

Vermont's Digital Equity Plan Summary

What is VCBB and Vermont's Digital Equity Plan

The Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) was created to give Vermonters (anyone living in Vermont) reliable, high-quality, affordable broadband, or internet connection. The internet is needed to do many basic, daily things, like school, work, shop, get health care, watch movies and shows, and talk to friends and family.

Vermont lawmakers created the Vermont Community Broadband Board to give Vermonters reliable and affordable internet connections. Broadband is the high quality and fast internet needed for work, school, and shopping. It is also best for streaming videos and talking to friends and family.

In 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure and Jobs Act with \$42.45 billion to make sure everyone can access and benefit from the Internet. Part of that money came to Vermont to develop a statewide Digital Equity Plan and program.

Vermont Community Broadband Board wrote Vermont's Digital Equity Plan. It was recently approved by the federal government. This is a summary of that plan. You can read the full plan by clicking on this link: [Vermont's Digital Equity Plan](#). If you wish to read the digital equity plan in your language, you may request the plan be translated at no charge by contacting Britaney Watson at Britaney.Watson@vermont.gov.

What does "Digital Equity" mean?

It means that every person has fair and equitable access to digital technologies, including internet access to participate fully in the society and economy of the United States.

Digital equity means that individuals and communities have what they need to be a part of society and the economy. It means that everyone has access to broadband and devices, and they know how to use them.

The problem

Vermont's Digital Equity Plan was made based on public comment from Vermonters and organizations that serve Vermonters. We heard from Vermonters in public listening sessions, focus groups, through email, phone calls, and interviews. We learned that there are several barriers or challenges keeping people from having internet.

We made a Digital Equity Plan based on what Vermonters said. We conducted interviews, made phone calls, had focus groups, and had public listening sessions. We learned that these are the barriers to digital literacy in Vermont:

1. Broadband (internet) is not available where they live.
2. Broadband (internet) is too expensive.
3. People don't have a computer or other device to get on the internet.
4. People don't think they need internet service.
5. People don't know how to use the internet fully or safely.

The Plan

Vermont's plan is to work with organizations that are already helping Vermonters. We will work with state and social service organizations and local community anchor institutions (places in towns that people go to for information like libraries, colleges, universities, labor/workforce development agencies, companies, and non-profit organizations).

Vermont has many organizations that help Vermonters. These may be state agencies, nonprofits, companies, and even libraries. Our plan is to work with them to bring digital equity to Vermont.

Vermont has five goals to get to digital equity. Below each goal are some of the ways Vermont's Digital Equity Plan will try to meet the goals.

1. Build out broadband so that all addresses in Vermont have a reliable internet connection.
 - Make sure every town in Vermont has at least one community anchor institution with access to symmetrical gigabit Mbps broadband service.
 - Work with community partners and internet service providers to install equipment so there is Wi-Fi outside buildings where unhoused people go for services (shelters, food shelves, etc.).
2. Make sure service is sustainable and community driven.
 - Have an easy way for people to give us ideas and feedback on the Internet service.
 - Make sure each community anchor institution has accessible information about digital equity services that is available in different languages.
 - Form a device loaning program so that Vermonters can borrow computers, tablets, or assistive technology.
3. Make sure internet service is affordable.
 - Work with internet service providers to make sure there are programs to help with broadband affordability, make sure they are promoted, and make sure people are using them.
 - Make sure people know about resources to help get assistive technology for people with disabilities.
 - Make sure every home with a high school student living in it has a connected device and assistive technology (if needed).
 - Look into working with organizations to make sure all students have connected devices.
4. Make it possible for Vermont people and businesses to use the internet for work, school, entertainment, health care, and other reasons.
 - Make sure all Vermonters have help available to learn how to use computers and the internet safely. The help will be accessible to everyone and available in various languages.
 - Digital equity resources will be accessible and translated into many languages, including American Sign Language and braille.

- Set up a phone number people can call to learn about digital equity resources.
 - Set up a digital navigator program to help people find help to learn how to use the internet and computers and do it safely. Hire people to be digital navigators who are from the communities they serve.
 - Make sure current public services that are online are accessible.
5. Help give Vermonters jobs in broadband and technology or learn new digital skills that help them get other types of jobs.

Who is the plan for?

The plan is for all Vermonters with specific attention to communities identified as having more challenges getting online than others:

- People with low incomes (households of income less than 150 percent of the poverty level)
- People who are older than 59
- Incarcerated people
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People who are learning English or who have trouble reading
- People who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- People who live in a rural area

Timeline

2024

- Continue to take public comment
- Start a digital navigator program
- Continue work to find partner organizations
- Award subgrants (money for other organizations to do digital equity work)
- Do yearly digital equity survey

2025

- Start programs
- Start a digital equity dashboard (website showing how Vermont is improving digital equity)
- Write digital equity report
- Do a yearly digital equity survey

2026

- Continue programs
- Continue the digital equity dashboard
- Write a digital equity report
- Do a yearly digital equity survey

2027

- Verify or confirm programs are sustainable (can continue)

- Continue the digital equity dashboard
- Write a digital equity report
- Do a yearly digital equity survey

2028

- Review programs to ensure sustainability
- Do a yearly digital equity survey
- Make an updated digital equity plan

Goals of Vermont's Digital Equity Plan by 2034

- All Vermont homes have reliable and affordable internet service (broadband) available if they choose to get it.
- At least 90% of Vermonters choose to get service.
- At least 70% of people who qualify for help affording their service have signed up for the help.
- 95% of homes have a laptop, tablet, or computer.
- 80% of Vermonters say they know how to use the internet and do it safely.
- There are at least 200 new jobs in broadband.
- Vermonters can find and use the internet to find out about and use services available.
- State offices and organizations that provide help for people make digital equity part of their services.

We want to learn from you

- What is preventing you from being able to meaningfully use computers and the Internet?
- Tell us about your experiences and hurdles with getting affordable and reliable internet and computers and developing your computer skills?
- What would help you get connected?
- If programs focused on teaching digital skills are offered, what should they include?
- Have you found any programs or services that have been helpful?
- How do we reach the people who may need support in accessing or using computers/the Internet? Who are trusted community partners we should work with?

If you have any questions for us, email vcbb.info@vermont.gov.