IIJA/BIL Series: Broadband and Digital Equity Investments

November 15, 2022

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Agenda

1. **Broadband Strategy Pillars and Current Status of Broadband in Massachusetts**

2. **Federal Broadband and Digital Equity Funding Landscape**

3. **IIJA (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) Digital Equity and BEAD Plans**

4. **Why is Digital Equity Important?**

5. **Municipal Digital Equity Planning Opportunity**

6. **Q&A Session**

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Presentation Goal

★ **Detail opportunities for municipalities to become involved in Digital Equity planning and implementation activities and preview other upcoming broadband initiatives**

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Massachusetts Broadband Strategy Pillars

Broadband Strategy Pillars going forward:

✔ **Extend and Improve Broadband Access and Infrastructure**

✔ **Adoption and Affordability**

✔ **Reaching Target Populations through Partnerships**

✔ **Digital Literacy**

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Current Status of Broadband in Massachusetts

'Like running water': Gov. Charlie Baker, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito celebrate state's success bringing broadband internet to rural towns

Updated: Mar. 24, 2022, 3:59 p.m. | Published: Mar. 24, 2022, 2:19 p.m.

Gov. Charlie Baker, right, and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito visit the Massachusetts Green High-Performance Computing Center at 100 Bigelow St. in Holyoke on Thursday. (Jim Kinney / The Republican)

By Jim Kinney | jkinney@repub.com

HOLYOKE — The state's Make Ready program helped utilities and providers bring modern, high-speed internet to 28,000 households in rural Massachusetts with 40,000 poles and 2,000 miles of optical fiber over the last four years.
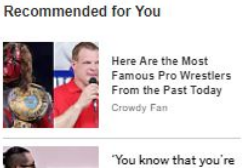
GREENFIELD RECORDER

News > Local

10 Franklin County towns benefiting from hotspot program extension

By DOMENIC POLI
Staff Writer

Published: 8/28/2020 1:06:59 PM

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

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Federal Broadband and Digital Equity Funding Landscape

- Statewide Mapping Effort
  - Identify remaining unserved and underserved homes
  - Support FCC broadband coverage challenge process
  - Inform targeted investments in broadband infrastructure
  - FCC releasing new coverage maps on November 18.

- State ARPA Digital Equity Fund - $50M
  - Build local/regional capacity in digital equity planning.
  - Implement digital equity projects.

- US Treasury Capital Projects Fund - $175M
  - Expand access to reliable broadband service.
  - Gap Networks Infrastructure Grant Program - $145M allocation
  - First priority is to "connect the unconnected"

- NTIA Digital Equity Act Planning Grant
  - Support a yearlong statewide digital equity planning effort.
  - Engage stakeholders, analyze data, build strategies to close the digital divide.
  - Design and implement systems to deploy DEA capacity grants.

- NTIA Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Initial Application Grant
  - Develop a 5 Year Action Plan for deploying BEAD funds.
  - Prepare a state challenge process.
  - Design and implement systems to deploy BEAD grants

Massachusetts allocations for IIJA (Digital Equity Act and BEAD) broadband funding have not been announced.

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Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – Digital Equity & BEAD Planning

DEA 🔗 BEAD

Robust stakeholder engagement in 2023 to ensure that the voices of all federally-identified target populations are heard

→

Public Housing
Workforce
Libraries
Health care
CBOs
Education

- ☐ Low income households
- ☐ Individuals who are member of a racial or ethnic minority group
- ☐ Individuals with disabilities
- ☐ Veterans
- ☐ Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
- ☐ Individuals with a language barrier
- ☐ Aging individuals
- ☐ Incarcerated individuals

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$50M State Digital Equity Fund

Overview

- Established under State ARPA Authorization – Funds must be committed by 12/31/2024 and expended by 12/31/2026
- Administered by MBI through a contract with the Commonwealth
- Will initially support two programs

Digital Equity Partnerships Program

MBI seeks 10 - 15 organizations to support the deployment of six initiatives in one or more of the following areas:
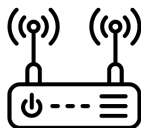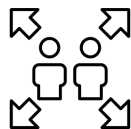
Digital Literacy

WiFi Access

Public Space Internet Modernization

Connectivity for Economic Hardship

Device Distribution and Refurbishment

Education, Outreach, and Adoption

Municipal Digital Equity Planning

Digital Equity Partnerships Program

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Defining Digital Equity

Digital Equity:

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

– National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Image Source: Detroit Community Technology Project

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Determining Factors of Digital Access

Connection

Fast
Affordable

Adequate Device

Router
Personal Computer /Laptop

Literacy

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

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Digital Equity Gap Implications

Digital Equity Gaps Impact:

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

And more…

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

- FCC Connect2Health Task Force

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Municipal Digital Equity Planning

Overview

- MBI is funding Municipal Digital Equity Planning Activities
  - **Charrette Model** – Similar to Municipal Vulnerability Planning Program
  - **Planning Model** – Similar to a Master Plan Chapter, or Economic Development, HPP, OSRP, or other topic specific planning activities.

- Available for individual municipalities, but regional collaboration is encouraged.

Program Goals

- Guide **municipal decision-making** related to services and infrastructure that will increase access, adoption and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic.

- Prepare municipalities to **submit grant proposals** to existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities.
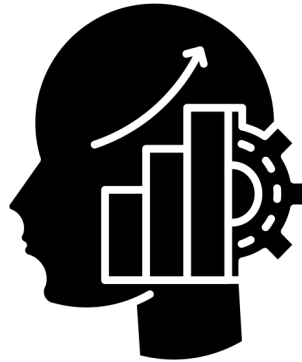

Example Plan: Chelsea, Everett, Revere Digital Equity and Access Plan, MAPC 2022

Apply online on at www. https://broadband.masstech.org/ municipal-digital-equity-planning-program

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Why Conduct a Digital Equity Plan?
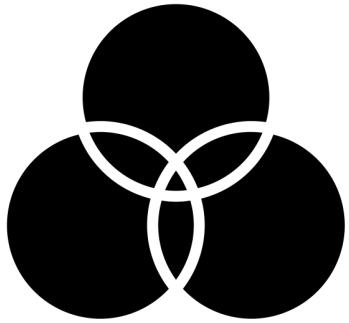
Align areas of interest and get leadership buy in

Build capacity and understanding of root issues

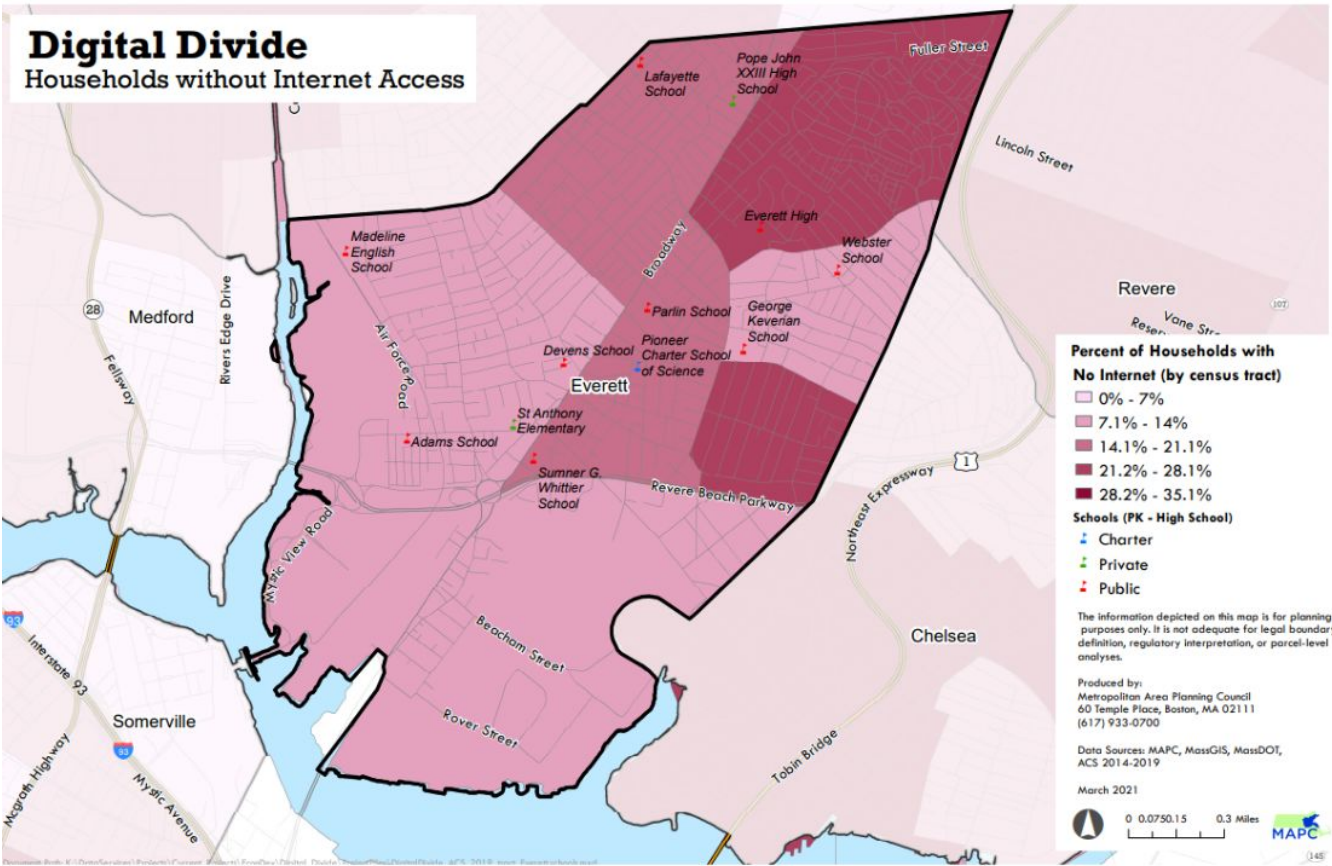Prepare for State and Federal Funding

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When should you conduct a Digital Equity Plan?

Now!

Elements of a Municipal Digital Equity Plan

Existing Conditions Analysis

Digital Divide — Households without Internet Access

Percent of Households with No Internet (by census tract)
- 0% - 7%
- 7.1% - 14%
- 14.1% - 21.1%
- 21.2% - 28.1%
- 28.2% - 35.1%

Schools (PK - High School)
- Charter
- Private
- Public

Percent of Households without Internet Access

- Medford 8.2%
- Arlington 8.9%
- Cambridge 11.1%
- Somerville 11.8%
- Massachusetts 13.3%
- Malden 14.3%
- Everett 15.8%
- Winthrop 15.8%
- Revere 18.6%
- Chelsea 19%
- Lynn 20%
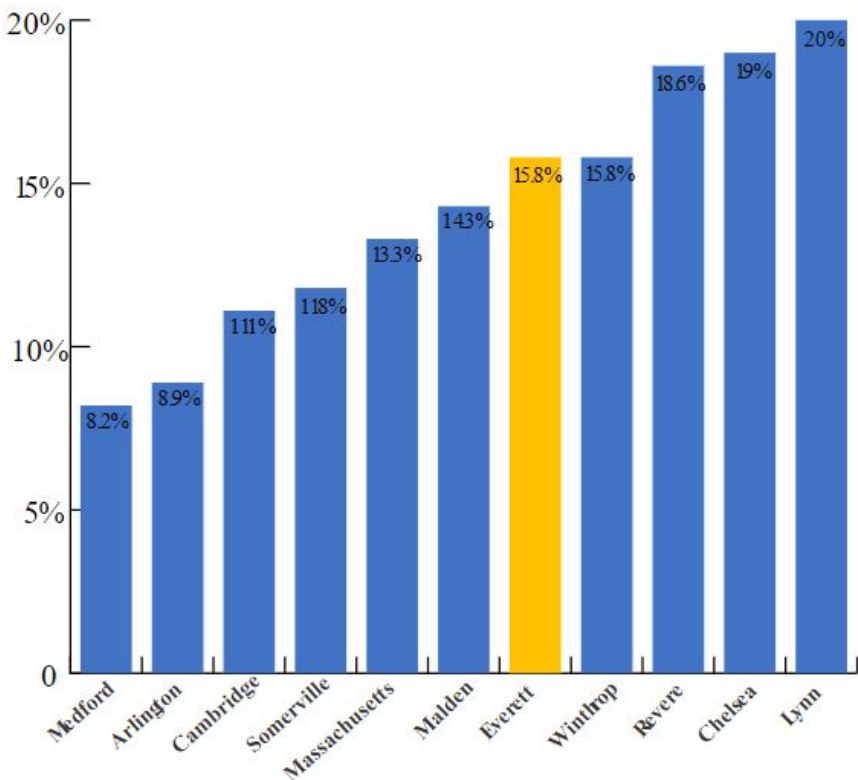
Source: MAPC Digital Access and Equity Plan, 2021. US Census ACS Community Survey
5 Year 2020

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Elements of a Municipal Digital Equity Plan

Community Input

I have issues with dropped or choppy video calls:

Always 11.0%
Frequently 21.5%
I don't have home internet 2.4%
Never 14.6%
Sometimes 50.4%
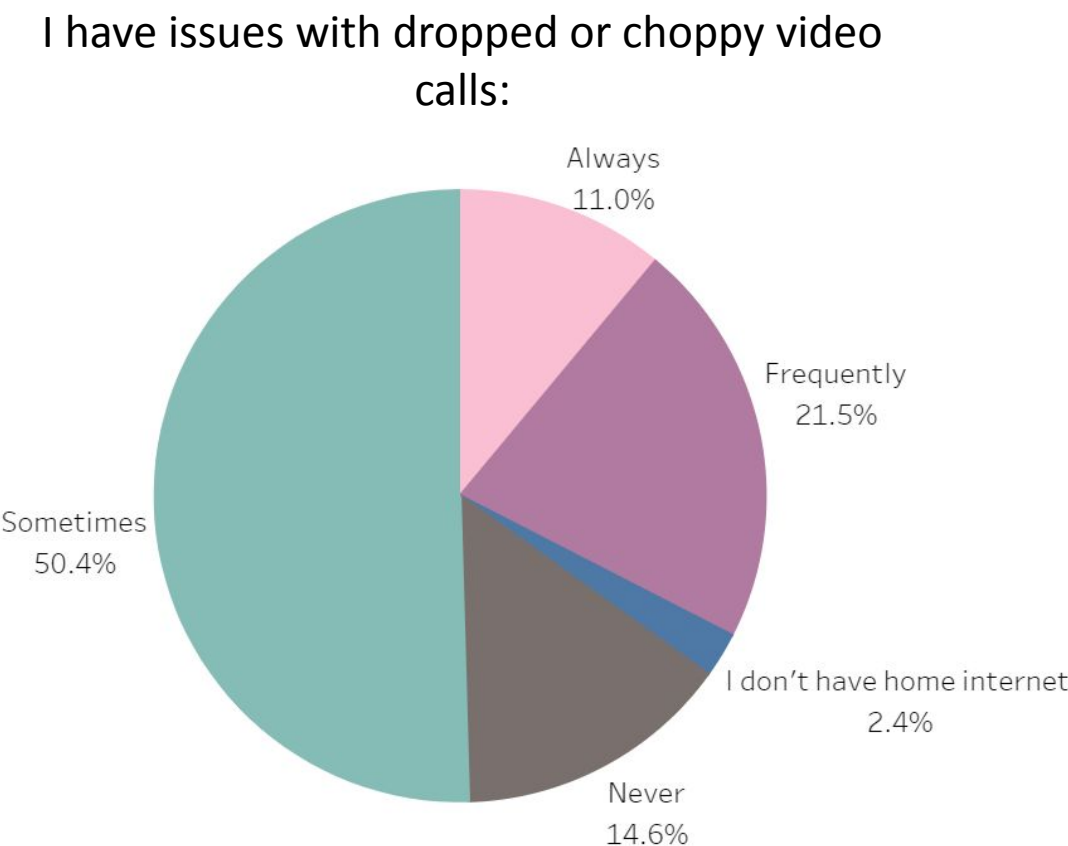
"I live in a 40 unit mid-rise and am told by the internet provider that most of the issues are because the wiring in the building is old. The provider says it's not their problem. We have interruptions all the time, no notice, residents just start calling each other to see if they have wi-fi. Could be down for hours. I work from home and it's a real issue for me."

Source: MAPC Digital Access and Equity Survey, 2021. Everett Respondents. N = 351

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Elements of a Municipal Digital Equity Plan

Stakeholder Strategic Actions

Executive and Legislative Officials →
- Elevate Importance of the Issue
- Allocate Funding
- Permit Access to Public Property/ Rights of Way

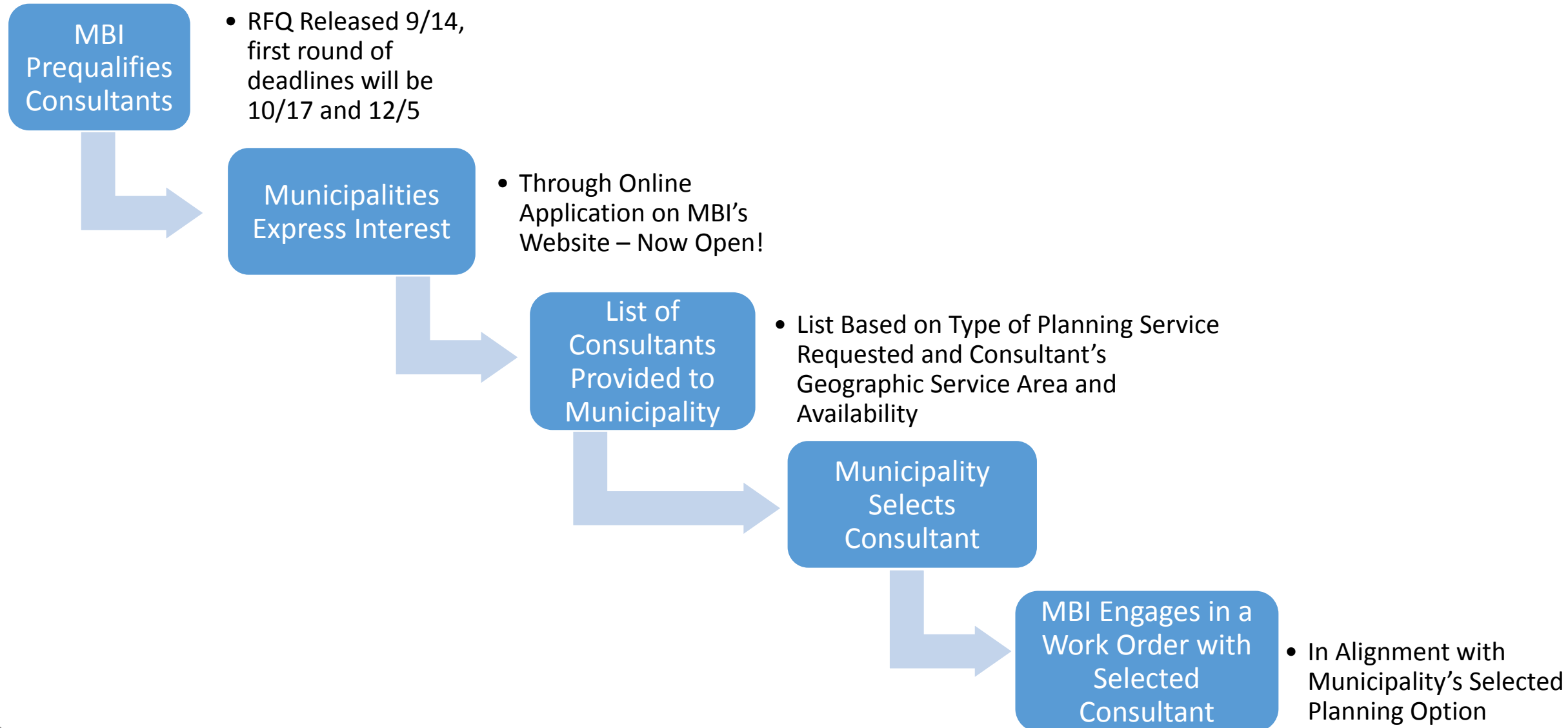**School Districts, Housing Authorities, Libraries, and Community Partners** →
- Promote Subsidized Internet Service Programs
- Provide Digital Literacy Training
- Make Available Public Computer Labs

Planners, IT Departments →
- Deploy WiFi Systems
- Connect Technology to Economic Development Goals
- Support Universal Broadband Goals

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Municipal Digital Equity Planning

MBI Prequalifies Consultants

- RFQ Released 9/14, first round of deadlines will be 10/17 and 12/5

Municipalities Express Interest

- Through Online Application on MBI's Website – Now Open!

List of Consultants Provided to Municipality

- List Based on Type of Planning Service Requested and Consultant's Geographic Service Area and Availability

Municipality Selects Consultant

MBI Engages in a Work Order with Selected Consultant

- In Alignment with Municipality's Selected Planning Option

Online Application Requirements

Basic Information

- Contact Info

- Municipality or Region applying

- Total population covered

- Plan / Charrette option

- Desired start/end date

"Impacted" Populations Data*

- % total pop at or below 300% federal poverty line

- Names of schools qualifying to receive universal free lunch

- HUD "Qualified Census Tracts"

Community Context

- Why a digital equity plan now?

- Desired activities/processes?

- Desired outcomes consultants should be aware of?

- List of key stakeholders

- Description of any existing digital equity programming

- Description of any complimentary planning activities

Municipal Support

- Signed letter by municipal CEO

- Designated municipal "lead" staff member

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Apply Here!

Questions!