

# Dalton Connects!

*A Municipal Digital Equity Plan*

**September 2024**



Source: Community Recreation Association





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# Acknowledgments

## Town of Dalton: Municipal Staff

- Tom Hutcheson, Town Manager
  - Janko Tomasic, Town Planner
  - Alyssa Maschino, Assistant to Town Manager
  - Mitchell Keil, Town of Dalton Veterans Agent
  - Mitch Lacker, Renatus Solutions
  - Kelly Pizzi, Director Dalton Senior Center
  - Dorin Middlebrook, Dalton Senior Center Administrative Assistant
  - Janet Forest, Director Dalton Public Library
- Town of Dalton: Elected Officials
- Dalton Select Board
  - Heather Hunt, Town Clerk
- Community Partners:
- Central Berkshire Regional School District
  - Community Recreation Association
  - Dalton Community Television
  - Dalton Housing Authority
  - Dalton Knights of Columbus Ch. 411
  - Dalton Public Library
  - Dalton Senior Center
  - RBD Electronics
  - St. Agnes Food Pantry
  - Wahconah Regional High School

## Berkshire Regional Planning Commission:

- Wylie Goodman, Senior Economic Development Planner
- Laura Brennan, Economic Development Program Manager
- Mark Maloy, GIS, Data & IT Manager
- Jocelyn Latvalla, Economic Development Program Associate
- Andrew McKeever, Community Development Planner
- Robert Ireland, American Connection Core

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# Introduction

In September 2023, with funding from the [Massachusetts Broadband Institute](#) (MBI), the State's Broadband Agency, Dalton town leaders and community members, supported by the [Berkshire Regional Planning Commission](#) (BRPC), came together for a project to understand how Dalton residents use the internet and how the town, along with local, regional, and statewide partners, could work together to address digital access and equity as it impacts residents' quality of life. The project resulted in part from an awareness that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic in towns and cities across the U.S. that not all residents had equal access to affordable, reliable internet and the devices and skills they needed to fully participate in their communities.'

Before the pandemic, people who lacked internet service, devices, or skills could often get by doing activities in person or on paper. Since then, towns and the nonprofits serving vulnerable residents have become more aware that internet access and skills are no longer a luxury or optional asset but rather a necessity of life that guarantees people have support when they need it most.

## The Digital Equity Act

The federal government saw the impact of what is referred to as the "digital divide" and allocated \$1.2 trillion to strengthen the nation's infrastructure, including broadband, through the [Bipartisan Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act](#) (IIJA). And, recognizing that digital equity goes beyond fiber and cable, they included money for the [Digital Equity Act](#) to address the factors underlying the digital divide, namely:



**Digital Equity (devices):** The condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology they need for full participation in U.S. society and its economy;



**Digital Inclusion (access and affordability):** The activities needed to ensure all people in the U.S. have access to and use of affordable information and communication technologies;



**Digital Literacy (skills):** The skills associated with using technology so people can find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information with one another.

Through the Digital Equity Act, states received money to create State Digital Equity Plans and, in Massachusetts, MBI offered cities and towns the opportunity to write Municipal Digital Equity Plans to address local needs with two additional goals:

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

Dalton selected BRPC as its consultant to guide its Municipal Digital Equity Plan with a focus on residents the federal government refers to as "Covered Populations." They include:

- Rural residents *\*everyone in Dalton*
- People age 60 and older

- People with disabilities
- Veterans
- People in households with incomes at or below 150 percent of poverty
- English language learners and people with low literacy
- People who belong to a racial or ethnic minority group (i.e., Black, Indigenous, People of Color: BIPOC)
- Incarcerated individuals

The plan that follows reflects a nearly year-long inquiry into the needs of Covered Populations in Dalton and includes data collection, surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The plan starts with an overview of existing conditions based on American Community Survey (ACS) and publicly available demographic and related data. It then highlights the work of Dalton organizations working to close the digital divide and provides an analysis of residents' responses to a statewide digital equity survey. Narrative summaries from focus groups and interviews capture the lived experiences of residents and, based on a holistic analysis of all quantitative and qualitative information, concludes with actionable recommendations the town and its partners can pursue to close the gap between the digital haves and have nots as well as potential funding they can pursue to support the longevity and sustainability of this work into the future.



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

Source: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

# Existing Conditions

Located at the base of the Berkshire Mountains, the town of Dalton serves as a bedroom suburb for the city of Pittsfield and is the third largest town in Berkshire County (population 6,330; 2,884 households). Dalton prides itself on its welcoming spirit, including to through-hikers who stop to eat, sleep, and explore this [Appalachian Trail Community](#) as they make their way from Maine to Georgia. Dalton's downtown has grown in recent years to meet the needs of these residents and visitors, and is now reimagining itself, notably with the private re-development of a former industrial building, The Stationery Factory, which now features a world-class concert venue, artist studios, healing arts practices, a brewpub, and a business that refurbishes and recycles computers. That kind of innovation, best characterized by one of Dalton's most respected companies, Crane & Co., is perhaps why the town boasts one of the county's most state-of-the-art high schools and has one of the Commonwealth's highest rates of middle-school students taking computer science and digital literacy classes.

## Covered Populations

Given that Dalton's entire population meets the federal government's Covered Population definition of "Rural," the section that follows focuses on the conditions of smaller populations within the town such as older adults and veterans. Due to high margins of error in the American Community Survey for small populations, however, percentages and numbers should be read as estimates and interpreted with caution.

### People Aged 60 and Older

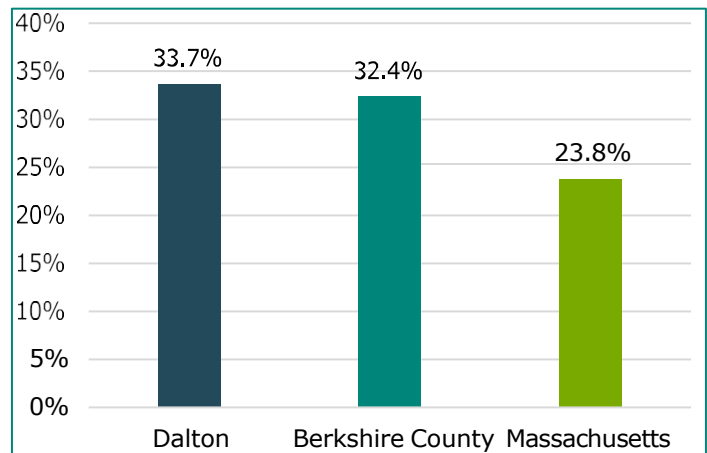


Adults age 60 and over make up nearly 34 percent of Dalton's population (2,135) with the town having a higher percentage of older adults and adults 65 and older living alone than Berkshire County or Massachusetts. The percentage of grandparents caring for grandchildren is also higher in Dalton than in the Commonwealth but slightly lower than Berkshire County.

A 2021 survey by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that [while technology use rose nationally among older adults during the pandemic](#), nearly 60 percent of adults 50 or older reported concerns about their ability to afford internet service. One year later, the same survey found more than 70

percent of those 50 and older relied on technology to socialize, shop, bank, and conduct telehealth, highlighting older adults' deepening reliance on the internet because of the pandemic. Dalton's large older adult population suggests the importance of providing these residents, especially those on fixed incomes, with a) help applying for subsidies or discounts that lower their home internet or cellphone bills (e.g., Affordable Connectivity Program or Lifeline) and/or b) identifying alternative ways to help them get online, such as through Wi-Fi hotspot lending through the senior center and/or Dalton Public Library.

Figure 1: Comparison of Population Age 60 and Older



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "ACS DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP05, 2021. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

## People with Disabilities

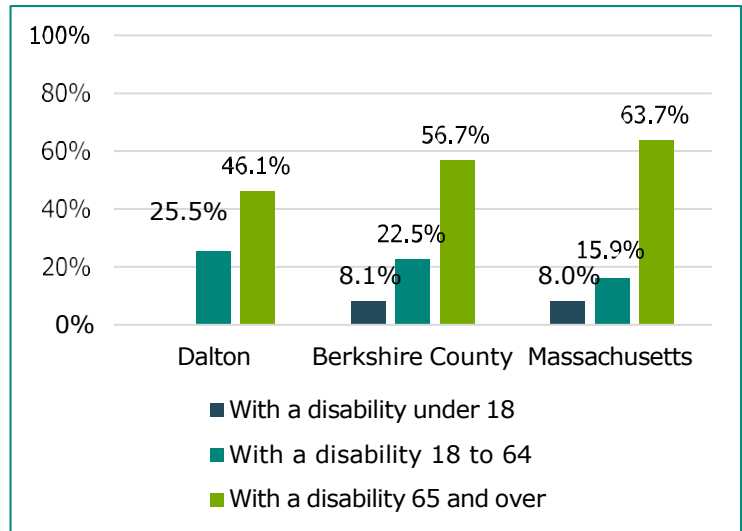


Dalton has a slightly higher percentage of adults with a disability than Berkshire County (15.9% versus 16.3%) but a *significantly* higher percentage than the state (12.6%). Figure 2 compares people with disabilities among age groups 18 and under, 18 to 64, 65 and older. Across all age groups 18 and older, the three most common disabilities in Dalton are:

- Independent living (8.2%)
- Ambulatory/Mobility (7.9%)
- Cognitive (5.5%)

Adults aged 65 and older are most impacted by mobility challenges while those younger than 65 most often face difficulties with independent living. The town has two residential care facilities, Craneville Place and Sugar Hill, supporting people who have difficulty living independently.

Figure 2: Comparison of Population with a Disability



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "DISABILITY CHARACTERISTICS." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table S1810, 2021. Accessed on February 29, 2024.

[Studies suggest that people with disabilities are less likely than those without to own a computer or smartphone.](#) Among the ways Dalton may wish to help residents with disabilities are a) acquiring free or low-cost devices from regional refurbishment programs (e.g., Alliance for Digital Equity, Computers4People) that people can apply for through community partners based on need; b) expanding device-lending through the senior center and/or public library; and c) working with regional organizations that specialize in adaptive technologies such as United Cerebral Palsy to ensure residents have devices suited to their needs. The senior center, with funding from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA), is now offering hybrid classes (i.e., an educational model where some students attend in-person while others join virtually from home), to homebound older adults, which serves as an example of the town's dedication to addressing residents' challenges and an opportunity to expand to include younger, homebound residents with disabilities.

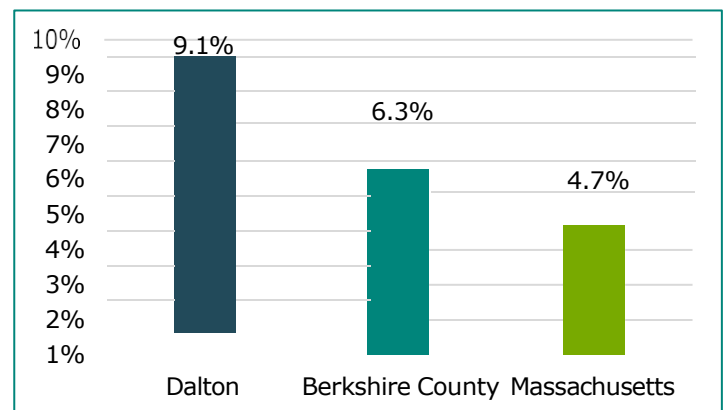
## Veterans



Dalton has a significantly higher percentage of residents who are veterans (9.1%) than Berkshire County (6.3%) or Massachusetts (4.7%). [The American Legion](#) reports

120 registered veterans in Dalton who served in the following military theaters:

- Vietnam: 54
- Unknown: 35
- Korea: 12
- Lebanon: 6
- Persian Gulf: 6
- Global Terrorism: 3



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Veteran Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2101, 2022. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2101>

Dalton has a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) who also serves North Adams. He visits veterans once a week at the Dalton Senior Center and reports meeting approximately 18 clients per month there (30 interactions). Nearly all veterans served by the VSO have smartphones, but just over half have computers and even fewer have printers or scanners. The VSO reports that most veterans need help navigating more complex technology, noting that few send emails unless they need help with benefits and generally prefer calling or coming in-person to conduct business rather than using Zoom or Facetime.

Given that veterans organizations nationally report an [over 200 percent increase in the use of telehealth during the pandemic](#), Dalton agencies serving veterans may wish to consider a) providing vets with-focused digital literacy classes or one-on-one guidance at places they feel comfortable such as the American Legion Hall or veteran’s agent’s office; and b) distributing large-screen devices to build veterans’ confidence using computers for more complex activities such as accessing telehealth and mental health services.

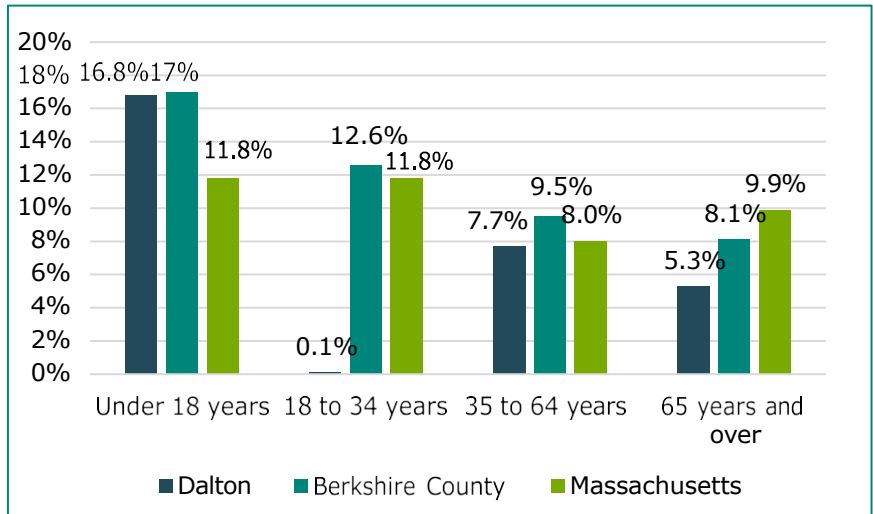
**Households with Incomes At or Below 150 Percent of Poverty**



The percentage of Dalton residents whose incomes are at or below the poverty level is slightly to moderately lower than that of Berkshire County and the state, with variations based on age. Across all ages, poverty is highest for those under 18.

A national study by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that 36 percent of low-income parents found it *very or somewhat difficult* to help their children with technology and online learning during the pandemic as compared to 18 percent of high-income parents.

**Figure 4: Income in the Past 12 Months: Percent Below Poverty**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1701, 2021.

Dalton’s higher child poverty rate suggests the importance of a) assessing early the digital needs of caretakers of low-income youth as part of school intake to identify whether they need help securing internet services or devices; b) offering free and low-cost digital skills classes at the Youth Center, Community Recreation Association, or after-school programs; c) starting local chapters of national organizations such as Code.org and Girls Can Code to spark interest in technology at earlier ages; d) providing large-screen devices and digital skills classes to parents and guardians, including grandparents caring for grandchildren, to ensure they can access school information; and e) funding and promoting internships for older youth at local companies and nonprofits that prepare them for 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology careers.



## People with a Language Barrier, including English Learners and Those with Low Literacy



Dalton has 195 foreign-born residents (3.1% of the total population), nearly 84 percent of whom entered the country before 2010, most from Europe. Across all households, nearly 92 percent speak English as their primary language; three percent (211) speak English and Spanish. After Spanish, Russian, Polish, or Slavic languages (17) and Mandarin and Cantonese (11) are the predominant languages spoken at home in bilingual households. A 2019 U.S. Department of Education study, [Supporting English Learners through Technology](#), found that a common barrier for English language learners was a lack of digital resources at home. While Dalton has a small number of non-English speaking households, the town may wish to a) ensure that translation options are easily accessible on its website; b) stay apprised of population changes, including an increase in newly arrived immigrants, who may need information in their native languages; and c) connect residents who speak languages other than English to organizations such as Literacy Volunteers, Berkshire Community College, and Berkshire Immigrant Center, where they can receive not only multilingual services but a sense of social cohesion.

## Members of Racial or Ethnic Minority Groups (Black, Indigenous, People of Color - BIPOC)



Most of Dalton's residents are white (94.7%; 5,998), with Hispanic/Latino residents accounting for the second largest ethnic group (2.9%; 183). Residents of other races and ethnicities (e.g., Black/African American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American) make up the balance (2.4%).

Given Dalton's small number of BIPOC residents, the town may wish to a) establish closer relations with or seek guidance from digital equity navigators in Pittsfield, which has a larger BIPOC population, to ensure digital equity services feel welcoming and inclusive; and b) enlist a BIPOC and/or bilingual digital literacy instructor to provide classes through Dalton Public Television to demonstrate the town's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Incarcerated



According to a report from the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, no Dalton residents are currently being held at the [Berkshire County Jail and House of Correction](#). The [Berkshire County Sheriff's Office](#) runs [2nd Street Second Chances](#), a program that, since 2022, has provided 575 formally incarcerated individuals county-wide with services supporting positive re-entry. Pittsfield is also home to the [Pittsfield Community Justice Support Center](#), which provides similar wraparound services. *\*Data from DOC can change frequently and does not indicate to which community an inmate may return after incarceration.*

[Many studies link digital literacy training during incarceration to lower rates of re-offending after release.](#) Although no Dalton residents are currently involved with the Sheriff's Office, the town can a) help those returning to the community from incarceration connect to wraparound digital equity online and in-person services; b) advocate to support digital skills training for those incarcerated and formerly incarcerated to help with positive re-entry; and c) identify local partners and/or a digital navigator able to offer digital support, including education about low-cost internet plans and other resources, that can help people adjust to community life and gain job skills.

# Digital Equity Indicators

In addition to using American Community Survey data to identify who in Dalton is most likely impacted by digital access, adoption, and affordability challenges, other socioeconomic indicators can also be considered as part of the town and its partners' efforts to close the digital divide.

## Environmental Justice Communities

When considering where digital equity support could have the greatest impact, one consideration is whether a census tract or block group is an Environmental Justice Community in which residents face greater challenges due to factors such as poverty, high energy costs, health disparities, lack of housing, and pollution. [EPA's Disadvantaged Community Map](#) identifies three Dalton block groups that qualify as EJ communities based on their having a higher than average percentage of households in poverty (Block Group 2 - 306 people; Block Group 3 - 258 people; Block Group 4 - 302 people). Block Group 3 also has a higher percentage of residents who struggle with heart disease, cancer, and disabilities; have limited English; and live in close proximity to flood-prone areas. To help people in these Block Groups, Dalton town leaders may wish to a) ensure these higher-risk residents are prioritized for devices and skill services; and b) pilot programs in these neighborhoods before expanding them town-wide.

## Broadband, Internet, and Computer Ownership



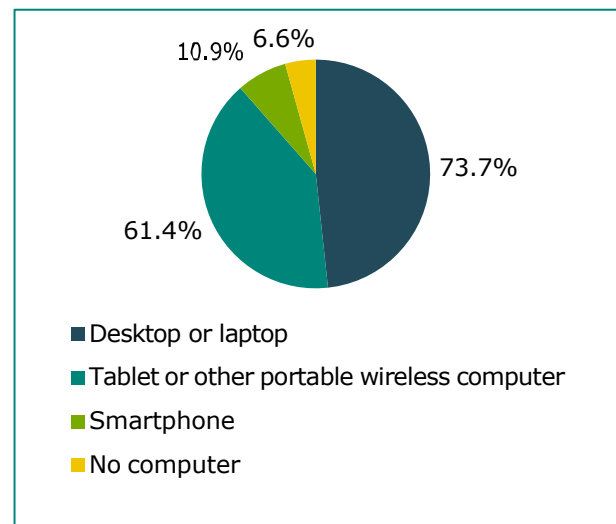
The percentage of households who have high-speed internet and own a computer is another indicator of where a community stands vis a vis the digital divide. Of 2,884 households in Dalton, nearly 89 percent

have a computer and broadband. However, the percentage who own a computer but lack broadband is higher in Dalton than in Berkshire County or Massachusetts. The percentage of households who own large-screen devices is also slightly lower in Dalton as compared to the county and state. In contrast, the number of Dalton residents who rely only on a smartphone (10.9%) to get online is significantly higher than the county or state.

[The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society](#) estimates that for households with annual incomes below \$30,000 close to a quarter lack a smartphone and more than four in 10 are without broadband or a desktop or laptop, while these devices are common among households earning \$100,000 or more a year.

[Berkshire Benchmarks](#) has documented that 20.4 percent (328) of Dalton households earn \$30K or less per year. Strategies Dalton could use to assist these less-resourced households acquire high-speed internet and large-screen devices include a) using Digital Equity Implementation funding from MBI to pilot digital courses that reward students with devices and a year of free Wi-Fi via a hotspot; b) creating and promoting a long-term (e.g., two to three month) device-lending program at the library and/or senior center; c) identifying a private or nonprofit computer refurbisher to pilot a large-screen device distribution program; and d) working with the high school or a local vocational school to develop an apprenticeship or internship

Figure 5: Comparison of Devices Owned



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "TYPES OF COMPUTERS AND INTERNET SUBSCRIPTIONS." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2801, 2021. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

program to teach device refurbishment resulting in more large-screen devices entering the community. Long-term, town leaders may wish to consider advocating for the passage of a statewide Digital Right to Repair Law to boost access to affordable computer devices across the Commonwealth.

**Table 1: Relationship Between Educational Attainment and Computer and Internet Ownership**

	Households With Computer		Households Without Computer			
	<i>*Households with and without a computer together total 100%</i>					
	<i>With Broadband Internet</i>		<i>Without Broadband Internet</i>			
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Less than a high school graduate or equivalency	146	75.3%	25	12.9%	23	11.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency), some college or associate's degree	1,963	76.9%	376	14.7%	213	8.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,897	99.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "TYPES OF COMPUTERS AND INTERNET SUBSCRIPTIONS." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates

Households in Dalton most likely to lack internet but own a computer are those in which the head of household has less than a four-year college degree (14.7%). Dalton households without a computer at all are more likely to be those in which the head of household has not completed high school (11.9%).

To address this education-based disparity, the town could a) encourage local schools to survey parents during student enrollment and parent-teacher meetings to identify those that need internet service or devices and refer them to area resources to secure one or both; and b) educate residents who have not earned a college degree about resources such as William Stickney Adult Learning Center and Berkshire Community College where they can use the [Northstar Digital Literacy Program](#) and receive large-screen devices to further their education.

**Income**

**\$** Enrolling income-eligible residents in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which sunset in February 2024 is an important strategy to close the digital divide. Launched at the end of 2021, the ACP was a federally funded program that lowered internet service for qualifying households by \$30 a month and up to \$75 a month for households on Tribal lands. Eligible families could also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to buy a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from a participating provider if they contributed more than \$10 but less than \$50 toward the purchase. While the program targeted households with incomes at or below 200 percent of Federal Poverty, having a household member who met at least one of the criteria below also made a household eligible:

- Assistance Programs: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Federal Public Housing, Veteran’s Pension or Survivor Benefits, Social Security Income (SSI), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), or Lifeline;
- Tribal Specific Programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or Tribal Head Start (income-based);

- Federal Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision;
- Federal College Pell Grant;
- Broadband Providers' Low-Income Internet Program Qualifications.

In February 2024, The Benton Institute estimated that 1,030 Dalton households qualified for ACP while only 419 were enrolled. The end of ACP could hit once-enrolled Dalton households even harder given the town's higher median housing costs (\$1,296) and the larger share of households whose gross rent represents over 25 percent of their household income (55%; 355 households).

Dalton town leaders could address the impact of ACP ending by a) engaging a digital navigator to work with schools, food pantries, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, and affordable housing agencies to help residents renegotiate their internet bills or identify alternative internet access options (e.g., Lifeline); b) identifying a digital skill provider (e.g., Tech Goes Home; Tech Foundry) to offer online training that includes free devices or a year of free Wi-Fi via a hotspot upon graduation; and c) advocating with fellow Berkshire County leaders to have Congress re-fund ACP or create an alternate subsidy program.

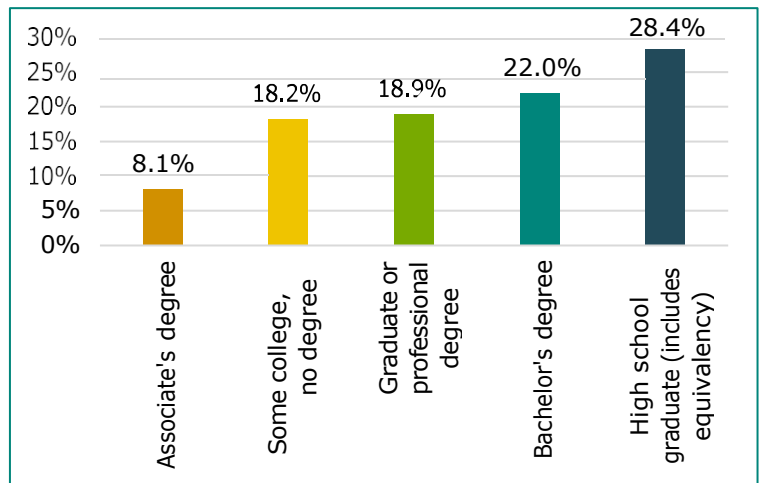
### Educational Attainment



The highest grade a person has completed in school is another potential indicator of a digital divide. In Dalton, nearly 60 percent of residents 25 and older lack a bachelor's degree, suggesting a lower level of educational attainment relative to the county and state.

Dalton may wish to a) provide stipends to older youth and young adults disinclined toward college to help them earn micro-credentials or certificates in technology fields and/or b) seek grants to create a downtown "tech hub," where people can "drop-in" for digital skill classes. To put the benefits of such training in context, among the occupations with the highest number of projected annual openings in Berkshire County between 2020 and 2030 are five that a) most likely require minimum digital skills; b) offer entry without a college degree, and c) pay over \$40,000 a year.

**Figure 6: Comparison of Educational Attainment Among Dalton Residents Age 25 and Over**



U.S. Census Bureau. "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP02, 2022, Accessed on January 23, 2024

**Table 2: Fastest Growing Occupations in Berkshire County (2020-30)**

Occupation	Annual Openings	Typical Education Needed for Entry	2022 Mean Annual Wage
First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support	71	High school diploma or equivalent	\$62,965
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	97	High school diploma or equivalent	\$52,575
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	97	Some college, no degree	\$50,081
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Med	62	High school diploma or equivalent	\$45,716
Office Clerks, General	108	High school diploma or equivalent	\$43,401

Source: Department of Economic Research: Long Term Occupational Projections, Berkshire County WDA

### Employment



There are just over 3,000 people over the age of 16 employed in Dalton. The percentage of Dalton residents in the civilian labor force is comparable to the county but significantly lower than the state (60.4% versus 67.1%). A significantly lower percentage report working virtually (184, 6.2%) despite many offices shifting to remote or hybrid work after the pandemic. Dalton’s unemployment rate (2.4%) is lower than the county and state, however few Dalton residents work in the Information sector, a possible indicator of the need for making advanced information technology and data science training more available to residents at younger ages.

**Table 3: Comparison of Employment and Unemployment Rates**

	Dalton		Berkshire County	Massachusetts
	#	%	%	
In Civilian Labor Force	3,136	60.4%	61.1%	67.1%
Employed	3,012	58%	57.9%	63.5%
Unemployed	124	2.4%	3.3%	3.6%
Armed Forces	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Not in the Labor Force (students, stay-at-home parents, retired workers)	2,058	39.6%	38.8%	32.8%

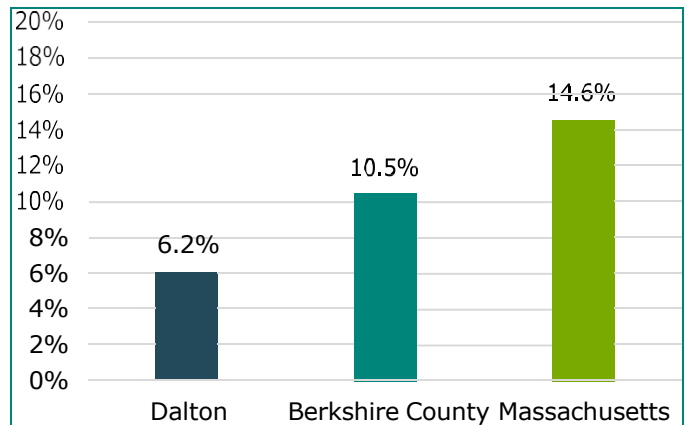
Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Selected Population Data Profiles, Table DP03, 2021. Accessed on September 30, 2023.

[A February 2023 report by the National Skills Coalition](#) found that 92 percent of all jobs today require digital skills. Despite Dalton's low unemployment rate increasing residents’ access to computer skills and software programming could provide a pipeline of workers for businesses at the Stationery Factory and allow more young people to stay in Dalton to do remote work.

## Industry Diversification and Worker Readiness

Table 4 (page 17) shows the number of people employed in key industries in Dalton and a subjective assessment as to the digital skill level each requires. There are less than 50 people working in Information, according to the ACS. Although the data comes with a high margin of error, it suggests the potential to a) incentivize young people to not only train for roles in the Information industry but also return to Dalton to start small businesses and companies after graduation; b) have the high school partner with local businesses to create digital skill internships to encourage a pipeline of future workers; and c) provide public transportation stipends to low-income residents who lack cars so they can more easily attend digital skill classes at Berkshire Community College and/or MassHire.

Figure 7: Percent of Residents Working From Home



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Selected Population Data Profiles, Table DP03, 2021. Accessed on September 30, 2023.



Source: *The Berkshire Eagle*

### The Stationery Factory: A COMMUNITY ASSET

- 25 Businesses
- ~50 Employees
- 25 Companies using technology with positions requiring low to high digital skills
- Digital Skills Used: Adobe Suite, CAD, Microsoft Suite, Audio and Lighting Production Software



Source: Crane Currency

### **CRANE CURRENCY: A COMMUNITY ASSET**

- 350 Employees at the Dalton location
- Positions requiring low to high digital skills (e.g., machine operator, maintenance technician, substrate designer)
- Digital Skills Sought: Basic computer skills; Microsoft Suite: Outlook, Word, Excel, Project; Intermediate to high computer skills; Jira, Smartsheet, JD Edwards, Illustrator, Adobe Suite, CAD



Source: Sinicon Plastics

### **SINICON PLASTICS: A COMMUNITY ASSET**

- 45 Employees
- Positions requiring intermediate to high digital skills (e.g., machine operator - Computerized Numerically Controlled Milling Machine)





Source: Ashuelot Park LLC

### **ASHUELOT PARK LLC: A COMMUNITY ASSET**

- Ashuelot Park LLC offers leasing of office, manufacturing, and warehouse space
- Northeast Fabricators & Mechanical Services
- 19 Employees
- Positions requiring basic to high digital skills: equipment operator, draftsman
- Digital Skills Sought: CAD

**Table 4: Employment by Industry in Dalton and Assessment of Digital Skill Level Required**

Industry	# Employed
<b>High</b>	
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	275
Administrative and Support and Waste Management Services	158
Finance and Insurance	137
Information	46
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0
<b>Medium to High</b>	
Health Care and Social Assistance	703
Manufacturing	309
Educational Services	258
Other Services, Except Public Administration	232
Public Administration	164
<b>Medium</b>	
Wholesale Trade	50
Utilities	36
Real Estate and Rental And Leasing	26
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil And Gas Extraction	0
<b>Low</b>	
Construction	209
Retail Trade	165
Accommodation and Food Services	154
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	59
Transportation and Warehousing	31
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Industry by Sex for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2403, 2022.

**Internet Availability, Affordability, And Performance**



Determining the state of digital equity in a town requires analyzing not only factors intrinsic to residents such as device ownership, skills, and literacy but also extrinsic factors, namely, the availability and reliability of affordable high-speed broadband from a competitive diversity of providers.

Small towns like Dalton often have limited choice among Internet Service Providers (ISPs) because fewer cable and fiber (e.g., Spectrum, Comcast) and fixed wireless (e.g., Verizon, T-Mobile) operators see a business case to be made in regions with a) a smaller than average current and future customer base; b) a larger than average number of customers who qualify for low-income subsidies or are likely to sign-up for basic service; and c) challenging and dispersed geography which makes infrastructure expensive.

Ten towns in Massachusetts have addressed the lack of ISP competitiveness by becoming municipal broadband providers (e.g., Braintree, Concord, Holyoke, and Quincy). Others, those without internet service previously, found success with hybrid arrangements (e.g., Alford, Becket, Otis, Washington, and Windsor) in which the town assumed building costs then partnered with a private ISP to a) provide retail service; b) give the town a say in the rate structure; and c) put in place a revenue-sharing agreement that served the town’s long-term economic goals. Concord, the longest-serving municipal broadband provider in the

Commonwealth, while profitable has been impacted by inflation that has raised the cost of their build-outs and points to the imperative for towns considering municipal broadband to conduct a thorough feasibility study using an experienced broadband professional to determine whether municipal makes sense in their context.

Educating the public about competing broadband models, as outlined in the Rockefeller Institute of Government’s [“Should States Fund Municipal Broadband and Cooperatives?”](#) – and connecting town leaders with the [Massachusetts Broadband Coalition](#) – could help Dalton leaders and residents make an informed decision about how to improve service while keeping costs within reach for residents, particularly in the event that startups come to town seeking to leverage the federal government’s Broadband, Expansion, and Deployment (BEAD) funding to expand service to unserved and underserved locations.

The information below from [MBI’s Public Beta Broadband Map](#), informed by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) data, details Dalton’s ISP landscape in terms of provider competition, coverage, and speed. Dalton reportedly has 2,699 broadband serviceable locations; 99.6 percent of which Charter Communications (Spectrum) serves. Although Westfield Gas City Electric (dba Whip City Fiber) is listed as a provider, they serve no known locations currently. The highest speed Charter offers is 35 upload and 1000 download Megabits per second (Mbps), but 99.6 percent of Dalton households request 100/20 Mbps Whip City Fiber can provide speeds as high as 1000/1000 Mbps symmetrical, but only two locations in Dalton receive that service.

MBI categorizes Dalton’s ISP landscape as having “little to no competition” because Spectrum has a near monopoly on service and is the only company providing speeds up to 1,000 Megabits per second (Mbps) download.

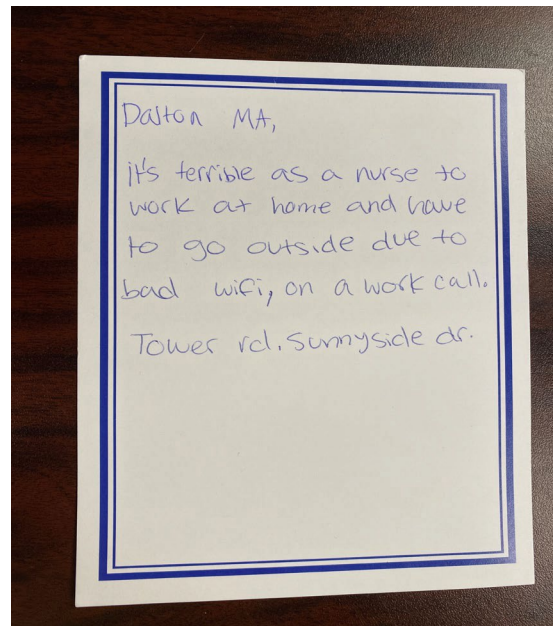


Photo: Jocelyn Latvalla

**Table 5: Internet Service Provider Comparison Speeds and Types**

Provider Name	Technology	Max Advertised Download (Mbps)	Max Ad. Upload (Mbps)	# BSLs w/ Service Available	% BSLs w/ Service Available
Charter Communications, Inc.	Cable	1000	35	2689	99.6%
Westfield Gas City Electric (dba Whip City Fiber)	Fiber	1000	1000	2	0.07%

Source: This data is extracted from the Massachusetts Broadband Map, developed by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI). The data is current as of at least February 22, 2024.

### Internet Speed

The fastest residential broadband speed in the U.S. is 1 gigabit (Gbp) simultaneous (equal upload and download); the slowest considered broadband by the federal government was 3 Mbps upload and 25 Mbps download for basic cable routed through a fiber hub miles from the end user with the “last mile” provided via coaxial copper. More recently, the FCC upgraded its definition of broadband to 20 Mbps upload and 100 Mbps download. ISPs charge customers more for faster speeds but confirming whether advertised speeds

match what customers pay can be difficult due to factors ranging from distance between the computer and router; age of a user's computer; number of people trying to get online simultaneously; type of activity(ies) in which user(s) are engaged (e.g., gaming versus email); user(s) choice of browser; and geography.

**Table 6: Ookla Speed Test**

Speed and Quality Results	# of Tests
Jitter > 50 ms	217
Latency > 100 ms	16
Latency > 500 ms	4
Speeds < 25/3 Mbps	169
Speeds < 50/10 Mbps	344
Speeds < 100/20 Mbps	805
Speeds at least 25/3 Mbps	1,298
Speeds at least 50/100 Mbps	1,024
Speeds at least 100/20 Mbps	318
Speeds at least 100/100 Mbps	1
<b>Total Tests</b>	<b>1,656</b>

Source Ookla Speed Tests; MBI

One of the most reliable ways to measure customers' internet experiences is through speed tests. The company Ookla has provided 1,656 to Dalton resulting in the identification off 1,298 locations with at least 25/3 Mbps download/upload speeds; 1,024 with at least 50/10 Mbps; 318 with 100/20 Mbps; and one with 100/100 Mbps. The Ookla data suggest that a significantly smaller number of locations in Dalton meet the new high-speed broadband definition. To address the situation, Dalton town leaders may need to work with residents to determine whether factors in their control (e.g., age of router or computer) are affecting results and could be addressed through equipment and device upgrades.

# Digital Equity Assets



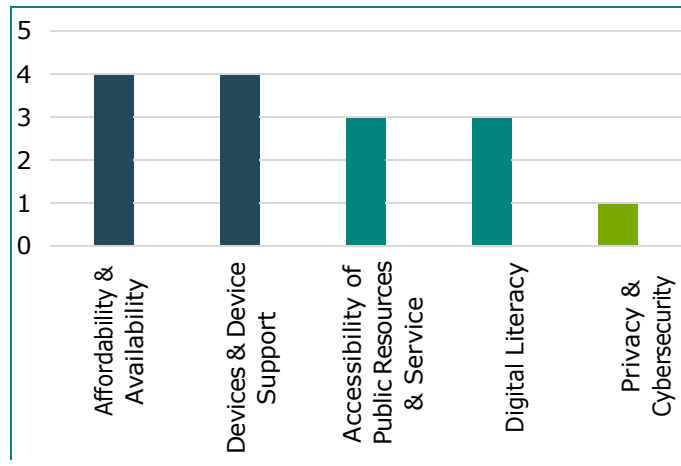
In addition to learning how digital equity challenges affect individuals and households, the Existing Conditions Analysis also looks at digital equity assets: individuals, programs, and organizations working to close the digital divide or well-positioned to do so in the future because they serve one or more of the Covered Populations.

As of February 2024, six organizations serving Dalton residents, not all based in Dalton (identified by \* if located outside of town) were listed on the [State’s Asset Map Inventory](#):

- Community Recreation Association (includes the Dalton Youth Center)
- Dalton Council on Aging / Senior Center
- Dalton Free Public Library
- Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity\*
- Hillcrest Educational Foundations\*
- Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County\*

The list does not include all organizations in Dalton serving Covered Populations, only those that replied to the State’s Asset Map Inventory. With more engagement, more Dalton organizations could and should be included in the future, among them:

- Dalton Community Television
- Dalton Housing Authority
- Food pantries operated by faith-based institutions



Given their trusted relationships with the Covered Populations, all these organizations are well-positioned to provide digital navigator services such as information and resource sharing about digital literacy classes, help with ACP re-enrollment, and device refurbishment and distribution. The section below provides brief summaries of some of Dalton’s most prominent assets.

**Table 7: Dalton Covered Populations Served: Asset Map Inventory Responses**

Covered Population Served	# of Organizations
Individuals (60 and older)	3
Low-income households (<150% federal poverty level)	3
Immigrants/Refugees	2
Individuals with Disabilities	2
Residents of Rural Areas	2
Veterans	2
Youth	2
Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low literacy)	1
Members of Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups	1
Women	1
Incarcerated Individuals	0
LGBTQIA+	0

Source: MBI Asset Map Inventory

## Community Anchor Institutions



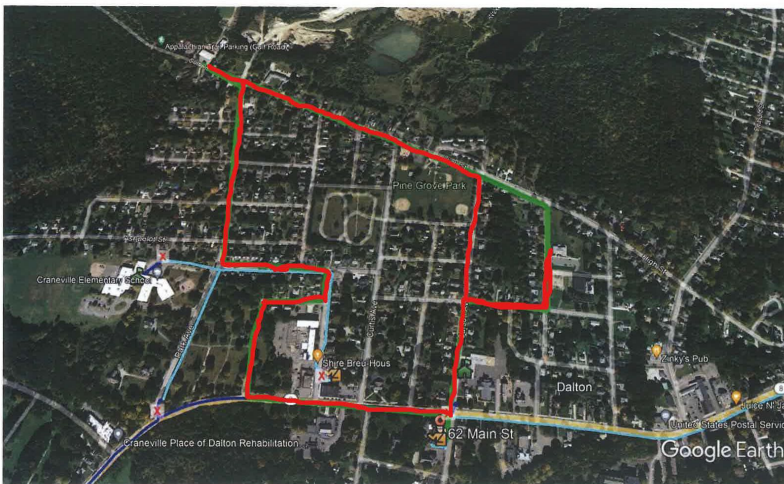
Dalton is home to three [Community Anchor Institutions](#) (CAIs), defined as a “public school, public or multi-family housing authority, library, medical or healthcare provider, community college or institution of higher education, state library agency, or other nonprofit or governmental community support organization that facilitates greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, low-income individuals, unemployed individuals, children, the incarcerated, and aged individuals.” In Dalton those CAIs include Town Hall, the Water and Fire Department, and River Run Apartments, a privately-owned affordable housing development.

With funding from the federal [Broadband Technology Opportunities Program](#) and investment from the state, MBI installed a fiber network across central and western Massachusetts ([See Middle Mile and Last Mile Programs](#)) to connect the town’s CAIs and expand public access to high-speed internet from locations considered critical to community activities and public safety, education, health, and commerce. A recent search by [Local Linx](#), the company that built the fiber network backbone, however, found that two of Dalton’s three CAIs were not taking the MB123 service (Dalton Town Hall and the Water and Fire Department) because, according to town officials, the cost is too high, requiring them to migrate to more affordable enterprise-grade ISPs instead; an issue shared by many Berkshire County towns.

## Dalton Downtown Ring Wi-Fi Network



In 2022, Dalton received a \$60,000 [Community Compact Cabinet Information Technology Grant](#) to construct a fiber-optic ring connecting all municipal buildings and Pine Grove Park. The ring reaches town hall, the Dalton Senior Center, and the town garage, all located within a half-mile of one another. In October 2023, the town leveraged the new technology to move its Emergency Operation Center (EOC) to the Senior Center and town garage to ensure accessibility in the event of a future natural or man-made disaster. In case of either, both locations can now provide the town and residents with high-speed internet, something not previously guaranteed. (See <https://pittsfield.com/story/73245/Dalton-Board-Approves-Draft-of-Emergency-Evacuation-Plan.html>).



Source: Town of Dalton

If the town extended the fiber ring beyond municipal buildings to residents and visitors frequenting the 71 brick-and-mortar businesses along Main Street, it could provide further economic benefits to Dalton’s entrepreneurs, such as a) encourage people to spend more time at area retailers and restaurants and b) serve as an incentive to fill vacant storefronts. There are currently three places in downtown Dalton where residents can access free public Wi-Fi: the library, the Community Recreation Associate (CRA), and the Dalton Youth Center (DYC). The town of Dalton could expand the fiber ring to connect the CRA / DYC campus, thereby ensuring all residents, especially youth utilizing after-school programs, have access to reliable high-speed internet.

## Dalton Public Library



The Dalton Public Library is one of the most popular locations in town for getting internet or computer devices for those who lack them at home. Dalton's library served just over 31K visitors in 2022, an average of 600 a week. The library provides free access to high-speed wireless internet both inside and within a few feet of the main entrance outside. Crocker Communications provides service through the library's membership in the Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (CWMars) library network. The Dalton Public Library uses CWMars as its ISP, which currently offers internet speeds of 100/100 Mbps: this will be upgraded by CWMars in July 2024.

### *Digital Devices and Digital Skills Classes*

The library sees about 60 internet users per week, with most patrons accessing the internet via the library's computers; only a handful bring their own devices. The library's publicly available devices include a workstation with two desktop computers, a color printer, and a copy machine. The library currently does not offer a device-lending program but does have two laptops that could be the start of a lending pilot. The library runs 15 children's programs (e.g., Storytime, Legos, and STEAM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) but none directly address digital or computer topics nor are there programs for teens or adults. The newly hired library director hopes to create new teen and adult programs, including a digital skills class.

### *Digital Services and Resources for People with Disabilities*

Many libraries in the Commonwealth are designated as centers where people with disabilities can access assistive technology aids such as screen readers, assistive listening systems, mobility devices, and speech recognition software. All Massachusetts libraries can also apply for the [Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioner's Access for All grant](#), which provides \$7,500 to \$20,000 for libraries to plan and launch projects to address local accessibility needs. The Dalton Public Library has no assistive devices to lend and has not received an Access for All grant. The library could apply for this grant next year to obtain assistive technology devices.

## Dalton Community Television

Dalton Community Television (DCTV) is a community television station that broadcasts public interest, educational, local sports, and governmental access programs through cable and [YouTube](#). According to the senior center director, older adults rely heavily on DCTV cable broadcasting to stay informed on community meetings and local happenings. The DCTV YouTube page is very active, with the June CBRSD School Committee Meeting having over 350 views. According to the DCTV station manager, the internet upload and download speeds they receive are slow, making it difficult to edit content. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, DCTV supported local students who created, filmed, edited, and produced their own television program. At this time, no such program exists. During the BEAD Challenge, the Town of Dalton used DCTV to record a BEAD information session that walked residents through submitting speed test challenges. The town may wish to re-energize the relationship between DCTV and Dalton public schools through funding, and web development that encourages student internship opportunities. Dalton could expand its fiber ring to connect to DCTV, which is on the direct path running down Park Avenue, to ensure this community-based organization has access to reliable high-speed internet that improves their capabilities.

## Dalton Council on Aging / Senior Center

The Dalton Council on Aging, which funds the Dalton Senior Center, is dedicated to serving the interests and needs of Dalton's 2,678 adults age 55 and older, which it does through programs and services that aim to enrich and maintain older residents' positive quality of life. In 2023, the Dalton Senior Center served 509 individuals.

The Senior Center hosts several weekly programs, including veterans' services, movement, art, entertainment, and hot meals. The center also offers monthly programs, including movie night, health clinics, and support groups. The building has password-protected Wi-Fi patrons can access inside, but the signal does not reach outside the building. The building is fully [ADA compliant](#), within walking distance of the Pinegrove Manor Housing Authority, open Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and Thursday from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm. The center temporarily closed in April 2020 due to the pandemic and re-opened to in-person services a year later. During that period, the center connected with some participants and board members via Zoom and other videoconferencing technologies.

The Senior Center has no digital devices that patrons can freely use on the premises. The Dalton CoA received a grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) *Age Friendly Berkshires: Digital Literacy and Inclusion* for \$50,393 to deploy hybrid programming. It is the only senior center in Berkshire County to receive the grant. Grant recipients can use the funding to purchase equipment, hire staff, and pay other expenses related to the hybrid programs. The director intends to buy eight laptops to distribute through a lending program and create an in-house computer lab. The director hopes to offer digital skills and cyber-security classes and expand hybrid access to weekly programs such as Bingo for older adults to stay connected. The CoA also received an Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) formula grant for \$28,502 to bring digital devices, curriculum development, direct program support, and staff training to the facility.

In 2023, members from the Dalton Select Board voted to move the town's polling location from the CRA to the Senior Center to improve accessibility along with being a community space for older adults ; the town's new polling location, the Senior Center also serves as one of two of the town's heating and cooling emergency shelter. Creating a free and open Wi-Fi network that could also be accessed outside the senior center would allow more Dalton residents to access high-speed internet at all times, not only in the event of an emergency.

## Affordable Housing Providers

The Dalton Housing Authority (DHA) manages a total of 76 units, including units at Pomeroy and Pinegrove Manor. Together, they serve approximately 81 aging residents, disabled, and low-income residents. Both locations offer bulk-rate cable television subscriptions to tenants and free access to an open Wi-Fi network in community rooms. The DHA has a resource service coordinator, paid by Berkshire Housing, who splits their time between Dalton, Adams, Williamstown, and Pittsfield. This person visits Pomeroy every Tuesday but does not go to Pinegrove. To support DHA tenants, the agency may wish to find funding for a) a computer workstation equipped with a desktop computer and color printer that tenants can use; and b) provide specialized digital navigator training to the service coordinator so this person can expand their service offerings to include digital equity, literacy, devices, and skills.

The other affordable housing entity in Dalton is River Run Apartments, a privately-owned development with 78 units and more than 100 residents. River Run Apartments has a community room like the one at the DHA but lacks a free, open Wi-Fi network. To support these tenants, town leaders could connect with River Run's management to identify ways the company can more effectively connect tenants with digital equity resources and services.



## Dalton Public Schools



The Central Berkshire Regional School District has three schools, all classified as Title I, serving Dalton's 1,259 students from pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. A Title I school is one that qualifies for federal financial assistance to ensure children from low-income families can meet challenging state academic standards. *In Dalton, these schools include:*

- Craneville Elementary School
- Nessacus Regional Middle School
- Wahconah Regional High School

According to the district's homeless liaison, there are currently six Dalton students whose families are unhoused. These families may be living in a hotel, doubling up with relatives, or living in a shelter. Most of the support the district provides these students and families concern transportation. The district could consider expanding its offerings to unhoused students to include digital needs to ensure their education is not hindered by a lack of permanent housing.

The chart below provides a broad overview of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) most recent digital literacy and computer science course-taking data for the district.

Notably, students begin exposure to digital literacy or computer science in Grade 6 with participation increasing in Grade 9. Involvement in digital literacy and computer science courses is highest for students with a disability, followed by male students and those who identify as multi-racial. Participation is significantly lower for those who identify as Hispanic or Latino or who are female. The school district may want to conduct more vigorous education and outreach to parents of less-engaged students earlier in their educational journeys to ensure they are aware of digital readiness offerings that can prepare them for the workforce and higher-paid future employment.

**Table 8: Dalton School District: Participation in Digital Literacy and Computer Science Courses**

Student Group	All Grades %
Students with Disabilities	25.8%
Male	24.8%
Multi-racial ( <i>Non-Hispanic or Latino</i> )	24.2%
High Needs	23.5%
All Students	22.7%
White	22.5%
Hispanic or Latino	21.8%
Female	20.6%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

### *Device Distribution*

Craneville Elementary School students in first and second grade get exposure to digital skills in the classroom when teachers request to use Chromebook carts or computer lab time. By the end of first grade, students can log in, use their clever badge (CBRSD platform), and learn how to manipulate the online world. As of 2018, CBRSD provided students in grades three through five with Chromebooks assigned to them that they leave at school. Students begin gaining digital skills using programs like ST Math and Code.org and online visual educational programs geared toward K-8 students specializing in math and coding.

At Nessacus Regional Middle School, students are assigned individual Chromebooks for the school year and are responsible for them during the school day but cannot take them home due to the high number of damaged Chromebooks that has resulted in the past. Students in grades six through eight take all MCAS pre-assessments and exams online. Students can continue their digital skills programming with courses such as engineering, which uses computer-aided design (CAD), or music tech, where they use special software on iPads.

In 2018, Wahconah Regional High School deployed a Chromebook distribution program for all students in grades nine through 12 to ensure every student could access global information and educational software through technology, thus reducing the “digital divide” and achievement gap, according to school officials.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the district deployed hotspots to CBRSD students who did not have access to affordable, reliable internet at home to complete remote schoolwork. Unfortunately, most students returned the hotspots due to insufficient cellular signals at home. Two CBRSD students still have hotspots, but the district stopped paying for data subscriptions once students returned to the classroom.

Within the next few years, the district hopes to create and deploy a digital citizen curriculum using Common Sense Ed. starting in elementary school. This curriculum will continue into middle school, where eighth-grade graduates will participate in a digital literacy course upon receiving their personal Chromebooks for high school.

The IT director estimates repairs on a case-by-case basis at current replacement costs. The district may cover accidental damage. The student, parent, or guardian may be responsible for damages caused by negligence. Chromebooks that need to be repaired are given to the Library Media Specialist, who generates a help desk ticket. Students are notified when the device has been repaired or replaced. Students are also notified if additional costs are associated with repair or replacement. Wahconah has 30 loaner Chromebooks on-site available for daily checkout. Since device distribution began in 2018, the school has seen few damaged or lost devices.

The School District’s Information Technology (IT) director oversees Chromebook refurbishing. The district buys extra laptops to replace or fix those that break. The IT director maintains a cache of devices whose parts he uses to refurbish damaged devices. CBRSD replaces Chromebooks on a rotating cycle: Craneville every five years, Nessacus every four, and each Wahconah student gets a new Chromebook as a freshman. The district gives devices it can no longer use to RBD Electronics, located in the Stationery Factory, a tech company that specializes in refurbishing and repurposing end-of-use computer assets to prevent premature disposal and reduce electronic waste.

### Wahconah Regional High School



Source: Aaron Robb

Wahconah Regional High School has a student body of 485 and offers 10 business and computer science classes, including:

- Accounting
- Marketing
- Computer Programming
- Video Game Design
- Computer Graphic Design
- Computer Building And Repair
- Music Production
- Engineering
- Computer-aided drafting and 3D-Printing

Although these classes are top-rated among students, due to the cost of equipment, some classes, like computer building and repair, are capped at eight to 10 students.

According to the principal, Wahconah has some of the “most state-of-the-art technology in the classroom in the county.” Each classroom has smartboards where teachers can share notes with students via Google Classroom. Classrooms are equipped with surround-sound technology that allows teachers to project their voices. The district encourages teachers to use wireless microphones to promote better student engagement. The technology benefits students with an individualized education plan or those with different behavioral disorders by enhancing attention. Shaun Therian is the instructional coach for staff to ensure teachers are confident using technology in the classroom. Staff members can schedule time to meet with Mr. Therian individually or as a small group throughout the year.

Wahconah students also have the option to participate in Virtual High School (VHS). Through VHS, students can select from a catalog of semester-length and full-year courses, including advanced placement (AP) and Pre-AP courses not offered at Wahconah. The program allows students to take one or more high school classes online; enjoy smaller classes and lower student-to-teacher ratio; engage in collaboration opportunities with peers worldwide; and take advantage of the flexibility of VHS courses, which can take place anywhere and anytime.

DESE offers high school students the opportunity to participate in the [Innovative Career Pathway Program](#), designed to introduce them to coursework and real-world experiences in high-demand industries, including information technology, engineering, and networking. Wahconah is not participating in the program, however, the current principal sees this as a future possibility. Wahconah offers its own version of a [Pathways Program](#) that maps out classes, clubs, and industry jobs based on students' interests.

### After-School Programs

The Dalton Youth Center (DYC) offers a free after-school program for the children of working parents, providing a safe place to study and play with peers; the program currently serves 15 to 20 students. DYC offers free tutoring and MCAS/SAT prep for grades three through 12; six to eight students are currently participating in that program. Kids Club is a CRA-sponsored childcare program for Craneville Elementary children. The program runs Monday to Friday from 2:55 to 5:30 pm and hosts 50 children. To leverage its role as a provider of after-school care and the availability of free, password-protected Wi-Fi across its campus, DYC could ask the library to provide middle-school students who lack computer devices at home and cannot borrow them from school — with library-affiliated devices they can use at DYC to do homework. The library could also work with DYC to start chapters of national programs such as CanCode and Girls Who Code to expose youth to higher-level digital skills like programming.



Source: Community Recreation Association (On-line tutoring offered through the CRA's after-school program)

Wahconah Regional High School also offers students a variety of tech related after-school programs and clubs, including:

- Business Professionals of America
- NE Mathematics League
- Robotics
- Science Olympiad
- STEM BCC
- Gaming
- Auto
- Video

## Berkshire Community College

### Student Demographics

Berkshire Community College (BCC) is a public community college in Berkshire County with a student body of 1,611. School enrollment has increased by approximately 200 since 2020, indicating the school's critical role in serving a diverse student body. A summary of the fall 2023 class as it pertains to the Covered Populations is below. In 2023, 16 out of 110 (6.9%) graduates from Wahconah attended Berkshire Community College.

*\*Last year, 813 students were Pell-grant eligible out of 1,367, but the school only awarded 627 because the remaining*

*students had outstanding paperwork. In fall 2023, 70 percent of students out of 1,703 were Pell-eligible.*

### Courses of Study

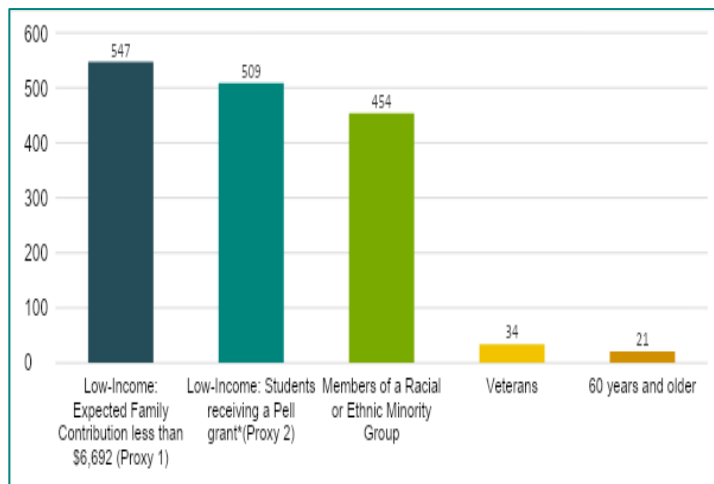
BCC offers more than 50 associate degree and certificate programs, including Business and Computer Information Systems. (CIS), and 21 courses related to computers. In Fall 2023, 46 students enrolled in CIS Programs. These programs include:

- Computer Science
- Networking & Cybersecurity
- Networking
- Business Systems
- Programming-Technical
- Programming-Business


Lower than-expected graduation rates for these degree and certificate programs point to the need to identify the factors impeding students from completing courses. More positively, BCC computer science alums have found employment with the following regional employers:

- Adams Co-op Bank
- Berkshire Community College
- Berkshire Health Systems
- Berkshire Life (now Guardian)
- Central Berkshire Regional School District
- DB Consultants
- General Dynamics (employs a sizable number of BCC computer science alums)
- Lenox Public Schools
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- The Option Institute

Figure 9: Berkshire Community College: Covered Populations Served 2023



Source: Berkshire Community College



BCC is developing new training through its [Workforce Development and Community Education](#) Program to prepare adults for jobs as IT Help Desk - CompTIA A professionals. Once enrollment opens, the grant-funded program will offer an entry-level, foundational certification to unemployed and underemployed Berkshire County residents to gain essential skills and knowledge needed for IT support and technical assistance careers. The college provides courses free of charge to income-qualifying students and offers wraparound services to help them graduate and find meaningful employment. The program is informed by [MassHire's Berkshire Workforce Blueprint](#), which identified Information Technology as a regional industry need, as well as economic and job data about current and projected workforce trends. The school hopes to enroll two cohorts per year in the program with eight to 10 students each.

BCC offers students in-person and virtual computer and IT support from 8 am to 7 pm. The school's computer labs provide students who need them with desktop and laptop devices. The school maintains an open, Wi-Fi accessible campus for faculty, students, and visitors, with a map that directs users to locations throughout campus where they can connect online. According to administrators, the top five technology challenges facing students are:

- Access to appropriate technology hardware
- Computer literacy about general computer operations and functions
- Computer literacy about the Internet/email
- Reliable access to MFA devices or numbers
- Reliable access to home internet

The school seeks to eventually provide all students with a computer, appropriate software, and training. With 1,600 enrollees in fall 2023, BCC estimates the cost of a computer, software, security, and training at \$1K per student or \$1.6M.

# Survey Results

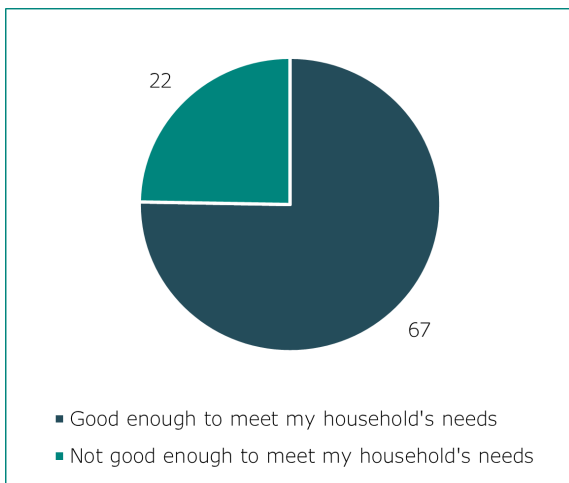
In total, 96\* Dalton residents completed the MBI *Internet for All* survey. Outreach efforts sought to ensure fair representation across the Covered Populations. Although the results align with the town demographics, among the groups less well-represented are people with disabilities (nine survey respondents) and veterans (four survey respondents). See the Appendix for a complete demographic breakdown.

## Internet Access

Nearly 96 percent of respondents reported being able to access the internet at home. Ninety-three percent identified Spectrum as their ISP, followed by Verizon (3.3%), AT&T (2.2%), and Cricket (1.1%). Home wirelines (cable, fiber, DSL, etc.) were the primary way people connected to the internet; the rest used fixed wireless and data plans for smartphones, hotspots, and tablets. Twenty-three percent of respondents reported their home internet service as not good enough to meet their household's needs. For those without internet, the library was their preferred location for going online.

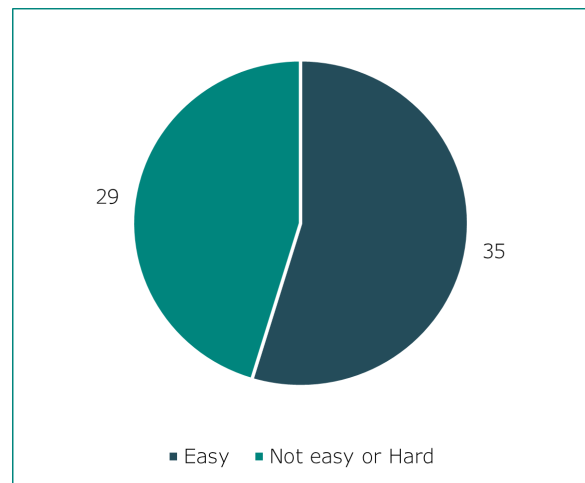
Ninety-two percent of respondents said they could comfortably use the internet for online activities such as general internet searching or participating in their local community. However, searching and applying for benefits was more difficult for nearly half of respondents.

**Figure 10: How well does your home internet service work?**



Source: Internet for All Survey

**Figure 11: Searching and applying for benefits for your family?**



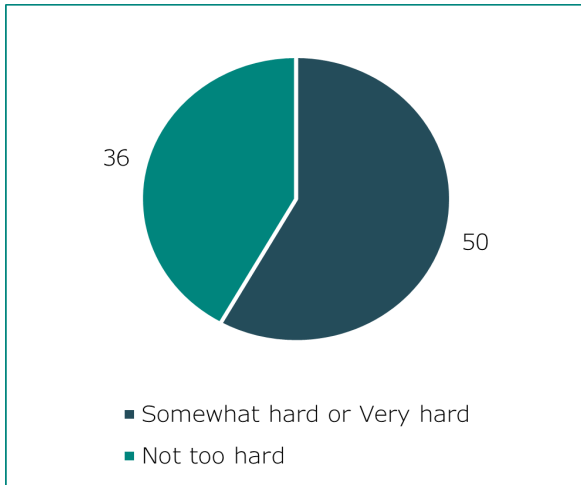
Source: Internet for All Survey

## Internet Affordability

For Dalton residents lacking internet, cost was the key inhibiting factor. Fifty-two percent of survey respondents with internet at home indicated it was *Somewhat* or *Very Hard* to pay their internet bill. The median monthly cost residents reported paying for service was \$85, \$10 higher than the state median of \$75.

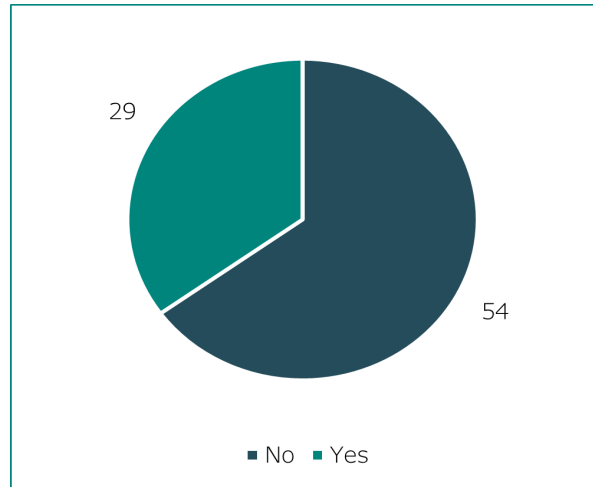
In the recent past, low-income residents could lower their internet bills by enrolling in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). However, survey results suggested many did not know about ACP. If the program was reinstated, the town could partner with local social service providers and community-based organizations to promote ACP and help residents enroll.

**Figure 12: How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?**



Source: Internet for All Survey

**Figure 13: Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?**

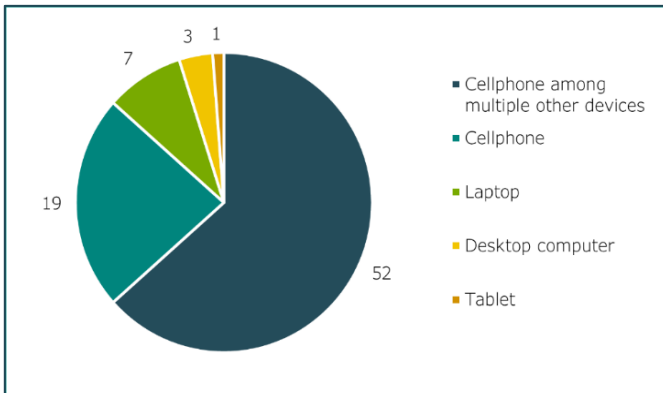


Source: Internet for All Survey

### Computer Access

Although 92 percent of respondents said they could use the internet for online activities, slightly fewer (90%) reported having enough computer devices for everyone in their household. About 22 percent reported a cellphone being the device they used most often to go online, while far fewer (13%) relied on a larger-screen device such as a laptop (8.2%), desktop (3.5%) or tablet (1.18%).

**Figure 14: Devices Used to Connect to the Internet**

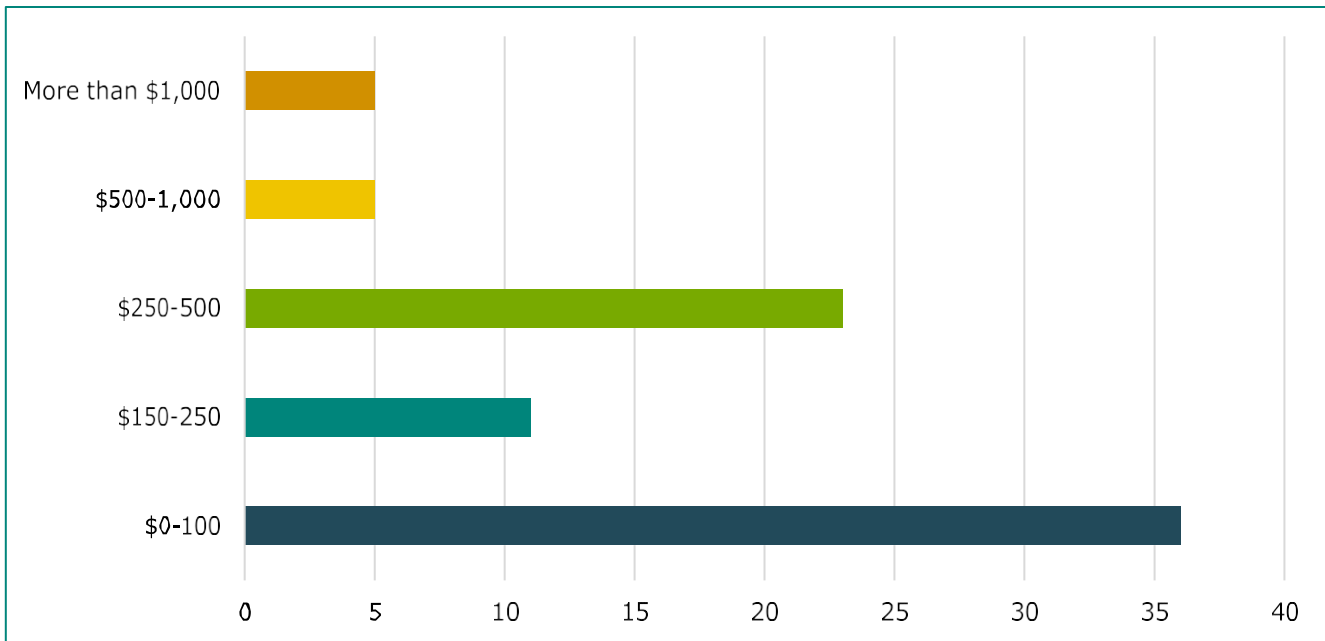


Source: Internet for All Survey

### Computer Affordability

The devices people used to get online are as important as the speed or service they receive. Twenty-eight percent of respondents said they could afford a computer costing up to \$500, such as a Chromebook, while fewer (6%) could afford a typical laptop (\$1,700). While middle- and upper- class individuals may see computer devices as essential to daily life, households with limited income may view them as luxuries, making it more challenging for them to learn advanced skills (e.g., Excel, PowerPoint, Adobe Suite) or participate in remote work.

**Figure 15: How much would you be able to pay for a large-screen device?**

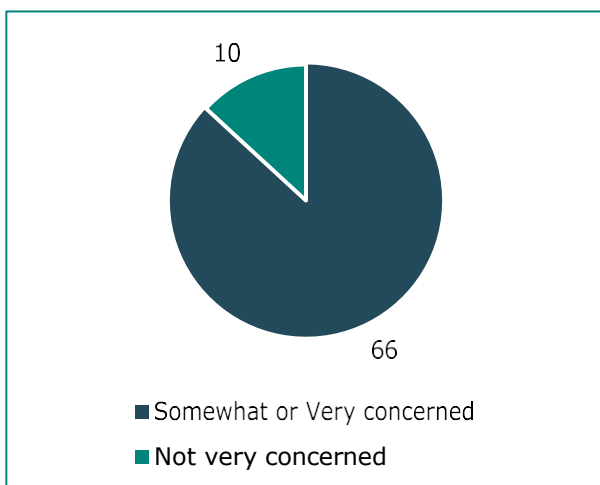


Source: Internet for All Survey

### Cybersecurity

Even with just over half of respondents (52%) reporting having the tools and resources to stay safe online, nearly 85 percent reported being *Very* or *Somewhat* Concerned about internet safety. Respondent's top concerns included a) having data stolen or used without consent; b) loved ones being defrauded or tricked; and c) being tracked or surveilled. The survey results suggested the need for broad and targeted education and awareness-building around cybersecurity, potentially starting with vulnerable populations like youth, older adults, and people with disabilities. Because a significant percentage of respondents (85%) rated most government websites as *Very* or *Somewhat* accessible, the town may wish to leverage its trusted platform to provide cybersecurity information and resources online.

**Figure 17: How concerned are you about internet safety?**



Source: Internet for All Survey



# Focus Groups

BRPC conducted two focus groups with members of Covered Populations between March 2024 and April 2024 at the following organizations:

- Dalton Housing Authority
- Dalton Senior Center

The section below summarizes key takeaways from these conversations and calls attention to issues shared across both groups as well as unique challenges the town and its stakeholders may wish to consider when engaging these audiences.

## Universal Themes

While most participants said their current internet service was sufficient for their needs, the price, lack of service provider competition, and irritation with ISP customer service were shared frustrations. Most participants voiced that service was inconsistent, speeds slow, and stormy weather often caused disruptions. Independent of service, members of both groups wanted in-person, hands-on digital skills classes to help them navigate the internet to its full potential.

## Specific Challenges

- **Older adults** expressed more internet safety concerns and a desire for hands-on digital skills and literacy classes in the community.
- **Low-income** residents voiced concerns about affording internet service once ACP ends, ISPs raising the price of low-cost plans, and lack of low-cost internet options in Berkshire County.

**Focus Group Summaries** The Dalton Housing Authority (DHA) provides affordable housing for older adults, people with disabilities, and moderate- to low-income families. The organization hosted a focus group with nine Pinegrove Manor and Pomeroy Manor residents, including residents representing four Covered Populations: rural residents, older adults, low-income, and veterans. Nine participants (eight women / one man) all learned about the event through outreach provided by DHA staff.

*"Some people assume we know more than we do, even regarding the vocabulary around technology."*

— Focus Group Participant, Dalton Housing Authority

People reported that their primary way of connecting to the internet was via cellphones. Everyone owned a smartphone, but some participants had lower-quality phones that made getting online harder. Two people also used laptops; one had a tablet, and another had a desktop computer but did not use it due to lack of digital skills. Group members were very concerned about cybersecurity and fraud. Participants were interested in attending a cybersecurity class if one was hosted at the senior center as well as a digital skills class. Most preferred one-on-one, hands-on training. The group regularly used the internet for civic engagement, internet calls to family (e.g., WhatsApp), paying bills, general research, entertainment (word puzzles, TV streaming at home), and exercise. One woman

attended yoga twice a week through Zoom on her laptop. Attendees did not like telehealth and preferred face-to-face conversations instead. However, participants loved the Berkshire Health Systems' portal because they could get a record of their results without calling the doctor's office.

No one visited the library and only one person used the Senior Center. When asked about the library as a potential location for a device-lending program, there was hesitation because participants were concerned that they would not know how to operate the device. Most participants went to a friend or neighbor's house to access the internet or ask for device help. A few group members used the DHA community rooms to access free Wi-Fi. When asked about Wi-Fi at the park, participants seemed hesitant. However, when told about the new computer hub at the senior center, they all said they would be inclined to use it and check out the facility.

Four people were enrolled in ACP but did not know they were eligible for a \$100 discount to purchase a device. They knew ACP was ending and were very concerned about being able to afford their internet service going forward. They found out about the plan ending through their ISP but have yet to be told what their new bill will be. The four not enrolled did not know the federal benefit existed but were enrolled in their ISP's lowest-cost plan, which will soon increase by five dollars, sparking frustration. Since most participants live alone, they were largely content with the speeds they received. Among their complaints were a) service being too expensive; b) poor quality customer service; and c) outages during bad weather. Some

*"I am afraid that when ACP ends, I will not be able to pay my internet bill."*



- Focus Group Participant,  
Dalton Housing Authority

people reported feeling "lucky" because they were able to speak to a customer service representative who knew ACP or was able to help them with low-cost enrollment. One participant did not have internet service because the cost was too high. Another recently started service again after canceling it for the same reason.

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The Dalton Senior Center provides meals, services, and programs for older adults in the community. The Council and Senior Center's vision is guided by trust, health, connection, independence, education, security, and outreach. Through these values, the goal is to provide sustained leadership and support that helps Dalton be a livable and age-friendly community. The organization held a focus group with seven community members (four men and three women) from four covered populations: rural residents, older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income residents who learned about the event from the St. Agnes food pantry and the monthly senior center calendar of events.

Three residents did not have internet at home due to cost and lack of infrastructure to connect their homes. The four with internet had the same local provider and shared similar frustrations around cost of service, quality of speeds, and service being interrupted by inclement weather. People used the internet primarily via their cell phones. Those with internet access at home also used larger-screen devices like smart TVs, laptops, and tablets. People used the internet for texting, email, navigation, entertainment, and research. People used large-screen devices for research, community engagement, emails, entertainment, and Zoom to talk to family. Only a few people used the internet for medical appointments or telehealth, preferring face-to-face visits.

*"I love YouTube to look up how-to videos! I just fixed a problem with my pipes in my home by watching a video. I have also used it to learn how to use my phone or email."*

– Focus Group Participant, Dalton Senior Center

Only four people had smartphones; the others did not because they do not feel comfortable using them. One group member, who identified as a person with a disability, used assistive technology such as talk-to-text to send messages or look things up on Google. One group member, who did not have access to the internet at home, frequently visited the library to connect. Other participants, who are clients of the senior center, said they enjoyed the organization's free Wi-Fi.

Like the Dalton Housing Authority focus group, senior center participants shared frustration about the quality of customer service from the local ISP. One resident tried for a year to sign his mother up for ACP but was unsuccessful, despite having all the correct paperwork. Concerns about cybersecurity and privacy were also prevalent in this group. One person voiced how difficult it was to find trusted information online. Focus group members expressed how vital it is for the community to have a trusted

resource to ask questions about technology, cybersecurity, and assistive technologies to help older adults and people with disabilities feel comfortable navigating devices and the internet.

# Recommendations

Based on findings from the 2018-2022 American Community Survey, publicly, survey results, focus groups, interviews with municipal and CBO leaders, and research into best practices regionally and nationally BRPC recommended actions the town and its partners can pursue to help close the digital divide in Dalton. While not all can be taken within the next year or two, these serve as a framework to how the town pursues future funding. **Actions that town leaders and community members identified in a plan review session held on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, identified the highest priority recommendations which are indicated in bold in the chart below.** The town plans to direct some of its digital equity implementation funding to these recommendations.

<b>ACCESS/AFFORDABILITY</b>	
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Population</b>
<b>Town of Dalton</b>	
Create a Digital Equity landing page on the town website where residents can explore low-cost resources and find places in the community and online to access the internet, classes, and devices.	All Residents
<b>Extend the fiber ring to River Run, Pinegrove Manor, and the downtown business area (e.g., Stationery Factory).</b>	<b>Low-Income Residents, Small Business Owners, Visitors</b>
<b>Ensure all town-affiliated websites (Library, CoA, CRA, etc.) are ADA-compliant so they can be accessed by people with disabilities (e.g., include alt-text descriptions on images).</b>	<b>All Residents, People with Disabilities</b>
<b>Install a virtual bulletin board that displays events, meetings, and resources at Pinegrove Park, Dalton Library, and Dalton Housing Authority properties.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
Prioritize digital equity outreach to residents of the town’s three EJ Block Groups (Block Groups 2, 3, 4) to ensure they have internet access, devices, and skills in case of health or emergencies.	EJ Residents
Provide information to help income-qualifying residents learn how to access discount internet and cellphone programs (e.g., Lifeline).	Low-Income Residents

Establish closer relationships with or seek guidance from digital equity providers serving the BIPOC and immigrant communities to ensure local services feel welcoming to all and follow best practices for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.	BIPOC and Immigrant Residents
Provide information to help residents who speak languages other than English connect to organizations such as Literacy Volunteers, Berkshire Community College, and Berkshire Immigrant Center, where they can receive multilingual services and gain a stronger sense of social cohesion.	Immigrants English-Language Learners
<b>Support Dalton Community TV connect with community-based organizations, such as the senior center and library, and encourage them to better use this community asset.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
Advocate with fellow Berkshire County leaders to have Congress re-fund ACP and/or devise alternative internet subsidies.	Low-income Residents
Actively engage River Run’s management to identify ways they can more effectively connect tenants with digital equity resources and services.	Low-income Residents
<b>Dalton Housing Authority</b>	
Host quarterly meetings for residents focused on digital access and affordability and ensure DHA management and staff are aware of and can speak to residents about their internet access and affordability needs.	Low-Income Residents
<b>Library</b>	
<b>Pilot a Wi-Fi hotspot lending program, following a community survey to ensure interest, need, and cell reception.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
<b>Senior Center</b>	
Explore interest in Wi-Fi hotspot lending for low-income older adults who lack home internet.	Older Adults
Create a more accessible and ADA-compliant virtual calendar of events..	Older Adults

Creating a free and open Wi-Fi network that can be accessed outside the senior center building to allow more people to access high-speed internet at all times, especially in the event of an emergency.	All Residents
<b>School District</b>	
Query parents and caretakers regarding their digital equity needs as part of school registration so they can be referred to the right entity to assist them access resources earlier in the school year	Youth and Families
Ensure unhoused students and families are made aware of and connected with essential digital resources, skills, and devices.	Low-Income Residents
<b>Community Recreation Association / Dalton Youth Center</b>	
Query parents and caretakers about internet affordability and access as part of intake to after-school programs.	Youth and Families
<b>Dalton Community TV</b>	
Recruit a digital tutor or coach to produce digital literacy and skills workshops that can be streamed online through the public access channel.	All Residents, Older Adults
<b>Upload digital literacy and skills videos to the DCTV YouTube channel.</b>	<b>All Residents, Older Adults</b>

## DEVICES

Recommendation	Population
<b>Town of Dalton</b>	
<b>Identify a local, regional, or national computer refurbishing nonprofit or business to donate or provide at low cost large-screen devices to local organizations and nonprofits.</b>	<b>Low- and Moderate-Income Residents</b>
<b>American Legion / Veterans Agent</b>	
Request from a local, regional, or national computer refurbishing nonprofit or business a donation of large-screen devices for veterans to build their confidence using computers, including for telehealth.	Veterans
<b>Library</b>	
<b>Expand desktop, laptop, and tablet devices options for public on-site and at-home (lending) use.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
<b>Provide audiobook players with adaptive buttons through Perkins in conjunction with a home delivery service for homebound residents.</b>	<b>People with Disabilities</b>
Partner with regional organizations specializing in adaptive technologies and training, such as United Cerebral Palsy, to ensure residents with disabilities have devices suited to their needs.	People with Disabilities
<b>School District</b>	
Apply for grants to expand the high school's computer repair class so more students can participate, learn skills, and return devices to the community.	Youth, Low-Income Residents
Develop an apprenticeship program to teach device refurbishment so more devices can enter the community.	All Residents
<b>Dalton Housing Authority</b>	
Adapt or redesign community rooms so they can function as mini-computer labs during daytime hours.	Low-Income Residents, Older Adults

## Senior Center

Request from a local, regional, or national computer refurbishing nonprofit or business a donation of large-screen devices for seniors' on-site or at-home use.

Older Adults

## Community Recreation Association / Dalton Youth Center

Establish a youth learning center at the CRA or DYC for peer tutoring that includes space for youth to access the internet and use large-screen devices.

Youth



## DIGITAL SKILLS

Recommendation	Population
<b>Town of Dalton</b>	
<b>Seek funding to expand adult digital literacy and skills classes at town assets (e.g., library, senior center, CRA, housing authority) in conjunction with identifying a shared (multi-town) part-time digital navigator or AmeriCorps Lead for America Fellow to support residents on a range of digital skill and equity issues.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
<b>Seek grant funding to create a downtown “tech hub” where people can drop in for digital skill classes leading to digital skills certificates.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
Provide transportation to low-income residents who lack cars so they can more easily attend digital skills classes at Berkshire Community College and/or MassHire.	Low-Income Residents
<b>Provide graphic design support to community-based organizations and town affiliated organizations to help them make their websites ADA- accessible and more visually appealing.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
<b>Library</b>	
<b>Provide dedicated space for youth and adults to participate remotely in online digital literacy and skills classes (e.g., Tech Foundry, Northstar, CanCode).</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
Recruit a local volunteer to offer teen and adult digital skills classes or provide one- on-one tech support.	All Residents
<b>Dalton Housing Authority</b>	
Provide digital navigator training to the service coordinator so this person can expand their offerings to include digital equity, literacy, devices, and skills.	Low-Income Residents
<b>School District</b>	
Make age-appropriate digital literacy classes mandatory for middle school students and/or high-school freshman before receiving Chromebooks.	Youth

Ensure all teachers are provided with time for professional development to a) acquire baseline digital literacy skills; b) understand how to use educational technology offerings to their fullest; c) assess the efficacy of educational technology before it is purchased; and d) competently support student learning delivered via ed. tech. programs.	Educators, Youth
Explore ways to create device refurbishment internships for middle and high-school students with the District IT director.	Youth
Strengthen links between the middle and high school and technology offerings at Dalton Community TV and tech-related businesses to help youth gain skills for tech- and media careers.	Youth, Dalton Community TV
Provide digital skills classes for parents and guardians, including grandparents caring for grandchildren, to help them gain the knowledge and skills to support youth success.	Youth and Families
Look for opportunities for the high school to partner with local businesses to create a digital skill internship leading to a pipeline of future workers.	Youth
Start a local chapter of national organizations such as Code.org or Girls Can Code to spark interest in technology among middle and high-school youth.	Youth
Conduct more education and outreach to parents of less-engaged students earlier in their schooling to ensure they take advantage of digital literacy and computer skill class offerings.	Youth and Families
Provide digital skills classes for parents and guardians, including grandparents caring for grandchildren, to help them gain the knowledge and skills needed to support youth's educational success.	Youth and Families
<b>Create a program with the senior center to have students from the youth leadership program help older adults with digital literacy and skills.</b>	<b>Older Adults</b>
<b>Dalton Community TV</b>	
<b>Produce a monthly digital skills program led by a digital navigator or ACC Fellow.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>



<b>American Legion / Veterans Agent</b>	
Provide veterans with vet-oriented digital literacy classes geared to their unique interests.	Veterans
<b>Senior Center</b>	
Incorporate digital skills training into hybrid programming, e.g., 'How to mute yourself on Zoom.'	Older Adults
Invite Berkshire Health Systems to run regular telehealth workshops to increase seniors' comfort level connecting with providers via the BHS portal and app.	Older Adults
<b>Community Recreation Association / Dalton Youth Center + Kids Club Program</b>	
Offer free and low-cost digital skills classes as part of after-school programming.	Youth

## CYBERSECURITY

Recommendation	Population
<b>Town of Dalton</b>	
<b>Provide education about cybersecurity on the town’s website and incorporate cybersecurity awareness handouts during large-scale community events.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
<b>Library</b>	
Invite cybersecurity presenters to offer online or in-person programs.	All Residents
<b>School</b>	
Invite cybersecurity presenters to offer online or in-person programs in conjunction with the Parent-Teacher Association.	Youth and Families
<b>Senior Center</b>	
Invite cybersecurity presenters to offer online, in-person, or hybrid programs.	Older Adults
<b>Host quarterly cybersecurity awareness into monthly TRIAD meetings hosted at the senior center.</b>	<b>All Residents, Older Adults</b>
<b>Dalton Community TV</b>	
<b>Incorporate cybersecurity awareness into a locally produced digital literacy and skills program.</b>	<b>All Residents</b>
Upload trusted video rescues to the DCTV YouTube channel for residents to access.	All Residents, Older Adults

# Future Funding

In addition to MBI’s Digital Equity Implementation funding the chart below provides future examples of additional funding the town and its partners can pursue unmet challenges. These grants are not exhaustive, and some may not be available until 2025. The town and its partners are advised to stay apprised of [BRPC’s Berkshire Funding Focus](#) website for notifications of federal and state grant opportunities and learn how to use [Candid/Foundation Directory Online at Berkshire Athenaeum](#) to search for philanthropic grants.

Federal		
Program	Description	Applicant(s)
<a href="#"><u>Rural Healthcare Connect Program</u></a>	This program seeks to improve the quality of healthcare available to patients in rural communities by ensuring eligible healthcare providers have access to telecommunications and broadband.	Berkshire Medical Center
<a href="#"><u>AARP Community Challenge Grants</u></a>	<p>AARP Community Challenge grants may be used to support three project types. Project types described below will be prioritized over those that support ongoing programming or events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent physical improvements in the community</li> <li>• Temporary demonstrations that lead to long-term change</li> <li>• New, innovative programming pilots or services</li> </ul>	Nonprofits

State		
Program	Description	Applicant(s)
<a href="#"><u>Mass Cyber Center Cyber Resilient Program</u></a>	Municipalities in Massachusetts are eligible to receive a one-time grant of up to \$25,000 to support cybersecurity improvements based on a vulnerability assessment conducted by a qualified provider. Respondents may apply grant funding towards the cost of vendors to implement the cybersecurity improvements or IT-related staff costs of the municipality performing the services in lieu of using a vendor.	Town of Dalton

<p><u>DESE – Computer Science Engage Grant</u></p>	<p>This continuation grant aims to establish and promote rigorous, engaging, and standards-aligned digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) education in public schools for kindergarten through grade 12. This grant supports the creation of new programs and/or expansion of existing programs to serve more students who are the most underserved (including but not limited to students designated as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, special education, underrepresented minorities, underrepresented females, and those living in rural areas).</p>	<p>Central Berkshire Regional School District</p>
<p><u>DESE - Middle School Career Connected Learning Partnership Grant</u></p>	<p>This competitive grant aims to assist school districts in planning and developing a career-connected learning model for middle school students. activities and projects will be developed to support students as they discover their personal interests, skills, talents, and passions, explore careers that align with those attributes, and engage in meaningful experiences to deepen their learning. The model will help students see the relevance of their academic learning as they begin exploring careers and understand all the potential learning opportunities and pathway options that will be available when they transition to high school</p>	<p>Nessacus Regional Middle School</p>
<p><u>MassLINKS – Adult Education Virtual School (DESE)</u></p>	<p>The grant will recruit, intake, orient, enroll, instruct, assess, advise, offer supportive services to, and post-exit follow-up for adult learners not served by programs currently funded by ACLS and/or whose need for services is not met by programs currently funded by ACLS. All services must be delivered virtually. This grant could be accessed to address the needs of out-of-school adult learners.</p>	<p>Local educational agencies; Community-based or Faith-based organizations; Volunteer literacy organizations; Institutions of higher education; Public or private nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Residential Retrofit</u></p>	<p>This MBI Grant Program seeks to deploy state-of-the-art broadband infrastructure at Affordable Housing properties across Massachusetts. MBI intends to increase low-income residents’ opportunity to access high-quality, reliable, and affordable broadband by addressing deficient wiring and infrastructure through grants for fiber optic cabling to the unit to qualified ISPs. Housing Agencies can utilize the grant to provide free internet service to their low-income populations.</p>	<p>Affordable Housing Managers</p>

<p><u>MAPC Apartment Wi-Fi Program</u></p>	<p>The Metropolitan Area Planning Council, with funding from MBI, will provide funding, project management, and procurement support and 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. The funding provides for all capital costs associated with network design, construction, and equipment, and the first year of ongoing operating expenses.</p>	<p>Housing Authorities and Affordable Housing Developers</p>
<p><u>MassBoard of Library Commissioners (MBLC)</u></p>	<p>The Open Program allows applicants to apply new methods to solve problems, build programs, and best conduct their library's mission and plan. It encourages creative program development and rewards those librarians willing to engage in a higher level of effort and to take those risks. The federal LSTA program encourages such innovation and risk-taking.</p>	<p>Libraries</p>

## Philanthropic

Program	Description	Applicant(s)
<p><u>Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund Trust</u></p>	<p>This Mass-based foundation has made grants to 221 organizations, nearly all in the state, since 2018. Among their foci are health, human services, and public safety. They have made no grants in the Berkshires but 12 in neighboring counties totaling over \$1.7M.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Berkshire Bank Foundation Inc.</u></p>	<p>The foundation supports organizations involved with arts and culture, environmental education, employment, housing, mentoring, human services, immigrant advocacy, military and veterans, and economically disadvantaged people. Special emphasis is directed toward programs designed to promote education and community economic development.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p>Donald C. McGraw Foundation, Inc.  <i>*No website</i></p>	<p>This funder awarded 36 grants in Berkshire County since 2018, including to Hillcrest Educational Centers, Berkshire Education and Correction Services, and Berkshire Medical Center. They can be approached for telehealth grants.</p>	<p>Berkshire Education and Correction Services, Berkshire Medical Center, Hillcrest Education Centers</p>

<p><u>Feigenbaum Foundation</u></p>	<p>Based in Pittsfield, they have awarded 303 grants in Berkshire County since 2018, including to The Berkshire Museum, Berkshire Taconic Foundation, and Community Access to the Arts. Among their foci are education, arts, and human services. This funder could support youth digital literacy through the arts.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund</u></p>	<p>A Boston-based philanthropy that has awarded 321 grants in the Berkshires since 2018, including to 18 Degrees, Berkshire United Way, and Berkshire Taconic. Among their foci are education and human services, which dovetail into digital equity.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Greylock Federal Charitable Giving</u></p>	<p>Provides support through grants and sponsorships to 501(c)(3)s and schools in communities in which Greylock has a physical location or large concentration of members. Foci related to digital equity include education, financial literacy, health, human services, and economic development.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Mountain One Community Dividend Grants</u></p>	<p>Funding preference is given to organizations or specific not-for-profit programs that support small businesses or low- to moderate-income individuals and families. Qualified 501(c)3 organizations may apply once annually for funding from Mountain One in support of programs and projects that directly impact our local communities and customers.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Pittsfield Co-op Charitable Donations</u></p>	<p>Since 1889, Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has been committed to enhancing the economic vitality and social welfare of the communities we serve through charitable donations. A major focus of their charitable giving is directed towards education, youth programs, and community development.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Vanguard Charitable Philanthropic Impact Fund</u></p>	<p>The Philanthropic Impact Fund (PIF) issues grants to nonprofits through a competitive RFP process ranging from \$30,000-\$50,000. Requests can be for full or partial funding.</p>	<p>Nonprofits</p>
<p><u>Jane and Jack Fitzpatrick Trust</u></p>	<p>The Jane &amp; Jack Fitzpatrick Trust makes capital grants and project grants that are important to the mission of the applying non-profit. The Trust will consider matching challenge grants where appropriate. The Fitzpatrick Trust is particularly interested in offering support to projects that deliver positive economic results to the community.</p>	<p>Community TV, Nonprofits</p>





<u>Corporation for Public Broadcasting</u>	CPB provides funding for the development of public media television, radio, and digital content as well as multiplatform projects that reflect public media’s mission to educate, inform and inspire the American public by providing stories through diverse perspectives, genres, styles and technologies.	Community TV
<u>Spectrum Digital Education Grant</u>	Spectrum Digital Education grants support nonprofits whose work includes digital skills training, professional advancement opportunities, and technology and resources needed for education.	Nonprofits

# Computer and Internet Resource Guide

The resources below focus on the digital needs of Dalton and Berkshire County residents from youth to older adults. In addition to those listed, all Berkshire County libraries offer free internet access, and some lend computer devices and hotspots to card holders. Senior centers may also run occasional computer classes or bring in volunteers for individual tech support. Check with your library or senior center for details. **Resources in languages other than English are indicated in red.**

Assistive Technologies	
Resource	Description
<p><b>Choice Magazine Listening</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.choicemagazinelistening.org">http://www.choicemagazinelistening.org</a></p>	<p>A free audio magazine for adults with impaired vision or another disability. Four times a year listeners receive 12 hours of great magazine writing. A talking book player is also provided for free. Recipients enjoy the issue for several weeks, then return it in a postage-free mailer. CML is also available as a download. For more information, call toll-free 1-888-724-6423.</p>
<p><b>Mass. Rehabilitation Commission Assistive Technologies</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.mass.gov/mrc-assistive-technology-services">https://www.mass.gov/mrc-assistive-technology-services</a></p>	<p>Connects people with disabilities with the technology they need to live independently. The regional provider can be found at <a href="https://www.easterseals.com/ma/programs-and-services/assistive-technology/at-at-home/">https://www.easterseals.com/ma/programs-and-services/assistive-technology/at-at-home/</a>. For more information, call 617-204-3851.</p>
<p><b>United Cerebral Palsy of Western Mass</b></p> <p><a href="https://ucpwma.org/">https://ucpwma.org/</a></p>	<p>Offers free durable medical equipment, an assistive technology library, and a radio reading service through Berkshire Talking Chronicle over WRRS (104.3) to support children and adults with disabilities. They also offer Computer Fundamentals Webinars to teach beginning and advanced computer knowledge and skills. For more information, call 413-442-1562. <b>Provides services in languages other than English.</b></p>

# Cybersecurity

Resource	Description
<p><b>Berkshire District Attorney's Office</b></p> <p><a href="https://berkshiredistrictattorney.com/technology-resources/">https://berkshiredistrictattorney.com/technology-resources/</a></p>	<p>Offers online safety resources including a Cyber-Tip Line to general safety information aimed at everyone from kids to older adults. For more information, <a href="mailto:email_contact.BerkshireDA@mass.gov">email contact.BerkshireDA@mass.gov</a> or call 413-443-5951.</p>
<p><b>Mass Attorney General: Computer and Online Privacy</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/computer-and-online-privacy">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/computer-and-online-privacy</a></p>	<p>Provides tips and insight into viruses, spyware, malware, and threats to computer systems, as well as phishing, hacking, and spam that can threaten personal identity and information. For more information, call 617-963-2223. <b>Select language at top of page to read in your language of choice.</b></p>
<p><b>Mass Attorney General: Cyber Crimes</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cyber-crimes">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cyber-crimes</a></p>	<p>Offers tips to ensure people know what to look for and how to avoid cybercrimes. <b>Select language at top of page to read in your language of choice.</b></p>
<p><b>Virtual Private Network (VPN)</b></p>	<p>A Virtual Private Network (VPN) creates a private connection between your computer and phone and a remote server. VPNs encrypt data and mask IP addresses to protect your online activity. Most people think of VPNs as tools to use away from home, but security experts say it's smart to use a VPN on your own Wi-Fi network as well so that your internet service provider cannot monitor your online activity.</p> <p><b>TunnelBear: <i>*Recommended by Consumer Reports</i></b> has an easy-to-use free version and works on Mac and PCs and Apple and Android mobile devices. The free version covers 500MB of data a month. An unlimited plan starts at \$6 a month: <a href="https://www.tunnelbear.com/">https://www.tunnelbear.com/</a></p> <p><b>NordVPN:</b> <a href="https://nordvpn.com/">https://nordvpn.com/</a></p> <p><b>Tor:</b> <a href="https://www.torproject.org/download/">https://www.torproject.org/download/</a></p>

# Discount Internet + Cell Service

Some internet providers offer discounted (and slower) service for people enrolled in programs such as SNAP, WIC, SSI, and veteran’s benefits. Because signing up for discounted service can be complicated, contact [digital@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:digital@berkshireplanning.org) for support.

Resource	Description
<p><b>Discount Internet Service Plans</b></p> <p>The new minimum speed for internet is 100 megabits (Mbps) upload and 20 Mbps download. Most cheaper plans offer slower service of 50/10 or 25/3.</p>	<p><b>Spectrum:</b>  <a href="https://www.spectrum.com/internet/spectrum-internet-assist">https://www.spectrum.com/internet/spectrum-internet-assist</a></p> <p><b>Verizon:</b>  <a href="https://www.verizon.com/discounts/verizon-forward/">https://www.verizon.com/discounts/verizon-forward/</a></p> <p><b>Xfinity:</b> <a href="https://www.xfinity.com/learn/internet-service/internet-essentials">https://www.xfinity.com/learn/internet-service/internet-essentials</a></p> <p><b>All Provider Search:</b>  <a href="https://www.digitalinclusion.org/low-cost-internet-plans/">https://www.digitalinclusion.org/low-cost-internet-plans/</a></p>
<p><b>Lifeline Cellphone Service</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.lifelinesupport.org/">https://www.lifelinesupport.org/</a></p>	<p>Lifeline phone service provides a small amount of data (usually 4.5 GB/month) through cellular service for free if people are income-eligible. For detailed information about the pros and cons of Lifeline and how to sign-up, see the last page of this guide. Cellphones can be used to connect to the internet if paired with a hotspot or if the person is in a location with a free, open Wi-Fi network like a café or airport.</p>

# Digital Skills: Adults

Resource	Description
<p><b>Cyber-Seniors</b></p> <p><a href="https://cyberseniors.org/">https://cyberseniors.org/</a></p>	<p>Cyber-Seniors provides FREE technology support and training for older adults. Book one-on-one tech call, find daily webinars, watch previous webinars, check out their cybersecurity center, visit their discovery hub, or connect in the community. They can be reached by phone at: 888-217-3057. <b>Select language at top of page to read the website in the language of choice.</b></p>
<p><b>Digital Skills Library Online</b></p> <p><a href="https://digitalskillslibrary.org/">https://digitalskillslibrary.org/</a></p>	<p>The Digital Skills Library is an open website of free learning resources designed to help all adult learners develop the digital skills needed to achieve their personal, civic, educational, and career goals. <b>Available in multiple languages including Spanish, Arabic, Hungarian, and French, Scroll down to Explore All Resources to find language options.</b></p>
<p><b>Digital Learn</b></p> <p><a href="https://training.digitallearn.org/">https://training.digitallearn.org/</a></p>	<p>An online hub for digital literacy support and training from the Public Library Association. Includes self-directed tutorials for users to increase their digital literacy. <b>Modules are video-based with narration and written in plain language at an elementary to middle school level for English and Spanish speakers.</b></p>
<p><b>Goodwill Foundation (GCF) Global</b></p> <p><a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/</a></p>	<p>Free program to learn the essential skills to live and work in the 21st century from MS Office and email to reading, math, and social media (<a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/socialmedia/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/socialmedia/</a>). The site offers more than 300 topics, including 6,000+ lessons, 2,000+ videos, and 50+ interactive exercises and games. <b>Select language at top of page to read the website in Spanish or Portuguese.</b></p>
<p><b>MA Adult Literacy Hotline</b></p> <p>1-800-447-8844</p>	<p>Provides referrals to over 300 adult education programs that offer one-on-one tutoring, small group, or classroom instruction to adult learners.</p>
<p><b>Mass Vets Advisor</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.mass.gov/collections/vets-advisor">https://www.mass.gov/collections/vets-advisor</a></p>	<p>A website that enables veterans and their families to search for all the benefits they are entitled to in an easy one one-stop fashion. <b>Select language at top of page to read the website in the language of choice.</b></p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Northstar via BRPC</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/launch-from/17204-Z3E9-berkshire-regional-planning-commission">https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/launch-from/17204-Z3E9-berkshire-regional-planning-commission</a></p>	<p>Take a free digital skills assessment and online classes at the website at left by entering BRPC's PIN: Z3E9. To arrange a group class or to test for a certificate, <a href="mailto:digital@berkshireplanning.org">email digital@berkshireplanning.org</a>. <b>Select language at bottom of page to read the site in the language of choice. Northstar is also available at MCLA, William Stickney Adult Learning Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Second Chances, and Roots, Dreams, and Mustard Seeds.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Senior Planet - AARP</b></p> <p><a href="https://seniorplanet.org/">https://seniorplanet.org/</a></p>	<p>Free online classes including digital skills aimed at older adults through American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Older adults can speak to a technology trainer from 9:00 am–8:00 pm EDT Monday to Friday for free at 888-713-3495. <b>Click on the Main Menu to find classes in Spanish and Mandarin.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tech Boomers / Tech Life Unity</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.techlifeunity.com/">https://www.techlifeunity.com/</a></p>	<p>Free tutorials that teach users how to use the most popular and trusted websites and internet apps with over 60 courses packed with videos and articles tailored to those with limited computer skills. The site is written in easily understood, non-technical language.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tech Foundry / Tech Hub</b></p> <p><a href="https://techhubmass.net/">https://techhubmass.net/</a></p> <p><a href="https://techhubmass.ticketleap.com/">https://techhubmass.ticketleap.com/</a></p>	<p>Free virtual and in-person tech classes empowering people with essential skills via a range of courses whether the person is starting out or looking to master advanced software. People can dive into topics from basic computer skills to software use. Students who complete six classes are eligible for a free device. Call 413-340-1105 or <a href="mailto:info@techhubmass.net">email info@techhubmass.net</a>. <b>Select language at top of page to read the website in English or Spanish. Their first Spanish-only class was on Computer Maintenance They are still determining the viability of creating more Spanish classes. Some training materials have been translated into Spanish. If at least 5 people are interested in a Spanish-language class, they may be able to arrange one.</b></p>

# Digital Skills: Youth

Resource	Description
<p><b>aiEDU</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.aiedu.org/">https://www.aiedu.org/</a></p>	<p>A nonprofit that believes everyone—especially those likely to be disproportionately impacted by AI—have access to knowledge and skills to thrive as workers, creators, consumers, and citizens. Online classes that are both self-guided and teacher-led.</p>
<p><b>Code.org</b></p> <p><a href="https://code.org/">https://code.org/</a></p>	<p>Expands access to computer science in schools with a focus on increasing participation by young women and students from under-represented groups. <b>Select language at bottom of page to read the website in the language of choice.</b></p>
<p><b>DLCS Parent and Guardian Resources</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/dlcs/pg-resources.html">https://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/dlcs/pg-resources.html</a></p>	<p>Supports parents around digital literacy and computer science with access to MassCORE and school report cards. <b>Select drop-down at top of page to read the website in Spanish, Mandarin, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, or Vietnamese.</b></p>
<p><b>Girls Who Code</b></p> <p><a href="https://girlswhocode.com/">https://girlswhocode.com/</a></p>	<p>Works to close the gender gap in technology and change the image of what a programmer looks like and does.</p>
<p><b>Teens Teach Tech</b></p> <p><a href="https://connectednation.org/programs/teens-teach-tech">https://connectednation.org/programs/teens-teach-tech</a></p>	<p>Invites teachers, youth-focused organizations, and community nonprofits to offer workshops, mentorship, virtual sessions, and community events that cover digital skills from computer literacy to mobile devices and staying safe on the internet. Part of <a href="#">AT&amp;T Connected Learning</a>.</p>

# Large-Screen Devices + Hotspots

Resource	Description
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Computers 4 People</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://www.computers4people.org/">https://www.computers4people.org/</a></p>	<p>Provides free computers to <u>income-qualifying individuals</u>. Free refurbished laptops to college-bound students in financial need; and PC Teen Building Classes and Digital Skills Classes for all ages. Computers (desktop, laptop, tablet) come loaded with the Google Chrome Suite. Users can download and install for free Apache Open Office @ <a href="https://www.openoffice.org/download/">https://www.openoffice.org/download/</a>. To start the process of requesting a device, email <a href="mailto:digital@berkshireplanning.org">digital@berkshireplanning.org</a> or call 413-442-1521 ext. 16.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>PCs 4 People</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://www.pcsforpeople.org/">https://www.pcsforpeople.org/</a></p>	<p>Connects people with low-cost computers and internet services and recycles and refurbishes computers. <b>Select language at top of page to read the website in the language of choice.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Total Access</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://www.totalaccesscomputers.com/">https://www.totalaccesscomputers.com/</a></p>	<p>Located in Adams, MA, this for-profit business offers discounts on computer trade-ins and remote support for computer viruses and other software issues.</p>



# Resources for Nonprofits

Resource	Description
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alliance for Digital Equity</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://sites.google.com/view/alliancefordigitalequity/services">https://sites.google.com/view/alliancefordigitalequity/services</a></p>	<p>Offers digital equity services to nonprofit partners in Western Mass. including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital skills training workshops and train-the-trainer options</li> <li>• Devices - laptops, Chromebooks, tablets</li> <li>• Hotspots - <i>coming soon</i></li> <li>• Digital Navigator Support - <i>Coming soon</i></li> <li>• Complete an online request for services for clients at the link at left.</li> </ul> <p>They hold a once-monthly digital alliance Zoom call for digital equity champions and advocates in Western Mass. <a href="mailto:Diane.Fisher@baystatehealth.org">Email Diane.Fisher@baystatehealth.org</a> to be added to their mailing list.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Public Health Institute of Western MA (PHIWM): Libraries and CoA Zoom Meetings</b></p>	<p>The Western MA Alliance for Digital Equity can provide free resources to libraries and Councils on Aging through a partnership with the Public Health Institute of Western MA (PHIWM). Get involved by...</p> <p>Attending PHIWM's monthly digital equity Zooms. Stay up to date on emerging digital equity issues and resources. Librarians and CoA directors can listen in or be added to the email list to receive information. <a href="#">To request resources for a library or CoA, please fill out this form.</a></p> <p>PHIWM is also happy to meet with librarians and CoA directors via Zoom or in person to explain more about their work.</p> <p>Libraries Zoom: The third Monday of the month from 2-3 pm. Link: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5234636756">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5234636756</a>.</p> <p>CoA Zoom: The fourth Tuesday of the month from 10-11 am. Link: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5234636756">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5234636756</a>.</p> <p>For more info. <a href="mailto:lhomstead@publichealthwm.org">email Liv Anna Homestead at lhomstead@publichealthwm.org</a> and Beyonca Twiggs at <a href="mailto:btwiggs@publichealthwm.org">btwiggs@publichealthwm.org</a>.</p>

# Resources for Towns (Municipal Broadband)

Resource	Description
<p><b>Connect Humanity</b> <a href="https://connecthumanityfund/">https://connecthumanityfund/</a></p>	<p>Provides tailored investments, strategic advice, and technical guidance to help under-served communities build the internet infrastructure needed to thrive.</p>
<p><b>Internet Society</b> <a href="https://www.internetsociety.org/">https://www.internetsociety.org/</a></p>	<p>Membership-based organization promoting the development of the internet as a global technical infrastructure, advancing the development of technologies, and advocating for policies that support the internet as a positive tool to benefit people.</p>
<p><b>Mass Digital Service</b> <a href="https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-digital-service">https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-digital-service</a></p>	<p>A statewide agency designed to help partners use the best technology, design, and data to make every interaction with the Mass. government simpler, faster, and more meaningful. Mass. Digital is part of the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security.</p>
<p><b>US Ignite</b> <a href="https://www.us-ignite.org/">https://www.us-ignite.org/</a></p>	<p>Creates next-generation internet applications to benefit the public using new technology. They work closely with HUD’s ConnectHome’s key ISP stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Vernonberg Group</b> <a href="https://www.vernonburggroup.com/">https://www.vernonburggroup.com/</a></p>	<p>A consulting firm based in Georgia that works with businesses, organizations, and governments providing expertise on digital equity programming, large-scale broadband studies, fundraising, mapping, and policy.</p>

# Social Services

Resource	Description
<p><b>413 Cares</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.413cares.org/">https://www.413cares.org/</a></p>	<p>413Cares offers a way for people to search for free and reduced-cost services in their community. 413Cares also connects people to organizations offering the needed services. Organizations can refer clients to other services and track their success.</p>
<p><b>DTA Connect</b></p> <p><a href="https://dtaconnect.eohhs.mass.gov/">https://dtaconnect.eohhs.mass.gov/</a></p>	<p>People may log into or set up DTA Connect to get SNAP/Transitional Assistance benefits or verification</p>
<p><b>Mass 211</b></p> <p><a href="https://mass211.org/">https://mass211.org/</a></p>	<p>Mass211 is a program of local United Way offices that offers links to key resources such as food pantries, utility assistance, domestic violence, mental health, runaway assistance, transportation, and youth homelessness.</p>

# Tech Job Training + Small Businesses

Resource	Description
<p><b>BreakThrough Tech</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.breakthroughtech.org/">https://www.breakthroughtech.org/</a></p>	<p>Seeks to increase women and non-binary students graduating with degrees in computer science and tech. They offer a one-year virtual and in-person AI program and a shorter Sprintership with tech companies. Students can apply to join either program. College students can register in December 2024.</p>
<p><b>Fiber Broadband Association OptIC Path</b></p> <p><a href="https://fiberbroadband.org/education-and-certification/fba-optic-path/">https://fiberbroadband.org/education-and-certification/fba-optic-path/</a></p>	<p>Provides future technicians with knowledge and skills while opening the door for a career with organizations such as telecom. and internet providers and contractors.</p>
<p><b>Mass CyberCenter Jobs Board</b></p> <p><a href="https://jobs.masscybercenter.org/companies">https://jobs.masscybercenter.org/companies</a></p>	<p>Highlights jobs and internships in the Commonwealth and remote positions with Massachusetts companies focused on cybersecurity and technology jobs.</p>
<p><b>MassHire</b></p> <p><a href="https://masshirespringfield.org/computer-skills/">https://masshirespringfield.org/computer-skills/</a></p>	<p>Live and on-demand webinars from MassHire - Upgrade marketability with their Work Skills Learning Program. People can choose from courses that include accounting, communication, Microsoft and Google Suite. No more waiting for a specific course to appear on a calendar. Learn at the person's own pace in MassHire computer labs.</p>
<p><b>Opportunity: LinkedIn</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.opportunity.linkedin.com/">http://www.opportunity.linkedin.com/</a></p>	<p>Free learning paths mapped to in-demand jobs, discounted Microsoft certifications to validate skills, and best practices for job searching and interview prep so people can put their best foot forward.</p>
<p><b>Tech Foundry</b></p> <p><a href="https://thetechfoundry.org/">https://thetechfoundry.org/</a></p>	<p>An 18-week program to prepare people for IT careers. The program combines technical skills, professional development, and career readiness supported by experienced and committed staff teaching in-demand skills through a mix of classes, projects, and labs. Call 413-276-0609 for more information or <a href="https://thetechfoundry.org/contact-us/">email them at https://thetechfoundry.org/contact-us/</a>.</p>

<p><b>Telecomm. Industry Apprenticeship Program</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.tirap.org/">https://www.tirap.org/</a></p>	<p>Offers former military professionals a structured pathway to earn income while learning the skills to pursue a meaningful career in the telecom sector. <u>Email them at</u> <a href="https://www.tirap.org/contact_us/">https://www.tirap.org/contact_us/</a>.</p>
<p><b>Verizon Innovative Learning</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.verizon.com/learning/about">https://www.verizon.com/learning/about</a></p>	<p>Expands digital access support to small businesses to protect the climate and prepare people for jobs of the future.</p>

# Other Resources

Resource	Links
<p><b>Chromebook</b></p>	<p><b>Chromebooks basics from Goodwill:</b>  <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/chromebookbasics/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/chromebookbasics/</a></p> <p><b>Google apps from Goodwill:</b>  <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/googleapps/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/googleapps/</a></p> <p><b>Google Chromebook guides:</b>  <a href="https://www.google.com/chromebook/howto/">https://www.google.com/chromebook/howto/</a></p>
<p><b>Free Online College or Advanced Courses</b></p>	<p><b>Coursera:</b>  <a href="https://www.coursera.org/collections/popular-free-courses">https://www.coursera.org/collections/popular-free-courses</a></p> <p><b>EdX:</b>  <a href="https://www.edx.org/courses?q=free+online+courses">https://www.edx.org/courses?q=free+online+courses</a></p> <p><b>Khan Academy:</b>  <a href="https://www.khanacademy.org/">https://www.khanacademy.org/</a></p> <p><b>MIT:</b>  <a href="https://ocw.mit.edu/">https://ocw.mit.edu/</a></p> <p><b>Stanford:</b>  <a href="https://online.stanford.edu/free-courses">https://online.stanford.edu/free-courses</a></p>
<p><b>Google</b></p>	<p><b>Google Learn:</b> <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/googleapps/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/googleapps/</a></p>
<p><b>iPhone / iPad</b></p>	<p><b>iPhone Basics from Goodwill:</b>  <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/iphonebasics/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/iphonebasics/</a></p> <p><b>iPhone Guide by Apple:</b>  <a href="https://support.apple.com/guide/iphone/welcome/ios">https://support.apple.com/guide/iphone/welcome/ios</a></p> <p><b>Manage photo and video storage:</b> <a href="https://support.apple.com/en-us/105061">https://support.apple.com/en-us/105061</a></p> <p><b>Optimize storage space on iPhone or iPad</b>  <a href="https://support.apple.com/en-us/108429">https://support.apple.com/en-us/108429</a></p> <p><b>iPad Basics from Goodwill:</b> <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/ipadbasics/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/ipadbasics/</a></p> <p><b>iPad Guide by Apple:</b>  <a href="https://support.apple.com/guide/ipad/welcome/ipados">https://support.apple.com/guide/ipad/welcome/ipados</a></p> <p><b>YouTube guides to Apple devices and software:</b>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@applesupport">https://www.youtube.com/@applesupport</a></p>

<p><b>Microsoft</b></p>	<p><b>MS Office:</b>  <a href="https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/training">https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/training</a>  <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/subjects/office/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/subjects/office/</a></p> <p><b>MS Teams:</b>  <a href="https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7">https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7</a></p>
<p><b>Video Streaming</b></p>	<p><b>Discount Amazon Prime (with commercials) for SNAP recipients:</b>  <a href="https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/splash/freevee_findus/">https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/splash/freevee_findus/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.amazon.com/58f8026f-0658-47d0-9752-f6fa2c69b2e2/qualify">https://www.amazon.com/58f8026f-0658-47d0-9752-f6fa2c69b2e2/qualify</a></p> <p><b>Hoopla and Kanopy:</b>  Many libraries across the state offer free access to online video streaming with Hoopla and/or Kanopy Check with the local library.</p> <p><b>Other:</b>  Many paid streaming services (e.g., Max, Netflix, Hulu) offer a free trial or have discounted sales on occasion. If the person does not want to pay, it's recommended to set up at least one reminder to cancel before the first bill arrives. Some monthly or annual services let the person cancel immediately but still enjoy the remainder of her/his subscription.</p> <p><b>Tubi TV:</b>  <a href="https://tubitv.com/home">https://tubitv.com/home</a></p>
<p><b>Windows</b></p>	<p><b>Windows 10 from Goodwill:</b>  <a href="https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/windows10/">https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/windows10/</a></p> <p><b>Windows 11 Features &amp; Tips:</b>  <a href="https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/tips/">https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/tips/</a></p> <p><b>Windows 11 Microsoft guides:</b>  <a href="https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/meetwindows11">https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/meetwindows11</a></p>
<p><b>Zoom</b></p>	<p><b>Zoom Learn:</b> <a href="https://learning.zoom.us/learn">https://learning.zoom.us/learn</a></p> <p><b>Zoom for Chromebook:</b> <a href="https://play.google.com/store/apps/details">https://play.google.com/store/apps/details</a></p>

## A Detailed Guide to Discount Cellphone Service with Lifeline

**Lifeline (<https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>)** is a federal program that may be able to provide people who income with a landline phone for \$10 a month or cell service with 1000 minutes of talk time, unlimited texting, and 4.5 gigabytes (GB) of data for free. The free phones, however, can be slow, leading to a frustrating experience.

Alternatively, people may be able to use a Lifeline SIM card in a better-quality phone. If people want to use their own device with Lifeline cell service, they should call their current cellphone provider first to discuss the steps involved.

While switching a SIM card may work right away, it can also stop working unexpectedly, even months later, requiring people to buy a 99-cent *bring-their-own device* SIM card and calling Lifeline to activate the new SIM card and device.

### **Lifeline Application:**

To apply for Lifeline, start by completing an application on the federal government's website with the Lifeline cellular provider at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>. When enrolling, people need to upload an ID card or other documentation to prove they income-qualify (e.g., SNAP, WIC).

When completing the Lifeline application, the person will need to use their name as it appears on their Social Security or state ID card. If the person used a different name for their qualifying income benefit (e.g., SNAP), it may be easier to update that first or call Lifeline for guidance.

### **Choosing a Lifeline Provider**

Two of the most common Lifeline cellphone providers also offering internet access are SafeLink and Assurance Wireless. If the person wants to use a different provider, s/he should visit the Lifeline website and put in their zip code to find other ISPs that cover the area where they live.

### **After Choosing a Provider**

Once the person has chosen their Lifeline provider and their application is approved, they will get a SIM card (and possibly a free phone) in the mail. They often arrive within a week.

**Lifeline Support Center:** 800-234-9473 or [LifelineSupport@usac.org](mailto:LifelineSupport@usac.org).

If the person has her/his own phone, it's safest to call the Lifeline provider first to ask them to activate the SIM card for the phone. Most phones are compatible, but not all. The phone needs to be "unlocked," which may need to be done through the carrier from which the phone was purchased.

**The person needs to know that s/he needs to call at least once a month to keep Lifeline service active and will need to recertify at least once annually.** People should read and address all emails or texts from Lifeline that they receive. Transferring a phone number from an old cellular plan to a Lifeline plan is complicated. People are advised to call the cellular provider to get instructions about how to do that.



# Conclusion

For a small town, Dalton is very well-resourced with a dedicated town manager who secured funding for a fiber ring to connect key assets; a high school prized for being one of the most technically advanced in the county; a small staffed but active senior center whose director secured funds to provide hybrid programming and computer skills to homebound older adults; and a vibrant Main Street business district anchored by the Stationery Factory that hosts 25 small businesses, including one that specializes in IT equipment recycling and refurbishing, which the school district relies on to recycle its outdated Chromebooks. Other assets such as Dalton Community Television and the CRA have the potential to tap into this exciting digital space by connecting with existing resources, building activities they are already doing, and expanding their reach to new audiences, including veterans, people with disabilities, low-income residents, and young adults learning to upskill.

## **Five of the key next steps BRPC identified for Dalton to close the digital divide include:**

- Reactivate DCTV to provide high-school internships focused on teaching students video skills while creating a digital skills program that residents can view on cable TV and on DCTV's YouTube channel.
- Forge a partnership with a computer refurbishing business to increase the number of large-screen devices available to organizations and residents.
- Increase collaboration between the CRA's youth programs and the senior center by creating a Teens Teach Tech program.
- Create dedicated computer stations in affordable housing community rooms for low-income and older residents to use.
- Develop a dedicated computer space at the CRA or Youth Center to expand hybrid tutoring for students participating in after-school programs.

Dalton has demonstrated its commitment to realizing many of these collaborations, and with the generous support of MBI's Digital Equity Implementation funding, the year ahead looks promising.

# Glossary

## **Bandwidth**

The rate at which a network can transmit information. Higher bandwidth is typically more desirable. The amount of bandwidth available can determine whether a user can download a photo in two seconds or two minutes.

## **Broadband Equity**

A condition in which all people and communities can access and use affordable, high-speed, reliable internet that meets their needs. Broadband can be delivered over wire (i.e., fiber or cable) or wirelessly (i.e., cellular). The FCC recently set the new speed of high-speed broadband at 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. Some fiber providers have proposed even higher speeds of 100/100 symmetrical Mbps.

## **Digital Divide**

The gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous people, low-income households, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

## **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 equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, life-long learning, and access to essential services. Equity acknowledges the systemic barriers that must be dismantled before achieving equality for all.

## **Digital Inclusion**

Refers to the activities necessary to ensure all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) including five elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; and 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration. Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to technology access and use.

## **Digital Inclusion Ecosystem**

A combination of programs and policies that meet a geographic community's unique and diverse needs. Coordinating entities work together in an ecosystem to address all aspects of the digital divide, including affordable broadband, devices, and skills.

## **Digital Literacy**

The ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information requires both cognitive and technical skills.

## **Digital Navigator**

Trusted guides who assist community members around internet adoption and use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

## **Digital Redlining**

Discrimination by internet service providers in the deployment, maintenance, or upgrade of infrastructure or delivery of services based on income, race, or ethnicity.

## **Digital Subscriber Line (DSL)**

The technology used to provide high-speed internet using telephone networks.

## **Fiber Optic**

A system that uses glass or plastic to carry light that is used to transmit information. Typically, each side of a fiber strand is attached to a laser that sends light signals. When the connection reaches capacity, the lasers can be upgraded to send more information along the same strand. Fiber technology has been used for decades and will remain the dominant method of transmitting information for the near future.

## **Fixed Wireless**

A connectivity model that uses stationary wireless technology to bridge the “last mile” between the internet backbone and subscriber.

## **Hotspot**

A physical location that offers internet access over a wireless local area network (LAN) through use of a router connected to an internet service provider.

## **Gap Network**

A network — usually fixed wireless or Long-Term Evolution (LTE) — deployed quickly and at comparatively low cost to address immediate connectivity in a small area. Many gap networks were launched at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Internet Service Provider (ISP)**

An Internet Service Provider is a company that provides services to access and use the internet.

## **Last Mile**

The final leg of a connection between an internet service provider and the customer. In DSL and cable systems, this is the most frequent bottleneck and most expensive to resolve. An ISP may run a faster fiber-optic network into the neighborhood but deliver the last mile (which may be far away) with a phone line that cannot sustain fast speeds.



## **Megabits (Mbps)**

A measure of speed in which 8 Mbps means that 8 million bits of information are transferred each second. Using an 8 Mbps connection, it would take one second to transfer a 1 Mbps file such as a photo. More Mbps are faster. One Kbps (Kilobits) is less than 1 Mbps, which is less than 1 Gbps (Gigabits).

## **Middle Mile**

The network connection between the last mile and the broader internet. For instance, in a rural area, the middle mile connects the town's network to a larger metropolitan area where it connects with major carriers.

## **Wi-Fi**

Networking technology that allows computers and other devices to access the internet using a wireless signal.

# Appendix

## The Stationery Factory

Source: 1Berkshire

### SHOES TO DREAMS

Community-Oriented Repurposing of a Legacy Manufacturing Complex for Mixed Use

The Stationery Factory is a 100,000 square foot mixed-use creative and community events facility in Dalton, Massachusetts. It began life as the Dalton Shoe Company's factory in 1889, later being repurposed and expanded as home to manufacturing of early automobile starter coils for Spark Coil Company and finally the stationery division of Crane & Company. When Crane shuttered the building in 2013, there was a real possibility that it might fall into blighted decline, slowly eroding until it became an impediment to economic development in the heart of downtown Dalton. Instead, a man who began his career nearly forty years earlier sweeping floors in that building, his partner, and a host of friends, entrepreneurs, artists, municipal and state officials, and community organizations, would transform this building into a flourishing model of economic vibrancy. The Stationery Factory is certainly a testament to adaptability, positivity, and vision, but perhaps most of all, to the enduring power of community.

#### OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

In 2013, Crane moved its stationery division to another facility. Steve Sears, a lifelong Dalton resident, knew that a building this size would soon begin to crumble under the weight of deferred maintenance. He knew the building well, as he had been working at Crane & Company for years as an engineer and vice president; he actually began his career as a janitor at Crane, including sweeping floors in the Stationery Factory. Inspired by Northampton's Thomes Marketplace, Sears imagined the possibilities of creating something similar in Dalton. Though he had been laid off from Crane in 2007, Sears had maintained his connections with his mentors and the larger Crane organization. While he did not have an exact plan in mind, he believed that Crane's management "trusted that I would do something positive for the community." With those connections he and his wife Maria Cruz, and long time business associate Willa Kuh, were able to quietly negotiate purchase of the building.

#### BUILDING A CULTURE

Sears likens his purchase of the building to "a dog catching a school bus." Though purchase of the building itself was not prohibitively expensive, a facility of that size and age takes a lot of time and money to keep up. Sears successfully approached a neighbor who owns RBD Electronics to occupy 25,000 square feet in the basement. While it didn't cover "even a third of the cost to operate the building, it was a step in the right direction" according to Sears.

The first few tenants were serendipitous and/or organic. In the following years, additional businesses began to fill the building, carefully curated by Sears to fit its developing creative cultural vibe. The building is now home to approximately 25 tenants, including artists, a nanobrewery, distillery, acupuncturist, massage studio, accountant, amplifier and instrument manufacture/repair shop, record store, and manufacturer of medical compression apparel. Sears noted that while the Stationery Factory elected not to follow through with an idea to create a coworking space, they instead created a collaborative space. "Businesses in this building have a relationship with other people in the building," he says, referring to RBD Electronics supplying discounted electronic equipment to others in the building, or the ability of business owners to take a pilates class, visit an accountant, or get a massage without leaving the property. "There's this synergy that happens when you have a community and they all look out for each other. That collaborative workspace is what draws people to our space."

#### "A TON OF SWEAT EQUITY"

Although some early tenants had taken interest in parts of the building without needing significant improvement, the building needed work to make it attractive and practical to others. Without the money to pay contractors for every infrastructural repair or improvement, Sears set to work with the resources he had. Sears bought a floor sander and

refinished the hardwood floors himself. He painted and made repairs as needed, and was able to call on former Crane contacts to help with things he couldn't manage himself. "I got help, but I learned how to sand floors," Sears says. "I love to do woodworking. A lot of what's built here, I did myself." One of the early tenants, Scott Taylor, is an artist. Scott put his artwork on the walls to help infuse a creative influence into the built environment. In his words, between Sears's contacts lending a hand and his own work, the building embodies "a ton of sweat equity." This sweat equity extended to the transformation of a central space on the second floor into a premier concert and performance space with exceptional acoustics, now home to concerts year round.

#### IT TAKES A VILLAGE (AND TOWN, AND STATE)

Sweat equity and connections can take you far, but a project the size and scale of The Stationery Factory needs financial investment. In this case, the Stationery Factory has received numerous benefits from the Town of Dalton and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Town provided a Tax Increment Financing Agreement in 2017, and the Commonwealth awarded a \$100,000 Collaborative Workspace grant in 2020 to help bring the building up to code. A 2021 Underutilized Properties Program grant helped with the buildout cost to prepare for Lymphedivas, a medical compression apparel manufacturer. Sears credits support from the Town and the Commonwealth with helping to make these projects viable. "It really helped us - we never would have been able to do that buildout without the assistance of the State," Sears says.

While lenders had been reluctant to finance the purchase of the building, Sears was able to secure financing from local lender Lee Bank for the required upgrade of an elevator for accessibility and with helping to finance the Lymphedivas buildout. He also credits 1Berkshire's 2015 Celebrate the Berkshires event for bringing approximately 300 people into the then-very-raw space. 1Berkshire hosted entrepreneurial support

programming at The Stationery Factory in 2018 and 2019, further exposing area business owners to the building, which also came to be home to weddings, corporate events, and marketplaces. It now also serves as the emergency center for the Town and reunification center for area schools in the event of emergency. "We just became good collaborators," Sears says. "[Community and business organizations] have ideas and needs, and we're like 'Yeah, we can do that.'"

“There's this synergy that happens when you have a community and they all look out for each other. That collaborative workspace is what draws people to our space.”

#### ANYTHING BUT STATIONARY

In just over a decade since purchase, the Stationery Factory has been transformed from a raw industrial space to a hub of community, events, and creativity. It has taken a significant amount of funding, elbow grease, vision, adaptability, and community support to get there. This transformation was possible because a self-described "developer by default" saw possibility in a raw industrial space, and knew that potential could be lost if the building was left idle. A building that once rang with the sound of manufacturing of

shoes, starter coils, or stationery now hums with the sound of a high school prom, the gentle bubbling of a distillery, and the manufacture of medical compression garments among so many other sounds in a symphony of creation. Despite the common misspelling of its name, this hub is anything but "stationary." It continues to evolve and thrive in its post-industrial life because of the collaborative nature of the businesses inside, the team running the operation, and the Berkshire community. "The future's unknown," Sears says, "but I know that if we care about what we're doing and we're trying to do the right thing, that eventually the reward will be there. If that reward is that people have jobs in their community and they can pay their taxes, and have homes, and their kids can go to school here, that's a huge accomplishment." 135 years after it was built, this building is still heavily involved in manufacturing. "I think we make dreams come true," Sears says. Not bad for a former shoe factory.

## School Data

### Digital Literacy and Computer Science Course taking: Nessacus Regional Middle School

Student Group – By Count	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
All Students	104	97	105
Female	63	47	39
Male	41	50	66
Low Income	39	47	49
High Needs	54	54	58
LEP English Language Learners			
Students with Disabilities	21	21	19
Asian			
African American			
Hispanic or Latino	6	4	5
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	6	1	9
White	89	91	89

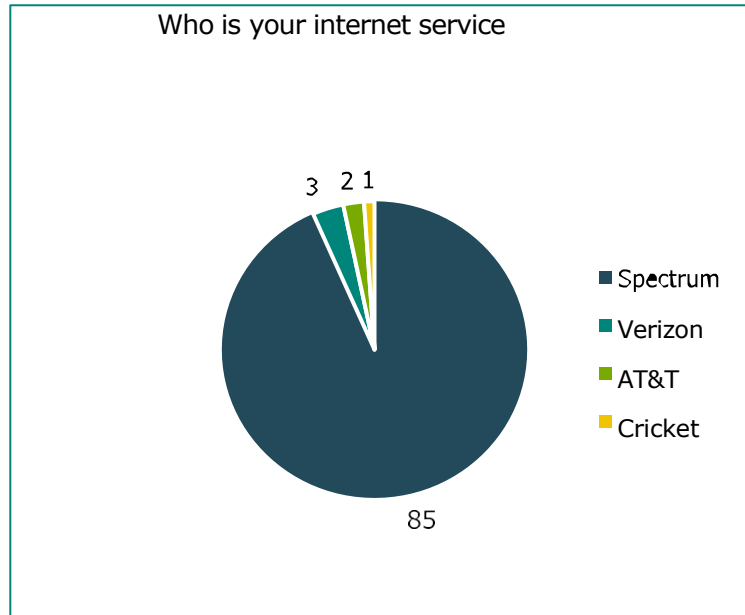
Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

### Digital Literacy and Computer Science Course taking: Wahconah Regional High School

Student Group – By Count	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
All Students	23	28	21	22
Female	7	2	6	8
Male	16	26	15	14
Low Income	12	11	9	12
High Needs	13	13	9	13
LEP English Language Learners				
Students with Disabilities	2	6	4	3
Asian				
African American				
Hispanic or Latino	0	1	2	2
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	0	1	0	0
White	23	25	19	20

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

## MBI Internet for All Survey Results



Do you have internet service at home?	Total
Yes	92
No	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>95</b>

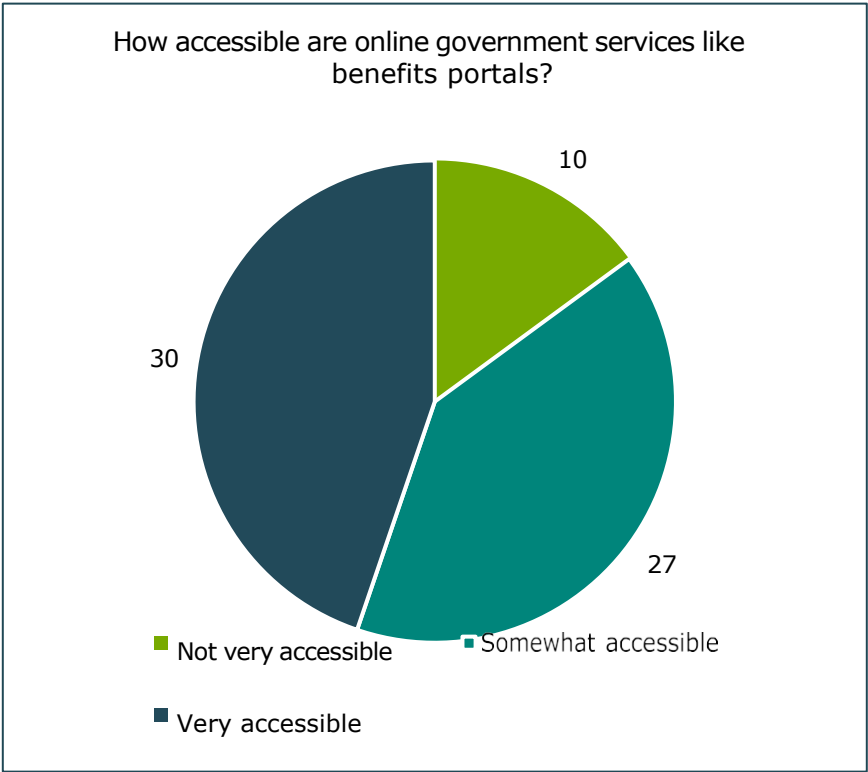
What kind of internet service do you have at home? (Select all that apply)	Total
Home wireline connection (cable, fiber, DSL, etc.)	53
Fixed wireless internet.	13
Data plan. Home wireline connection (cable, fiber, DSL, etc.).	12
Data plan	6
Fixed wireless internet. A data plan.	5
Grand Total	89

Top 5 devices used most of the time to connect to the Internet	Total
Cellphone	19
Cellphone; Laptop	16
Cellphone; Laptop; Tablet	21
Cellphone; Desktop computer; Laptop; Tablet	15
Laptop	7
Desktop computer	3
Tablet	1
Grand Total	82

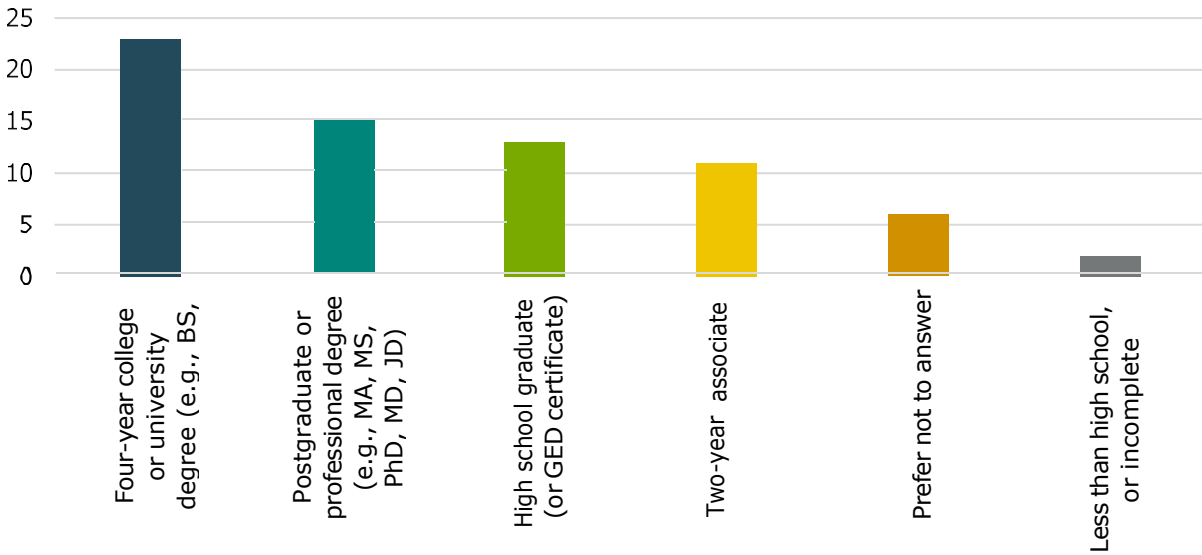
How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?	Total
\$0-100	36
\$150-250	11
\$250-500	23
\$500-1,000	5
More than \$1,000	5
Grand Total	80

How hard is it for you to pay your internet bill?	Total
Somewhat hard	41
Very Hard	9
Not too hard	24
Not at all hard	12
Grand Total	86

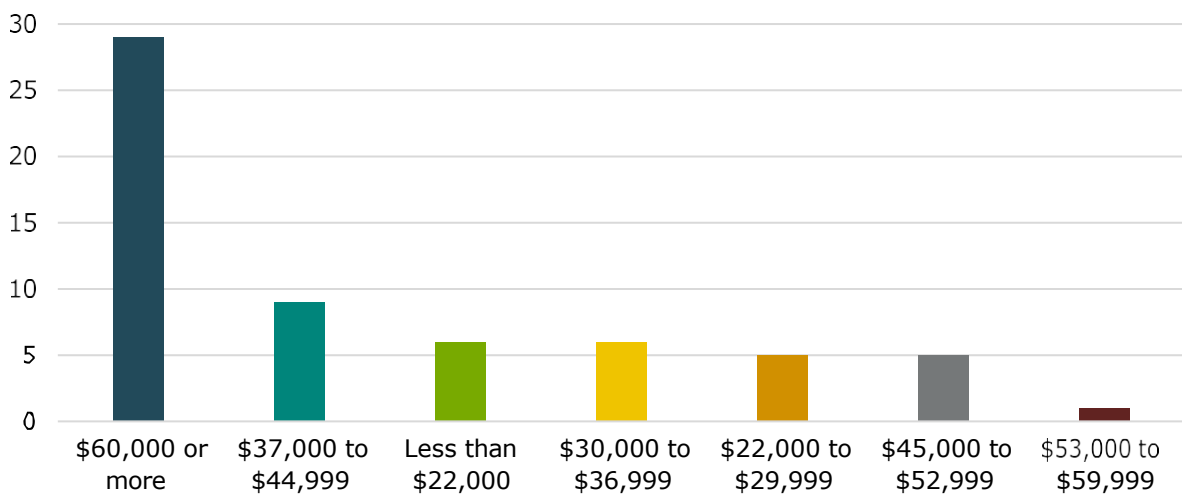


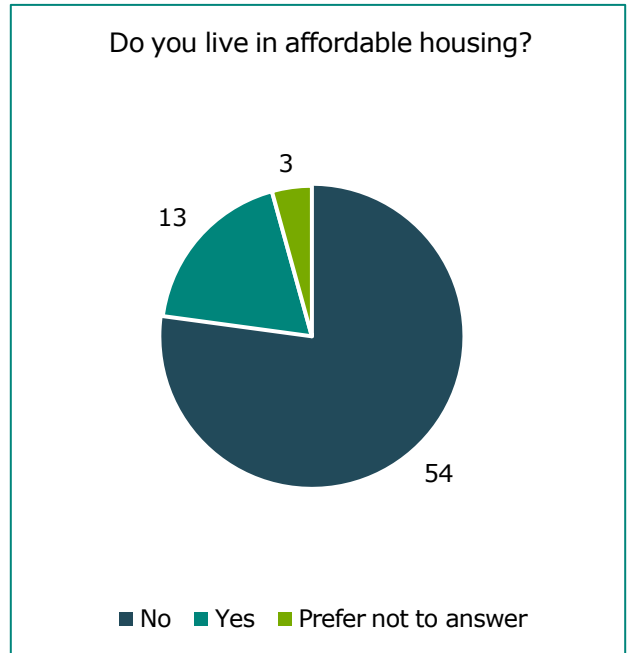
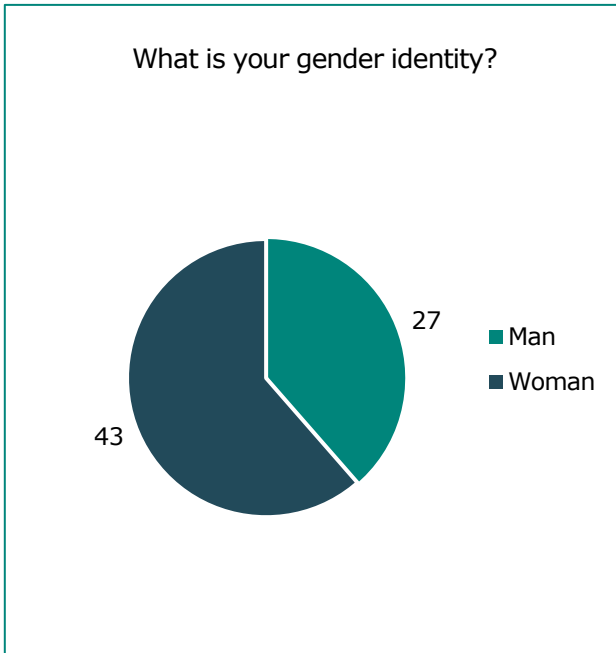
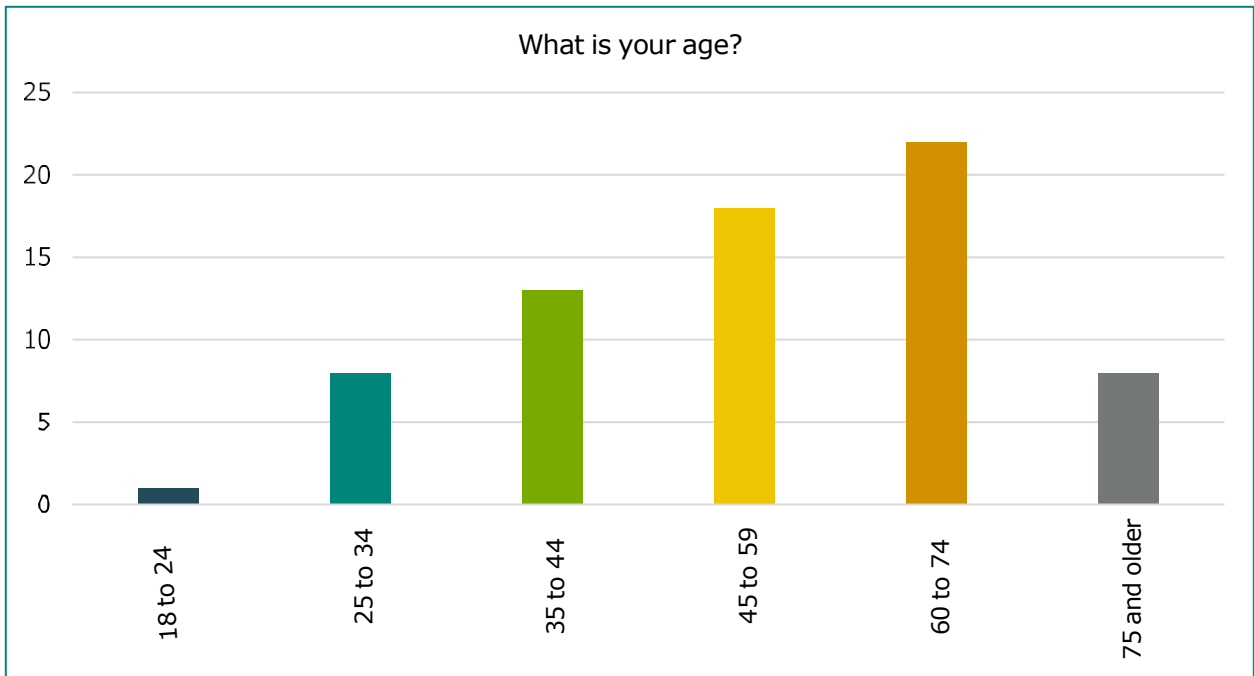


What is the highest level of school you have completed or highest degree obtained?

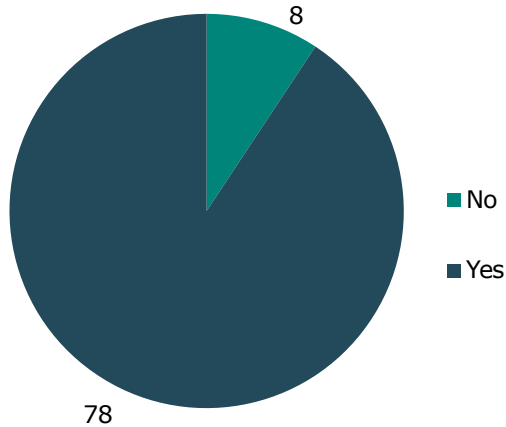


What is your total annual household income from all sources and before taxes?

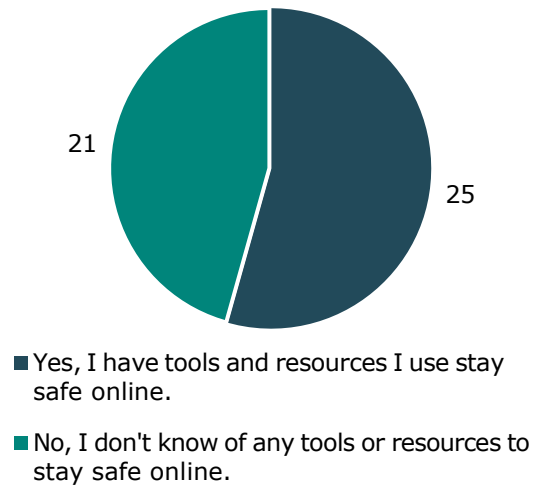




Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need?



Are you aware of tools or resources you can use to stay safe online?



What are you most concerned about? (Select all that apply)	Total
That my data could get stolen or used without my consent. That I or a loved one could get scammed or tricked. That I could be tracked or surveilled. That I or a loved one could be harassed or abused online.	34
That my data could get stolen or used without my consent.	15
That my data could get stolen or used without my consent. That I or a loved one could get scammed or tricked.	10
That I or a loved one could be harassed or abused online.	5
That I or a loved one could get scammed or tricked.	3
That my data could get stolen or used without my consent. That I could be tracked or surveilled.	1
That my data could get stolen or used without my consent. That I or a loved one could be harassed or abused online.	1
That my data could get stolen or used without my consent.	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>70</b>