

## **2022 Digital Equity Fund Specifications**

### **About Digital Equity and Inclusion in Boston**

The new federal Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF,) the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA,) and the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program funding have created an opportunity to close the digital divide by ensuring that all Americans have access to reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband services in order to create an equitable society.

In Boston, these new federal funding opportunities will accelerate digital solutions to social, educational and economic problems through digital equity programs. These will provide immediate, positive impacts on Boston families, as well as help increase participation and access to opportunities in all aspects of life for those who have historically been left behind.

The new Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), is a unique, needs-based federal program funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021 providing \$14.2 billion to modify and extend the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB COVID program) as a longer-term broadband affordability program. ACP now provides eligible households with a discount on broadband service (\$30/month) and connected devices (\$100/device) as the successor to EBB.

Just 10 months into these digital lifeline (EBB/ACP) programs, over 23,000 Boston households have enrolled in ACP. Nationally, over 10 million households have signed up for ACP – about 20% of the eligible number. Clearly, there is more work to be done to help eligible households access this opportunity. If successfully enrolled, we anticipate the support will last for 4-5 years.

Boston is fortunate to have robust competition and availability of broadband and wireless services throughout the City. But broadband that is not affordable is not accessible. With affordability being the largest barrier to broadband access, the City of Boston is launching a revamped Digital Equity Fund aimed at signing households up for the Affordable Connectivity Plan and broadband or wireless services. This enrollment effort will be supported through approximately \$1,000,000 in grants ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000.

The Department of Innovation and Technology invites community-based organizations, non-profit institutions, social service agencies, local religious groups, and advocacy agencies to apply for these grants this year will go assist their eligible clients, constituents, customers and congregations to enroll in the federal government's "[Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#)."

Recipient agencies of this year's Digital Equity Fund grants will use their awards to inform and enroll their communities in the ACP and sign up **interested folks**. This funding can be used to:

- Staffing or as stipends for "digital navigators," who are trained individuals that provide needs-based help with all kinds of digital needs, from internet and device access to digital literacy training;
- Purchase devices and hot-spots (solely) for administering any ACP recruitment and enrollment programs;
- Create marketing materials with specific content to promote ACP; ● Support community outreach efforts in multiple languages in order to adequately meet the specific needs of their constituents; ●

We encourage nonprofits and other community-based organizations to focus on serving the following populations to apply:

- Households with income at or below 200% of the national poverty line.
- Households where *any* member participate in one of these programs:
  - Assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, SSI, Federal Public Housing Assistance, WIC, Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefits, or [Lifeline](#).
  - Several Tribal programs.
  - A federal Pell Grant in the current award year.
  - A school lunch or breakfast program.
- Households where any member meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income program.

Local nonprofits, institutions, churches and community-based organizations serving neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by high-speed internet affordability will be prioritized. In Boston, these neighborhoods include:

- Dorchester
- Roxbury
- Mattapan
- East Boston, and
- Hyde Park

ACP provides \$30/month towards your broadband bill for the next five years and a one-time, \$100 discount on the purchase of a digital device (a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet.) For many Boston residents, this can mean free internet service for the foreseeable future.

### **HOW TO APPLY FOR A 2022 DIGITAL EQUITY FUND GRANT**

The City expects to award grants ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000. These

are one-time one-year grants. All grant funds must be spent within one year (Boston fiscal year 2023 -July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023.)

To qualify for a grant, organizations must:

- Be a 501(c)(3) or have a fiscal sponsor,
- Boston-based, and
- Serve Boston residents.

The application deadline for 2022 is [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](#) at 5 p.m. You can preview a word document of the application.