Town Council Meeting

Town of Randolph
Digital Equity Plan

March 4, 2024

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TOWN OF RANDOLPH
Incorporated 1793

MBI | MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE | at the MassTech Collaborative

AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTIONS

2. DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN OVERVIEW

3. COMMUNITY NEEDS

4. GOALS & RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

5. NEXT STEPS

DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

With funding from Mass Broadband Institute (MBI), the Town of Randolph contracted VHB to prepare a **Digital Equity Plan** for the Randolph community.

The intent of the Project is to achieve the following:

1. **Guide the Town's decision-making and investments** related to services and infrastructure that will increase access, adoption, and usage of the internet throughout the community
2. **Prepare the Town to apply for funding** from existing or forthcoming state and federal programs to support investment in digital equity
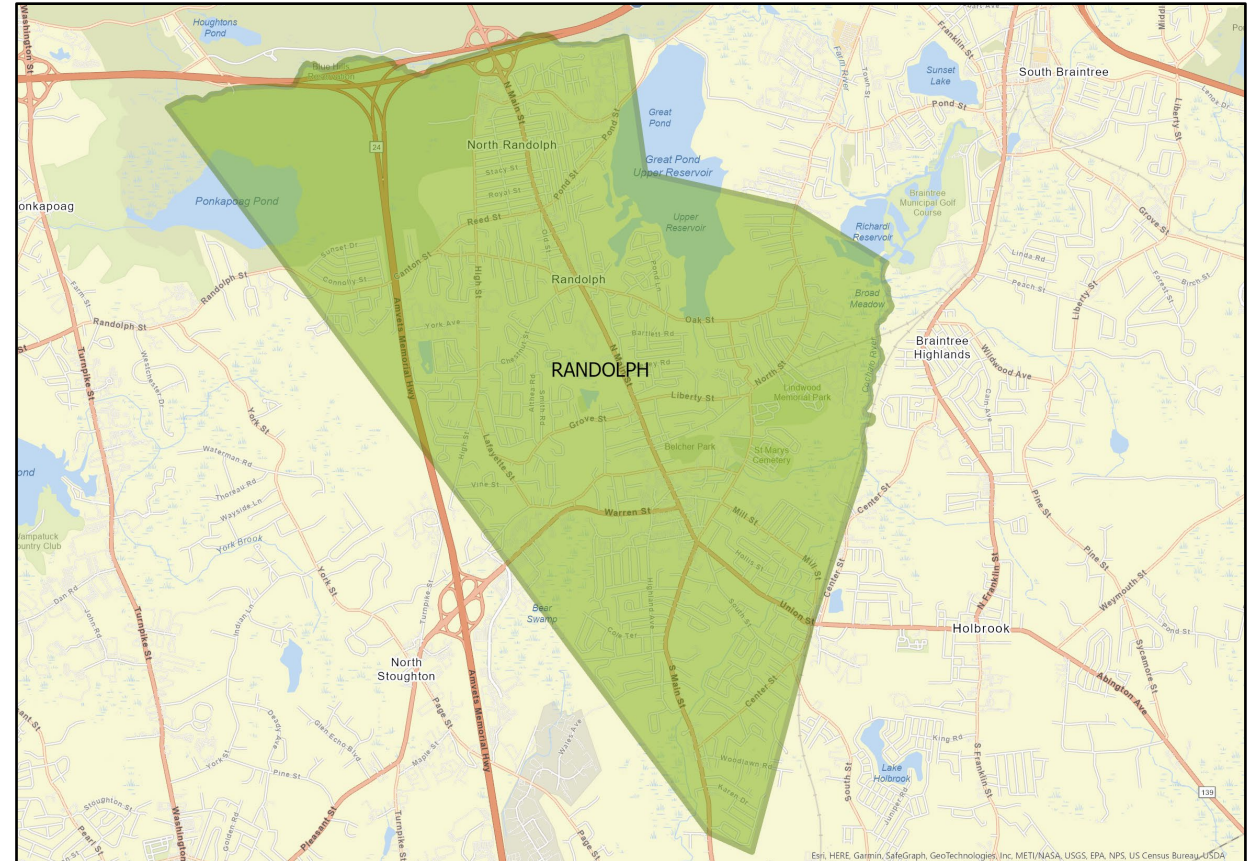
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Elizabeth LaRosee, Director of Library, Recreation, and Community Programs

- Bill Clark, IT Director

- Lt. Christine Morse, Randolph Police Department

- Sharon Parrington-Wright, Library Director, Turner Free Library

- Dr. Amy Hartley-Matteson, Assistant Superintendent, Randolph Public Schools

CONSULTANT TEAM

Luke Mitchell, VHB

Project Manager

Julia Mintz, VHB

Deputy Project Manager

Jennifer Nelson, VHB

Project Planner

Curtis Ostrodka, VHB

Technical Advisor

Steven Anderson, VHB

Technical Advisor

DIGITAL EQUITY

A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy.

Digital divide is the **issue**.
Digital inclusion is **the work**.
Digital equity is **the goal**.

PROCESS

RESEARCH

Foundational Research ✓
Kick-Off Meeting: **March 23rd** ✓
Stakeholder Sessions ✓

DIALOGUE

Public Meeting #1: **May 25th** ✓
Pop-up #1: **June 10th** ✓
Pop-up #2: **September 23rd** ✓
Public Meeting #2: **December 6th**

SYNTHESIS

Prepare Final Digital Equity Plan ✓
Presentation of Digital Equity Plan

Public Engagement

- Total engagement of approximately 200 residents

- Provision of translation and interpretation services

- Stakeholder Interviews:
    - Turner Free Library
    - Randolph Community Partnership
    - Randolph Public Schools
    - US Haitian Chamber of Commerce
    - Elder Affairs

- Tabling Events:
    - Randolph Day
    - Randolph Social Services Fair

- Public Meetings

- MBI Statewide Public Survey

Randolph Day Tabling Event

Digital Equity Measurements*

Internet Access

8% of households do not have a broadband internet subscription.

14% of public survey respondents reported their household internet did not work well enough to meet their household needs.

Device Access

5% of households do not have a computer.

Regarding which devices MBI statewide survey respondents use most to connect to the internet, **77% use a cellphone,** 65% use a laptop computer, 54% use a tablet, and 35% use a desktop computer.

Digital Literacy

93% of respondents reported they are concerned about cybersecurity.

23% of respondents who reported it is hard to pay their monthly internet bill also reported they had not heard about the ACP.

*Sources: MBI Statewide Public Survey, U.S. Census

Internet Access

- A federal program, resulting from COVID-19, that aims to provide wireless internet for low-income households.

- Over 900 Randolph households are still without an internet subscription. There is potential to grow public awareness regarding subsidy programs such as the ACP.

- 52% of survey respondents reported paying more than $50/month for their internet subscription.

Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment (Sept. 2023)	Randolph	Norfolk County
Net New Enrollments Alternative Verification Process	(18)	(220)
Net New Enrollments Verified by School	-	-
Net New Enrollments Lifeline	24	(34)
Net New Enrollments National Verifier Application	(38)	100
Net New Enrollments total	(32)	(154)
Total Alternative Verification Process	5	366
Total Verified by School	-	1
Total Lifeline	542	3,929
Total National Verifier Application	2,069	15,220
Total Subscribers	**2,616 (22% of total households)**	**19,516 (7% of total households)**

Source: Universal Service Administrative Co.: ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker

22% of Randolph's households are enrolled in the ACP – 3X that of Norfolk County.

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Device Access

- While a high percentage of Randolph's residents report having at least one computer, there is a gap in computer access for over 500 households.

- The Turner Free Library is a digital equity hub, providing publicly accessible Wi-Fi, computers, laptops, Apple iPads, and mobile hotspots.

- There are touch boards in all Randolph Public Schools (RPS) classrooms, with Chromebooks and iPads assigned for student use.
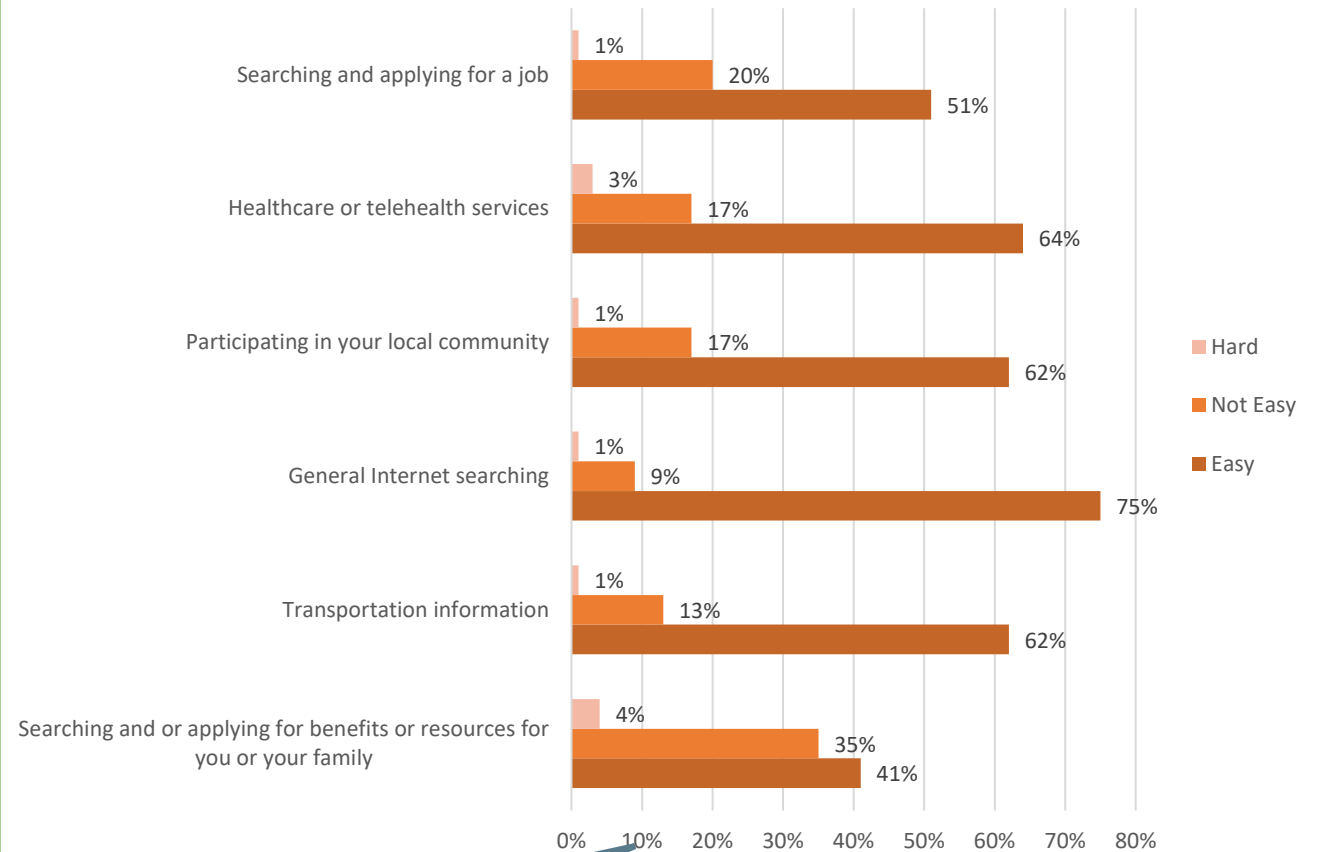

Turner Free Library

Digital Literacy

- There is a need for digital literacy training opportunities for different proficiency levels and language speakers, focusing on typical web-based applications and devices and how to utilize them effectively.

- The Library provides digital literacy training in the form of individual technical assistance on a walk-in basis and computer classes targeting various proficiency levels.

- Randolph Community Partnership incorporates digital literacy training into their curriculum, with a focus on employment (e.g., device use, office etiquette, common software platforms).

Please rank the level of difficulty for what you use the internet for.

Searching and applying for a job — Hard 1%, Not Easy 20%, Easy 51%

Healthcare or telehealth services — Hard 3%, Not Easy 17%, Easy 64%

Participating in your local community — Hard 1%, Not Easy 17%, Easy 62%

General Internet searching — Hard 1%, Not Easy 9%, Easy 75%

Transportation information — Hard 1%, Not Easy 13%, Easy 62%

Searching and or applying for benefits or resources for you or your family — Hard 4%, Not Easy 35%, Easy 41%

Legend: ■ Hard ■ Not Easy ■ Easy

Source: MBI Statewide Digital Equity Survey

Difficulty areas: job-searching, accessing telehealth, understanding community resources

Goal 2:
Expand community outreach
and strengthen **partnerships**.

- *Improve public outreach methods*

- *Ensure outreach is accessible on all devices*

- *Socialize Randolph's digital equity goals*

- *Track community sentiment*

- *Strengthen network of local partners*

- *Maintain relationships with mission-driven non-profits*

Goal 5:
Provide targeted support

for **vulnerable segments of the community**, including **students**, **adults seeking jobs**, and **seniors**.

- *Expand and promote the library's "device advice" program*

- *Enhance programming at the Randolph Community Partnership*

- *Protect the community from common online risks*

- *Train residents on tracking medical records*

- *Strengthen digital literacy training for students*

- *Monitor the use of technology in classrooms*

NEXT STEPS:

Implementation

- **MBI Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program**

- **Local Digital Equity Coalition**