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Memorandum

TO: Santi Garces, CIO
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Sarah Figalora, CoS
Ian Donnelly, OBM
Zachary Lax, DoIT Ops
FR: Mike Lynch, DoIT Broadband & Cable Office
RE: Digital Equity & Inclusion (DE&I)
Budget and overall program DRAFT
DA: May 24, 2022

City of Boston's Digital Equity, Digital Inclusion & Online Learning during/post COVID19 pandemic

BOSTON'S DE&I EFFORTS:

The City of Boston's efforts to address Digital Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) span more than 30 years of effort and a series of strategies to equitably address unequal access to computers, the internet, and other forms of communication technology. The explosion of technology, networks and platforms that began in the 90's also was seen as future challenges and recognized as a Digital Divide that must be bridged, particularly for the unserved and the under-served.

Boston's approach to the digital inclusion has been a four-legged stool strategy:

1. Foster competition to provide choice to residents, households and businesses.
2. Demand comprehensive deployment of wireline and wireless providers in all Boston's neighborhoods.
3. Provide the digital tools (chromebooks, notebooks, hotspots, subsidies) to connect and engage online.
4. Help our residents, students and vulnerable citizens to learn and acquire the digital skills to work, learn and play online.

Boston is fortunate to have multiple broadband providers -- Yet, COVID19 highlighted what we already knew..... At least 35,000 school families and isolated seniors lack broadband connectivity. They might have been able to get by without access in the past, but in a post-COVID19 world, that's not likely to be feasible or practical.

Where we are now:

- Historically, Boston funded bigger projects for non-profits through the Digital Equity Fund. Last year, we shifted to a mini grant model that focuses on more specific needs (e.g. hardware requests, training needs, etc.) but can serve more organizations.
- We're thinking through the 2022 (FY23) phase of the Digital Equity Fund to focus on the same mini-grant model of funding the community of nonprofits, community-based organizations and religious communities but, we'd like to shift the focus from funding hotspots and chromebooks for household to outreach and recruitment of households into new federal broadband benefit and subsidy - the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).
 - Boston is actively engaged with CBO's and social service agencies in signing households up for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).
 - ACP is a unique, needs-based federal program funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act 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.
 - Nationally, over 10 million households have signed up for ACP -- about 20% of the eligible number. ○ Now, as of February, over 19,000 Boston households have signed up for the new Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

Background:

Boston has invested about \$15 million to address Digital Equity & Inclusion efforts by improving access to affordable and reliable broadband for households and businesses and by facilitating 'ease of access' with up-to-date digital tools.

Boston tries to bring more equity and choice to residents by:

- Launching a Digital Equity Fund for non-profits and CBO's;
- Expanding Boston's Wicked Free Wi-Fi open air access;
- Strengthening the City's network and connectivity,
- Distributing devices to residents and families in need;
- Supporting digital training and skills development through a network of dedicated non-profits. And, ● Adding \$1M in funding our Digital Equity & Inclusion efforts in this year's budget and beyond.

In addition to work done during COVID as described in the Abstract section above, Boston has begun to invest over \$12 million to further bring digital equity and inclusion to nearly 23,000 Boston public housing residents, library users, and school-age families thanks to the \$7.17 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), which was signed into law by President Biden a year ago this week as part of the larger American Rescue Plan Act.

[The ECF is managed by the FCC's Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), the folks who administer the E-Rate program for libraries and schools. Grants through that program continue to flow to local schools and libraries.]

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Ongoing, Boston is actively engaged in a multi-pronged Digital Equity and Municipal Broadband study that we hope will help us to answer questions and help us better understand the internet access landscape in Boston right down to the census block, in particular:

- Accessibility:
 - What neighborhoods are served?
 - What neighborhoods can be served in the future?
 - How many people & homes are served in each neighborhood?
 - Are there any gaps in the service?
- Quality:
 - Identifying the upload and download speeds available for the basic and affordable plans.
- Affordability:
 - What internet plans are offered at what price points?
 - What subsidized, lifeline, or EBB-type programs are offered?
- Opportunities:
 - Opportunities for broadband providers to address digital equity.
 - Existing and planned programs to help those with limited access.
- Workforce:
 - How many contractors and employees do broadband providers have in Boston?
 - Summary demographic information on broadband providers including reported ethnicity, race and gender identity for contractors and employees.

Key Participants.

training they need to succeed!

1. Mayor's Office, Chris Osgood, Anne Schwieger
2. Dept. of Innovation & Technology, Sarah Figolora
3. Broadband & Cable, Mike Lynch
4. Digital Equity Advisor, Peter Favorito
5. Age-Strong Commission, Cmmr. Emily Shea, Melissa Carlson, et al
6. Equity Office, Natasha White
7. Office of New Immigrants, Yusifi Vali
8. Housing Authority, Lydia Agro
9. Public Schools, Mark Racine, Andy Horgan
10. Public Library, Kurt Mansperger
11. CFO's office, Casey Brock-Wilson

City of Boston's Digital Equity, Digital Inclusion & Online Learning during COVID19 and Beyond -- Connecting Bostonians with the technology tools, access, and training they need to succeed!

Helpful Links:

- More details about the Digital Equity Fund can be found in the following links & documents:
 - [Digital Equity Fund Website](#)
 - [Review Committee Sliddeck](#)
 - [FAQ Document](#)
- [The scoring rubric can be found at this link](#)
- [All applications can be found in this folder.](#) You are only responsible for reviewing the applications in the folder with your name on it. Each application will be looked at by 2 reviewers.

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