



Project Compass:

USDA Broadband Technical
Assistance Grant – Awarded to Merit
Network

Project Compass: USDA BTA Grant

Background

Academic researchers, practitioners, and municipal leaders developed a working paper, the Digital Opportunities Compass, which is based on 25 years of research focused on improving digital opportunities for residents and businesses.

This grant-funded project is based on the Compass research process. Our goal is to support communities to increase digital skills and opportunities for residents and businesses.

Merit will work with communities to develop a connectivity and digital opportunities strategy, conduct sentiment analysis research to understand residents' broadband and digital skills needs, develop community education programs, conduct feasibility studies for infrastructure, lead a community task force, identify both existing state and national resources, recommend future funding sources and support the development of grant narratives.



merit

Merit, the longest running R&E network in the U.S., is an **independent non-profit organization** governed by 12 public universities and supported by over 370 affiliate Members and anchor institutions.

Our Members are community-facing organizations from across the **education, library, government, healthcare and non-profit sectors.**





Merit's mission is connecting organizations and building community

Founded in 1966, Merit owns and operates America's longest-running regional research and education network.

We provide network, security and community services to member organizations that help make our society a better place to learn, discover, work and live – while upholding the principles of an open internet.

RECENT PROJECTS



Michigan Moonshot

Provide communities with expert GIS & broadband support to assist with data collection and mapping, analysis, grant storytelling, and infrastructure planning.



Research

Conduct and publish research on cutting edge network technology, cybersecurity, and societal impacts of technology.



Compass Pilots

Lead three rural MI communities through the Digital Opportunities Compass framework

Funding Overview

- **Grant:** 2023 USDA Broadband Technical Assistance Grant
- **Purpose:** BTA provides financial assistance through cooperative agreements to eligible entities to receive or deliver broadband technical assistance and training and supports the development and expansion of broadband cooperatives.
- **Period of performance:** 24 months - Each community will participate for approximately 12 months
- **Participants:** Eligible areas must be completely contained within a rural area or composed of multiple rural areas.
- **Awarded project:** Leverage the Digital Opportunities Compass framework to develop a connectivity and digital equity strategy in the eight rural communities of Michigan.



Deliverables for Your Community

- Development of a digital equity and infrastructure strategy for your community that can also be leveraged for additional grant applications
- Household-level survey and analysis that identifies residents' sentiments and perceptions regarding digital skills
- Community education and digital training materials
- Feasibility study for broadband connectivity
- Community listening tours
- Identification of potential funding sources
- Grant narrative
- Development of digital equity task force
- Participation in statewide coalition - opportunities for economy of scale

Participation Requirements

- Official endorsement of program
- Participant agreement with Merit
- Task force champion commitment
 - Assistance in recruiting community partners/leaders to join task force
 - Support finding locations to host meetings
 - Information sharing and assistance
- Commitment to the task force meeting schedule
 - Onboarding/discovery call
 - ~6 virtual and 2 in-person task force meetings



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Digital Opportunities

Compass:

Six Components & Indicator Areas



[DOWNLOAD THE WORKING PAPER](#)