regionalized solutions.

## Recommendations

### CONNECTIVITY

***Continue efforts to advocate for internet service options and improved quality in Falmouth for residents, businesses, and community organizations***

A lack of competition was frequently cited as a contributing factor to unreliable, unaffordable, and inconsistent internet service across town. This is true within the Town of Falmouth and broadly across the region.

Falmouth is, in many ways, leading the region with its efforts to advocate and advance options for improved internet service. The Town of Falmouth should continue to monitor activity within the internet service provision landscape. Entities across town should continue to advocate for improved conditions, considering opportunities to attract new providers with the aim of increased affordability, speeds, and service quality for all residents through fiber-to-the-premises. The Town should continue to provide a public platform for residents to share their internet service challenges and develop a structure to track provider performance, infrastructure, and accountability. This will be particularly critical as the internet service landscape evolves in town.

## CONNECTIVITY

Affordability was a dominant concern reported by residents throughout the community engagement process, and this is backed by both quantitative and qualitative data further explored in the *Key Findings* chapter. Again, this is true both within the Town of Falmouth and across the region. As Falmouth's connectivity landscape evolves, the Town must do its utmost to ensure that residents are offered affordable options. Furthermore, it should be very clear how residents can obtain affordable and high-quality options, without burdensome processes attached to this access.

Additionally, the town should address connectivity challenges experienced by key community institutions, such as nonprofits and businesses. During this plan's community engagement process, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals who own or frequent local businesses cited unaffordable, inconsistent, and/or unreliable internet at their own location or at other key town locations. Connectivity challenges impact operations, economic development or financial growth, and emergency preparedness for these entities.

Advocacy on behalf of a collective of businesses and nonprofits may be more successful than entities communicating with their provider individually. It is recommended that the Town of Falmouth gather more data specific to business and nonprofit connectivity experiences and impacts in order to better inform this advocacy.

### ***Provide increased community education around internet service options***

- Public education about internet services will benefit community members in a number of areas. Increased educational offerings should be made available, covering topics such as:
- Connectivity terminology and best practices for communicating with internet and device professionals to address your needs.
- Falmouth's connectivity landscape, including service provider options, including information on alternative solutions such as Starlink, 5G networks, and hotspots.
- Understanding internet speeds, bundles, and "cutting the cord".
- Affordability solutions.

There are a number of ways to provide this education, and a lead entity or group of entities should be identified to coordinate programming. Currently, the most effective model for this solution is the popular Gadgets Made Eazy workshop offerings that are hosted at the Falmouth Senior Center on how to transition from cable to streaming services. In keeping with this successful model, content experts should be identified in the above areas, with workshops hosted at key community locations such as the Senior Center and Public Library.

As the digital landscape is constantly evolving, it would be prudent to offer workshops on a fairly regular basis. For example, the lead entity in the Town of Falmouth may offer a planned series of workshops once a year, with community organizations identifying and filling gaps as needed based on community input within their own scheduling.

### ***Support public Wi-Fi availability***

While certainly not all members of the Falmouth community primarily rely on public Wi-Fi, it is an invaluable service for those who do. Expanding public Wi-Fi availability will benefit residents, business owners, and tourists, by supporting economic growth and recreation. As community members noted spotty internet coverage in certain areas of town, increased public Wi-Fi will also support public safety efforts.

The Town of Falmouth should map key community locations – most likely, town planners will already have a foundation to build from – which may include popular local spaces (such as beaches, parks, fields, trails, and other centers of activity) and buildings (such as those owned by public, non-profit, and private entities). These spaces should be mapped and inventoried for their current availability of public Wi-Fi. For spaces with public Wi-Fi, the Town should seek to understand whether strength and reliability are satisfactory and consider the need to improve service quality. The Town should also identify key community locations without public Wi-Fi and consider opportunities to offer Wi-Fi in these locations. In doing so,

the Town should carefully explore factors such as required maintenance, liability, and safety.

The Town of Falmouth may consider providing a map of existing Wi-Fi locations across town as a resource for community members and visitors. Many current locations offering public Wi-Fi may be private businesses (such as cafes, restaurants, and shops) or welcoming community spaces (such as the library). Developing a simple, user-friendly resources for individuals to view existing Wi-Fi locations will likely yield benefits for those entities (such as an increase in patronage).

## **DEVICES**

### ***Promote existing computing device and hotspot lending programs and consider additional device needs***

Falmouth Public Library currently offer hotspots and Chromebooks for lending. These lending programs, and the library's on-site computers, are an invaluable service, and are likely particularly helpful for the 4.1% of Falmouth residents who lack a device or the 7.6% who lack an internet connection. Community organizations across Falmouth should be made aware of these lending options and ensure their staff who work with covered populations are able to make referrals. Library staff currently report that lending programs seem adequate to address community need, but this should continue to be monitored,



particularly as more residents become aware of this service.

Feedback from aging residents of Falmouth indicated challenges with the complexities of smartphones and tablets. The Falmouth Senior Center and/or Falmouth Public Library may consider offering a lending program using technology such as the Claris Companion tablets<sup>11</sup>, which are designed specifically for aging individuals. This type of lending program has been successfully implemented by other councils on aging across the state.

### ***Promote existing and introduce new device provision programs***

Technology is constantly changing, and it can be difficult for many community members to “keep up” with what is needed to achieve their personal and professional goals. In 2024, Falmouth Service Center provided devices to clients through a partnership with Comcast, a program that they hope to repeat again in the future. This type of program supports Falmouth residents who lack a device or who are relying on outdated or inappropriate devices. If offered again, this offering should be well-promoted, with consideration for promoting it in multiple languages in partnership with local congregations who may support English language learners.

An additional need exists for high school seniors who have relied on school-issued devices and may be left without a device upon graduation. This may impact a graduate’s ability to apply for jobs, succeed in higher education, or participate in the workforce. A program should be developed that bridges graduating seniors in

need of a device with a high-quality laptop. This program could be implemented between Falmouth Public Schools and existing device refurbishment programs, such as services offered by the nonprofit Computers 4 People, which has recently opened operations in Massachusetts. This type of program would be even more advantageous if offered by a network of school systems across the region and not Falmouth Public Schools alone.

Community organizations also reported a need for high-quality devices for themselves and their clients. Introducing a device refurbishment program would address concerns from community organizations.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://clarishealthcare.com/claris-companion/claris-for-family/>

## SKILLS

### ***Meet community members “where they are at” by developing a local digital navigator program***

Community members frequently reported a need for personalized, hands-on support with the internet and devices to improve skills, troubleshoot issues, and achieve personal goals. One-to-one support would involve working with an individual, in a private setting, using their own device and moving at a pace that is comfortable for their own successful learning. Ideally, this support would be progressive in nature, building from one appointment or interaction to the next.

Community feedback reflects the need for digital navigators, trusted guides who assist community members with ongoing, individualized support for accessing affordable and appropriate connectivity, devices, and digital skills.<sup>12</sup>

Currently, library staff support patrons with internet and technology needs on a drop-in basis. There are digital skills workshops provided by the Senior Center and Falmouth Community Television, but these may not always offer individualized learning. A handful of private companies provide services similar to digital navigation, but these may be inaccessible to community members who are not able to pay for support.

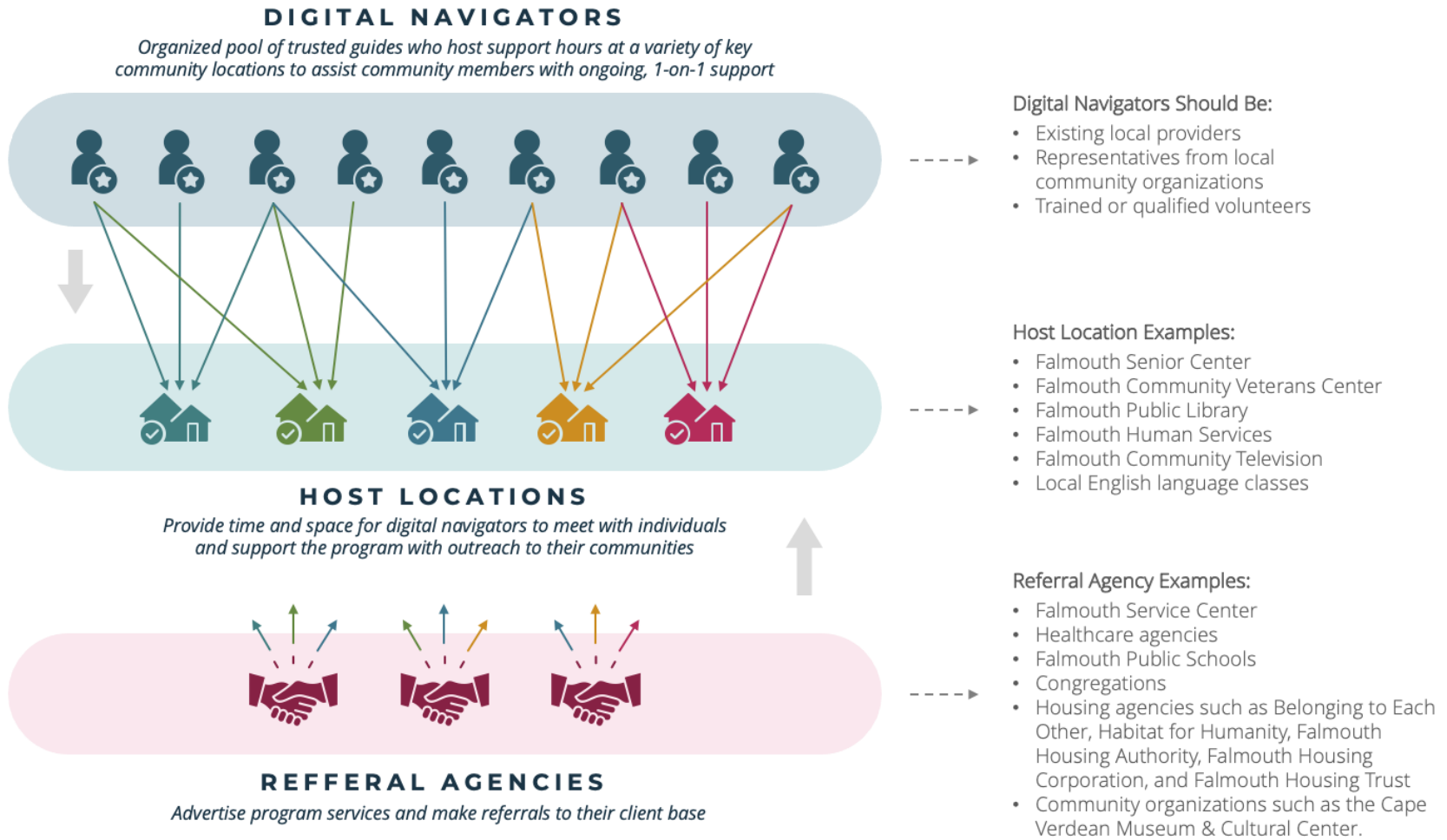
Falmouth lacks a free program that provides highly individualized support for community members as they face ever-evolving internet and device needs. However, Falmouth has a wealth of community organizations who believe that their patrons would benefit from this service and who would be willing partners to host such a service. The Town of Falmouth should organize a local digital navigator program to benefit residents in partnership with trusted community organizations. Digital navigators are individuals embedded in local community organizations who provide one-on-one attention to residents based on their unique needs.

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<sup>12</sup> Digital Navigator Model, National Digital Inclusion Alliance: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/digitalnavigatormodel/>

SKILLS

Figure 11: Suggested service model for digital navigators.



A truly effective model would include an organized pool of digital navigators (who may be industry professionals or volunteers) who host support hours at a variety of key community locations, with referrals made from a widespread network of entities supporting covered populations.

**Digital navigators:** in this model, digital navigators should come from a variety of sources. Some digital navigators may be self-funded by the organization that they are associated with and others may require funding. Others may be willing to offer their services on a voluntary basis. Digital navigators should meet to share information and best practices. Digital navigators would preferably include a multi-lingual individual (Portuguese and/or Spanish), an individual trained to work with aging adults, and a veteran (such as one associated with Falmouth Community Veterans' Center) to fully respond to needs identified by the Falmouth community. These individuals may be trained by an industry professional. Oversight of this effort should be led by a central organization, which may be one of the host locations or could be a separate entity, though digital navigators should also build close relationships with the appropriate location host.

**Host locations:** Places in Falmouth that may avail of digital navigators include: the Falmouth Senior Center, the Falmouth Community Veterans' Center, the Falmouth Public Library, Falmouth Human Services, and local English language classes. Neighborhood Falmouth could also tap into this network via their current service provision model

of providing support at-home. All of these entities have expressed a willingness to host increased programming for the populations they serve and function as welcome spaces that community members trust. The responsibility of host locations would be to make time and space for digital navigators, support the process through which patrons schedule services, and provide outreach via typical means (newsletters, social media, word-of-mouth) so that community members are aware of the service.

**Referral agencies:** Falmouth has many community organizations that support covered populations who would be able to refer their clients to this service. This includes: Falmouth Service Center, Wellstrong, healthcare agencies like Community Health Center, Duffy, Gosnold, and Cape Cod Healthcare, Falmouth Public Schools, Cape Verdean Museum and Cultural Center, congregations, housing agencies such as Falmouth Housing Corporation, Falmouth Housing Authority, Falmouth Housing Trust, Habitat for Humanity, and Belonging to Each Other. Staff and volunteers of these agencies should be made aware of the program and prepared to provide referrals to clients-in-need.

**Additional areas of focus:** In addition to providing personalized skills support as previously described, the following elements could be incorporated into the digital navigation model to better operationalize recommendations from this chapter's *Connectivity* section:

- Technology audits help individuals understand the technologies they currently have, better understand

## SKILLS

what they actually need, and could provide support to implement any necessary changes.

- Affordability support to help individuals access more cost-effective internet service and device options in line with their needs. This would require an understanding of internet speeds and bundles, or the ability to effectively communicate with providers to advocate for clients. This may also include the ability to refer to local businesses in instances where a device could be repaired rather than replaced.

**Accompanying hotline:** Incorporating a local hotline would augment this service, so that folks are able to receive support in real time. This would require greater program coordination needs, agility from digital navigators, and responsibility for the host location.

**Complementing other local services:** Digital navigation would be complemented by existing and new workshops and classes offered at entities such as Falmouth Community Television, Falmouth Senior Center, and Falmouth Public Library. Digital navigation is not designed to detract from these services; in fact, ideally, digital navigators will be aware of these programs and refer clients to them as appropriate. It is worth noting that healthcare agencies may also provide services similar to digital navigation as it relates to patients using MyChart or accessing other health services – similar to the above, Falmouth’s digital navigators should refer clients to those resources as appropriate.

**Regionalization:** The need for digital navigation exists across Barnstable County. Ideally, a regional digital navigator program would be developed. The organizations identified above as *Host Locations* and *Referral Agencies* could offer similar roles under a regional program. However, a regional program would offer greater sustainability and stability, would spread responsibility for program maintenance across more partnering organizations (thereby mitigating any particular burden experienced by one organization alone), and would likely offer greater opportunity for continued training and peer learning for navigators.

### ***Increase digital skills workshops and classes and continue to support programs that work***

As described in the Key Findings chapter of this report, workshops and classes already exist in Falmouth to support residents with internet and technology skills in group settings. This includes courses offered by the Falmouth Senior Center in partnership with Gadgets Made Eazy and Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands, Falmouth Community TV, and workshops offered by Falmouth Public Library. These programs should continue to be offered and expanded as appropriate with necessary funding. To ensure that those most vulnerable are able to access existing programming, local scholarships should be considered for fee-based programs.

Additionally, staff at each entity should identify opportunities to introduce new workshops and classes in line with community feedback. This may include increased programming around internet safety, basic computing and internet skills, and workshops around a particular theme or task. Examples of themed workshops that would resonate with the Falmouth community include: accessing MyChart and healthcare tools, banking online, using state and municipal online platforms (such as the RMV), and online navigation as an English language learner.

Community organizations engaged in this project may already have considered the ideal curriculum to create workshops that best match community needs. For example, Falmouth Community TV has developed an application for a recent Request for Proposal (RFP) offered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration which would have offered a digital equity workshop series designed for Cape Cod residents in need. While the grant application was unsuccessful, this type of workshop series would be a beneficial to introduce for Falmouth residents. With curriculum already considered, FCTV could be well-positioned to implement this workshop series if resources became available.

Organizations serving covered populations across Falmouth would also benefit from an increase in workshops hosted at their locations. For example, the Falmouth Veterans Community Center would be an ideal location to host digital skills workshops. The organization has a new computer lab available to all veterans and both staff and participants expressed an interest in developing

digital skills programs. A significant advantage is that these classes could be designed and offered by veterans, for veterans. Similar workshops could be considered for other covered populations across Falmouth in partnership with relevant support groups.

### ***Increase focus on programs that address internet safety, privacy, and security concerns***

Internet safety, privacy, and security was a theme throughout community engagement. All of the above recommendations should incorporate learnings around internet safety as a core value of service provision. For example, teaching a resident how to use a financial banking app should also include components of safe online banking and scam identification.

Regular workshops covering online safety should be continued, expanded, or introduced in a coordinated fashion through entities such as the library, Senior Center, schools, and local community organizations. Workshops may target specific digital threats – such as how to identify a fraudulent email – and should also provide broad opportunity for residents to receive support with individual concerns. As these internet safety concerns may be of a personal or sensitive nature, workshops should foster a comfortable, safe space and should be accompanied by opportunities for one-on-one conversations.

Involving public safety officers in addition to those with technical expertise will be helpful in providing this service.

## COMMUNITY

The town should consider opportunities to further coordinate between municipal departments so that vulnerable community members are notified when a local scam is identified.

Finally, Falmouth Public Schools should consider ways to increase opportunities for youth to learn about internet safety and mental health impacts. Community members reported concern for younger generations as they engage in the digital world. The Town of Falmouth should continue to provide spaces for youth to exist “outside of their smartphone” such as those offered by the Falmouth Department of Recreation.

Generally, residents would benefit from increased communal education around digital safety and security that is practical, grounded in access to essential services and security tools (such as helping individuals install antivirus software), and unthreatening for new learners. Often, residents identified safety concerns as a primary reason for not using the internet or technology. Pursuing the above recommendations will be key to ensuring that community members trust themselves to use the internet and technology to achieve their everyday needs.

## COMMUNITY

### *Local coalition building and coordinated outreach*

Entities across the Town of Falmouth should communicate about digital equity programs so that offerings are well-coordinated, complementary, and promoted across varying agencies to reach covered populations. This could be operationalized through a method as simple as a Falmouth Digital Equity Listserv, where involved entities share information and updates, or as structured as quarterly meetings facilitated by a lead agency. Benefits of cross-organizational coordination include:

- Opportunities to encourage participation from covered populations and individuals most in need through strong coordination between local organizations. For example, if staff at the Falmouth Senior Center are regularly aware of workshops offered by Falmouth Community Television related to digital safety, they are better able to directly share this program with residents in need.
- Opportunities to broadly promote digital equity programs to encourage greater attendance (for example, posting on social media or newsletters).
- Opportunities to build complementary programs. Agencies can coordinate among each other to ensure that programming is not duplicative, and to

develop a stronger continuum of learning. For example, a one-day workshop at the Senior Center is a likely starting place or entry point for an aging individual looking to improve their digital skills. That same individual could be encouraged to attend a multi-day workshop at Falmouth Community Television to continue to enhance their skills.

Ideally, local coordination will also include an understanding of the landscape beyond the Town of Falmouth. This is further described in the *Support Regional Collaboration* recommendation below.

### ***Develop a digital equity fund for community organizations***

The Falmouth community may consider opportunities to build a local digital equity fund that could be accessed by community organizations to support their own operations and ability to serve covered populations. For example, local organizations could apply to this fund to purchase new devices, support public Wi-Fi build-out, or even bridge gaps with internet service payments. The entity responsible for maintaining this fund would need to carefully consider fund management, governance, and application structure.

Falmouth has a few local resources that could provide guidance in developing this sort of funding model. The Town of Falmouth, acting through the Human Services Department, seeks proposals every year from interested public or private, state and federally recognized non-profit organizations, agencies, or partnerships to provide projects, programs and services that address unmet

human service needs in the community. Additionally, The Falmouth Fund, a permanent endowment fund of The Cape Cod Foundation, is another local resource with experience in managing and distributing charitable funding for Falmouth community organizations.

A digital equity fund could be implemented at a local level (ie: for organizations operating or benefiting Falmouth community members) but would have maximum impact if organized in collaboration with interested individuals across Cape Cod. The Cape Cod Technology Council, Open Cape, and The Cape Cod Foundation could all be potential partners to further explore this recommendation.

### ***Develop methods and structures to measure progress***

As further described below in Measuring Success, the Town of Falmouth should consider what constitutes success within the implementation of specific recommendations above, as well as the future execution of this plan. Entities assigned with implementation activities should identify immediate and long-term goals to guide the development of any given offering. Progress and results within individual activities could be monitored through the development of a digital equity network, as described above. The Town of Falmouth may look to previous successful community efforts as a foundation for building out appropriate methods and structures to measure progress in advancing digital equity.

### ***Continue data collection***



## COMMUNITY

As described in the State of Digital Equity chapter, continued data collection will improve program development and prioritization of digital equity solutions. It is recommended that the Town of Falmouth identify a local entity to lead continued data collection in areas such as the below:

- **Understanding youth and family priorities.** The Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s Statewide Digital Equity Survey was well taken by residents in Falmouth. However, young families were underrepresented in survey respondents. To better understand the digital equity landscape specific to young families in Falmouth, further distribution of the survey or a similar survey is recommended in partnership with Falmouth Public Schools. This could be particularly useful in terms of identifying implementation priorities. It is important to note that solutions that will benefit youth and families in Falmouth are certainly incorporated in this digital equity plan, informed by pop-up events and stakeholder interviews.
- **Identifying barriers experienced by underrepresented communities.** This project focused on exploring internet experiences of covered populations identified by the Digital Equity Act. However, the federal Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program identified “underrepresented communities” who may also face heightened barriers to achieving digital equity. Continued exploration of data related to the experiences of these populations would benefit future implementation strategies, particularly given forthcoming BEAD non-deployment funding.
- **Business and nonprofit needs.** As described in the *Recommendations* section of this chapter, businesses and nonprofits face internet affordability and quality needs. Advocating on behalf of a collective of businesses and nonprofits may require data related to the specific experiences of these entities.

## Support regional collaboration

There is a tremendous opportunity for increased regional collaboration to further digital equity services and resources across Cape Cod. However, making space for new, effective partnerships is often “easier said than done.” While this recommendation is not specific to the Town of Falmouth alone, Falmouth can take a leadership role in initiating collaborations, such as those described below:

- Regional or statewide opportunities to develop a digital equity coalition to support education on best practices, peer-to-peer information sharing, and the creation of more streamlined programming. An example may include participation in efforts led by organizations such as the Cape Cod Technology Council and Health Aging Cape Cod.
- Building out a digital navigator program that not only addresses challenges shared by community members within the Town of Falmouth but also

expands to those in need across the region. The need for one-to-one support and digital navigation arose in nearly every municipal plan developed by the Commission and in regional conversations. Ideally, the digital navigator program recommended for Falmouth would be a model for, and ultimately connect to, similar efforts across the region.

- Increasing public understanding and resource sharing on existing regional or subregional services that advance digital equity, such as those available through community health centers, as this will be key to building new services into the future.
- Leveraging existing partnerships such as those through the COAST and CLAMS networks (described in Key Findings) and the public schools. Intentionally baking digital equity conversations into existing platforms may provide a starting place for increased peer-learning and service building discussions.

| Category            | Recommendation  | Action  | Champion  | Funding   | Page |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|------|
| <b>Connectivity</b> | Continue efforts to advocate for internet service options and improved quality in Falmouth. | Monitor internet service provision landscape and advocate for increased affordability, speeds, and service quality.   | Town Administration, Falmouth MLP, Selectboard, Town Planning, community advocates, FalmouthNet.  | N/A   | 54   |
| <b>Connectivity</b> | Continue efforts to advocate for internet service options and improved quality in Falmouth. | Provide a public platform for residents to share challenges and track provider performance.   | Falmouth MLP, FalmouthNet.  | N/A   | 55   |
| <b>Connectivity</b> | Continue efforts to advocate for internet service options and improved quality in Falmouth. | Acknowledge and support community institutions such as businesses and nonprofits as they seek improved internet service.  | Town Administration, Falmouth MLP, Selectboard, Town Planning, community advocates, FalmouthNet.  | N/A   | 55   |
| <b>Connectivity</b> | Provide increased community education around internet service options.                      | Offer educational workshops on connectivity, internet speeds, and affordability solutions, with an identified lead entity to coordinate and host locations.                                   | Falmouth Community TV, Falmouth Community Veteran's Center, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, Falmouth Public Library, private consultants and businesses. | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, philanthropic, private sources, Falmouth Human Services or other town grants, and capital or operational budget. | 55   |
| <b>Connectivity</b> | Support public Wi-Fi availability.  | Map and inventory public Wi-Fi locations to identify gaps in coverage and consider opportunities to expand public Wi-Fi at key town locations to support residents, tourists, and businesses. | Town Administration, Falmouth IT department, Town Planning, Falmouth Chamber of Commerce, Falmouth EDIC, and community organizations.                                     | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, Residential Retrofit Program, Falmouth EDIC. Will become an ongoing expense.                                     | 56   |

|                     |  |   |  |   |    |
|---------------------|--|---|--|---|----|
| <b>Connectivity</b> | Support public Wi-Fi availability.   | Develop and provide a public Wi-Fi map for community members and visitors.  | Town Administration, Town Planning, Falmouth MLP, FalmouthNet, town GIS.   | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program.  | 56 |
| <b>Devices</b>      | Promote existing computing device and hotspot lending programs and consider additional device needs. | Raise awareness of lending programs across community organizations supporting covered populations so community organization staff can make referrals. | Falmouth Public Library, Town Administration, Falmouth MLP, Selectboard, Town Planning, FalmouthNet, Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, Falmouth Human Services, and other community organizations serving covered populations. | Explore funding opportunities as needed.  | 56 |
| <b>Devices</b>      | Promote existing computing device and hotspot lending programs and consider additional device needs. | Monitor demand for existing lending programs and expand as needed.  | Falmouth Public Library and other entities offering hotspots or devices.   | Explore funding opportunities as needed.  | 56 |
| <b>Devices</b>      | Promote existing computing device and hotspot lending programs and consider additional device needs. | Consider lending programs for seniors using technology tailored for aging individuals.  | Falmouth Senior Center, Neighborhood Falmouth, Falmouth Public Library.  | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program and/or private and philanthropic funding sources. | 57 |
| <b>Devices</b>      | Promote existing and introduce new device provision programs.  | Support device distribution programs through partnerships with organizations like Comcast.  | Falmouth Public Library, Town Administration, Falmouth MLP, Selectboard, Town Planning, FalmouthNet, Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, Falmouth  | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program and/or private and philanthropic funding sources. | 57 |

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|                |   |   | Human Services, Neighborhood Falmouth, and other community organizations serving covered populations.  |   |    |
| <b>Devices</b> | Promote existing and introduce new device provision programs. | Develop a device program for graduating seniors who may lack access post-graduation.  | Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth PTA, community organizations, and private companies (including device refurbishment companies).  | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program and/or private and philanthropic funding sources.                             | 57 |
| <b>Devices</b> | Promote existing and introduce new device provision programs. | Introduce a device refurbishment program to support community organizations and clients in need.  | Falmouth Public Library, Town Administration, Falmouth MLP, FalmouthNet, Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, Falmouth Human Services, other community organizations serving covered populations, and device refurbishment companies. | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program and/or private and philanthropic funding sources.                             | 57 |
| <b>Skills</b>  | Develop a local digital navigator program.                    | Establish a network of digital navigators providing personalized, hands-on technology support with host locations and referral agencies to support the program. | Falmouth Public Library, Town Administration, Falmouth MLP, Selectboard, Town Planning, FalmouthNet, Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Service Center, Falmouth Community TV, Neighborhood Falmouth, Falmouth Human Services,                      | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, forthcoming state funding, and/or private and philanthropic funding sources. | 57 |

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|---------------|---|--|---|---|----|
|               |   |  | community organizations serving covered populations, and private consultants and businesses.  |   |    |
| <b>Skills</b> | Develop a local digital navigator program.  | Consider incorporating a digital support hotline for real-time assistance.   | Digital navigator program lead (see above).   | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, forthcoming state funding, and/or private and philanthropic funding sources.   | 58 |
| <b>Skills</b> | Increase digital skills workshops and classes and continue to support programs that work. | Expand workshops at entities like Falmouth Community Television and the Senior Center.   | Falmouth Community TV, Falmouth Senior Center, and any other entities providing digital equity workshops or classes.  | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, forthcoming state funding, and/or private and philanthropic funding sources. Scholarships should be considered for fee-based services. | 60 |
| <b>Skills</b> | Increase digital skills workshops and classes and continue to support programs that work. | Develop new courses based on community feedback, including internet safety, financial security, and state services access.   | Falmouth Community TV, Falmouth Senior Center, Public Library, Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth Service Center, Neighborhood Falmouth, Falmouth Human Services, community organizations serving covered populations, and private consultants and businesses. | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, forthcoming state funding, and/or private and philanthropic funding sources.   | 60 |
| <b>Skills</b> | Increase focus on programs that address internet safety, privacy, and security concerns.  | Offer internet safety workshops targeting common threats like scams and identity theft with coordinated public outreach when local internet safety threats are identified. | Falmouth Police Department, Falmouth Community TV, Falmouth Senior Center, Public Library, Falmouth Public Schools, Falmouth Service  | Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, forthcoming state funding, and/or private and philanthropic funding sources.   | 61 |

|                  |  |  |  |  |    |
|------------------|--|--|--|--|----|
|                  |  |  | Center, Falmouth Human Services, community organizations serving covered populations, and private consultants and businesses.  |  |    |
| <b>Community</b> | Local coalition building and coordinated outreach. | Develop a local digital equity coalition to ensure complementary programming and cross-promotion among digital equity service providers. | Falmouth MLP, FalmouthNet, Falmouth Public Library, Falmouth Community TV, Falmouth Senior Center, Falmouth Human Services, Falmouth Public Schools, Neighborhood Falmouth, and organizations serving covered populations. | Explore funding opportunities as needed. | 62 |

# Funding

Digital equity initiatives across the country have been supported by a combination of government (federal, state, and municipal), philanthropic, and private sector funding streams. The Town of Falmouth can leverage existing funding opportunities to advance the above recommendations. It will be important to monitor these and potential new funding streams as priorities evolve over the coming years.

## ***Massachusetts Digital Equity Funding Context***

Through the federal Digital Equity Act of 2021, \$2.75 billion was allocated for the development and support of digital equity programs across the country. Massachusetts received a \$1 million planning grant to develop a statewide digital equity plan, a process implemented through the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI). MBI serves as the coordinating entity for broadband related funds, including those through the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The statewide digital equity plan, [Massachusetts Internet for All](#), lays the foundation for the advancement of future digital equity funding streams, which will be operationalized through a combination of forthcoming federal and state funding and coordinated through the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.

State-allocated ARPA funding supports the advancement of a Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Grant Program.

As a participant within MBI's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program, the Town of Falmouth is eligible to apply for up to \$100,000 to operationalize and pilot strategies identified in this digital equity plan through the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program.

In June 2024, the Town of Falmouth reserved grant funding through MBI for this implementation effort.

The Cape Cod Commission remains available to support the Town of Falmouth in this process, which could include prioritizing this plan's recommendations, developing a funding application for MBI, connecting with strategic partners, and planning next steps for action in greater detail.

Additionally, the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) allocated \$14.1 million to Massachusetts, secured in late 2024, from its Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program. This funding will support the launch of MBI's Launchpad program and the expansion of its Municipal Digital Equity Planning and Implementation programs.

## ***Digital Equity Partnerships Program***

Following the passage of An Act Relative to Immediate COVID-19 Recovery Needs, a \$50 million Broadband Innovation Fund was established to bridge the digital divide as a component of the Commonwealth's COVID recovery and response efforts. MBI funded an initial nine organizations through the Digital Equity Partnerships Program, more recently announcing an additional \$20



## Funding

million in grants to many of the same organizations to continue this work.

The following programs are most relevant to potential projects within the Town of Falmouth:

- **Metropolitan Area Planning Council Apartment Wi-Fi Program:** this program provides funding, project management, and procurement support to fund the construction of Wi-Fi networks which provide residents with equal or superior service than what is available from commercial ISPs, at no cost to residents. Funding covers all capital costs associated with network design, construction, and equipment, and the first year of ongoing operating expenses.
- **Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers:** Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) Telehealth Consortium to help 35 health across the state support telehealth services. The Consortium will provide required staff capacity, training and coaching resources, oversight, and evaluation to screen patients at FQHCs for digital access needs. The Town of Falmouth should learn how local qualifying health centers are operationalizing this funding to support residents of Falmouth and consider opportunities for partnership. There is one such center in Falmouth: Community Health Center Of Cape Cod-Falmouth.

While the grant solicitation is now closed for the Digital Equity Partnerships Program, the Town of Falmouth may consider opportunities to tap into the above programs. Connecting with the funded agencies may provide useful peer learnings or resources.

### ***Capital Projects Fund (CPF)***

**GAP Network Grant Program:** MBI designated \$145 million from the federal Capital Project Fund for this program. Its aim is to connect remaining unserved and underserved locations in advance of grants from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program. Falmouth was among eight Cape communities identified for funding in the first two rounds of this program, Falmouth. These grants, along with matching funds from the awarded providers, total more than \$41 million. As in Falmouth, these funds help introduce a new broadband competitor to municipal markets.

**Residential Retrofit Program:** This program deploys state of the art broadband infrastructure to Affordable Housing properties across Massachusetts. MBI will make available grants covering 100% of eligible capital costs associated with the retrofit of eligible properties. This program and the previously described MAPC Apartment Wi-Fi Program share the same expression of interest form for entities looking to pursue either opportunity.

### ***Broadband Equity Access Deployment (Bead) Program***

Massachusetts was awarded \$147 million in BEAD funding to close remaining gaps in unserved and underserved locations. The guidance for awarding grants from these funds is heavily weighted toward existing services providers, whether private or public. As implemented

through MBI, BEAD funding was to be awarded after the GAP Network Grant Program, which was expected to address a majority of underserved and unserved locations.

BEAD funding in excess of what is needed for broadband infrastructure will be used for non-deployment projects. Funding priorities are expected to strongly align with recommendations offered in this digital equity plan – ensuring that all communities are equitably able to adopt the internet. These priorities are also reflected in existing plans and programs such as the Massachusetts Internet for All Plan, the Digital Equity Partnerships Program, and the Municipal Digital Equity Planning and Implementation Programs. Two quality-of-service programs, the Residential Internet Retrofit Program and the Front Door Program, are expected to absorb a portion of BEAD non-deployment spending.

The BEAD award process is ongoing. Should available funding remain available after an initial round, there are expected to be further grant rounds in support of digital equity.

### ***Municipal Fiber Grant Program***

The Municipal Fiber Grant program is a competitive grant program that supports the closing of critical gaps that exist in municipal networks. Focused on connecting municipality-owned facilities, it assists municipalities in achieving many critical goals associated with municipal fiber networks. Grants to a single town can be up to \$250,000, and up to \$500,000 for joint applications. The Town of Falmouth was

awarded a \$203,458 grant to connect various municipal facilities to the existing municipal fiber network.

### ***American Connection Corps***

MBI has partnered with the Lead for America American Connection Corps program offered through Lead for America to establish a digital equity fellowship opportunity in Massachusetts, with funding available to place fellows at organizations across the Commonwealth. Digital equity fellows will support the development of digital inclusion programs by providing strategy, organization, and administration to hosting entities. Commission staff recommend a regional, interagency, or intermunicipal approach for pursuit of this program. The program requires a lead agency to host the digital equity Implementation fellow, and entities within the Town of Falmouth, including the town itself, may be well positioned to support this effort given the completion of this digital equity plan.

### ***Residential Affordability Programs***

As described in Current State of Digital Equity, the Affordability Connectivity Program concluded in Spring 2024. Entities throughout the Town of Falmouth should identify organizations to support eligible residents in accessing both the Lifeline and Comcast Internet Essentials programs. Social workers, case managers, guidance counselors, and other professionals who work 1-on-1 with individuals and families to access subsidy programs are particularly well positioned to support enrollment in this type of program.

## Measuring Success

### ***Leveraging Additional Funding Streams***

There are a number of public and philanthropic funding streams that are not specific to digital equity, but that could be accessed to further digital equity goals. For example, community-based organizations have accessed Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to provide digital literacy classes.

Workforce development funding may be another good avenue to pursue, as there is a connection between digital adoption and participation in the workforce. Similarly, educational funding streams and programs, particularly including those that benefit covered populations, may be aligned with digital equity goals.

Entities across the Town of Falmouth or that benefit the Falmouth community may be eligible for diverse funding streams that ultimately further digital equity. By developing a stronger digital equity network across town assets, the Town can learn of and strategically approach funding and programmatic opportunities.

## **Measuring Success**

Measuring the successful implementation of this digital equity plan will require tracking existing individual programs, services, or strategies as well as those that may be initiated as a result of this plan. Coordination and information-sharing between involved entities will be

critical in order to ensure that these activities are successful on a community-wide level. The Town of Falmouth may identify a lead staff member or entity to identify and coordinate methods for the Town to employ in measuring the progress of this plan's implementation.

Understanding the success of individual digital equity activities will vary dependent upon the nature of that initiative or offering. Generally, identification of goals and measurement tools should guide the development of each activity. Targets should be set related to immediate outcomes that are tied to community need (for example, intended number of community members to benefit from any given program). Long-term goals for each activity should also tie in with an overarching, town-wide vision as identified through this digital equity plan.

Successful implementation of this plan will be continuous and evolving work, as residents move into and out of the community, as community members move along the continuum of digital equity, and as the digital world continues to progress.

## **Continued Learning**

Ongoing learning is key to addressing the digital divide, particularly as the digital world will continue to advance. Commission staff have identified particular areas that were not addressed through this planning process, listed below:

- **Municipal practices:** while the intersection between digital equity and municipal policies, practices, and communications was an area of discussion for many other towns who undertook local digital equity plans (see [Orleans Digital Equity Plan](#), page 52), this rarely arose in community feedback for Falmouth. However, this does not mean that issues do not exist. Municipal departments should consider feedback that they have heard from community members with regards to navigating web-based services and resources to determine pain points and potential solutions. The Town of Falmouth should further explore how municipal services and communications intersect with digital equity to ensure that all residents are able to access vital town information and resources, regardless of technical abilities.
- **Emergency communications:** the Town of Falmouth should continue to consider how emergency communications must evolve to better reach residents who are impacted by the digital divide. Digital equity should not be assumed when planning emergency communications.
- **Data collection:** the connectivity landscape in Falmouth and beyond is quickly evolving. Entities across the Town of Falmouth, including the Falmouth Municipal Light Plant (MLP) and Falmouth Net, have done much work to track connectivity. These efforts should continue.
- **Connecting with regional efforts:** there is momentum across the region for continued digital equity learning, collaboration, and implementation. Leaders within the Town of Falmouth should continue to stay connected to regional efforts to maximize peer learning opportunities and available resources.

## Advancing Digital Equity in Falmouth

Community members, leaders, and organizations across the Town of Falmouth offer a strong foundation of expertise and commitment to advancing digital equity. Continued progress will require collaboration and engagement from actors at all levels, including municipal, regional, and state entities, community-based, nonprofit, and private sector organizations, and individual advocates

This plan provides a starting place for the Town of Falmouth to convene stakeholders and practitioners to prioritize implementation strategies. Cape Cod Commission staff are available to support the implementation process and can better connect these efforts to other initiatives across the region. Equipped with data, community feedback, and tailored recommendations, Falmouth is well-positioned to lead the way in fostering a more inclusive digital future for all.



# APPENDIX