Montgomery County Office of Broadband Programs

**Bridging the Digital Divide:
Access, Affordability and Digital Inclusion**

for Age-Friendly Montgomery County Advisory Group

April 21, 2021

Broadband Digital Equity

- **Digital Equity** is state in which all families have access to broadband and devices, and the skills to use them, for daily living, to participate in civic life, and to fully participate in the digital economy.

- **Digital Literacy** is the skills training to reach Digital Equity

- **Digital Divide** is the gap to Digital Equity – the percentage and number of families who have not reach a state of digital equity

- **Montgomery County Office of Broadband Programs Digital Equity Goal** is a three-prong approach to help all families (1) get home access to the Internet, (2) have a device to use the Internet, and (3) have the skills to use the Internet and the device.

Broadband Terminology

- **Broadband** is access to the Internet at minimum broadband speeds

- **Broadband Speed** or Megabits per Second (**Mbps**) measures the capacity to receive and transmit data for video conferencing, email, and surfing websites

- **Download** is the capacity to receive data & **Upload** is the capacity to send data

- Federal (FCC) **Minimum Broadband is 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up**; **Baseline is 50/5 Mbps**; and **Above Baseline is 100/20 Mbps**

- **MoCo Households** of 4 people or less need **7/7 Mbps day and 15/4 Mbps night** **MoCo Multigenerational Households** of 7-11 people need **24/7 Mbps** **MoCo Home Businesses** need **20/17 Mbps**

Montgomery County Household Data - Income

- **Montgomery County has 368,898 households**

  - **79,056 households have an income of less than $50,000 (21%)**

  - **47,033 households have an income between $50,000 & $75,000 (13%)**

  - **242,809 households have an income of $75,000 or greater (66%)**
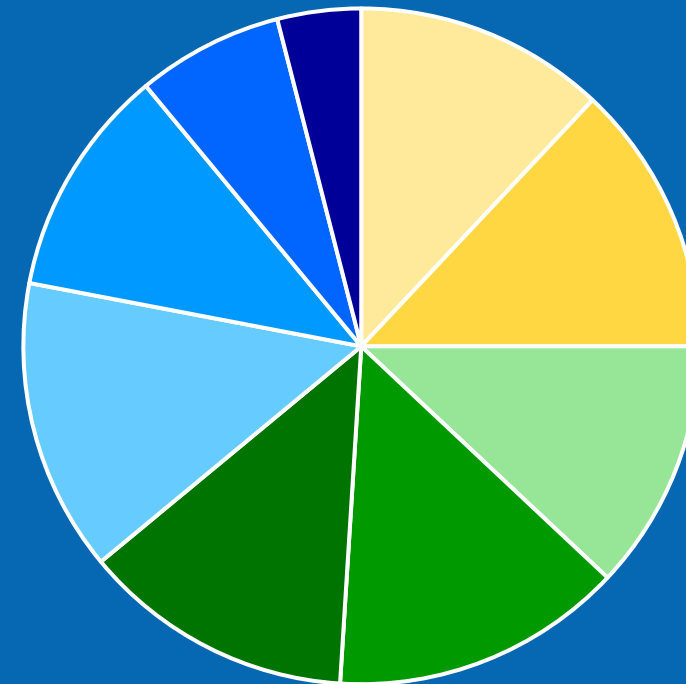
County Household Data – Race and Ethnicity

- **Montgomery County has 368,898 households**

  ➢ **221,966 households are White (60%)**

  ➢ **73,442 households are Black (20%)**

  ➢ **49,420 households are Latino (13%)**

  ➢ **58,263 households are Asian (16%)**

  The rest are multi-race or other races

Montgomery County Age Data

- **Under 19**
  262,672 (25%)

- **Age 20 to 49**
  409,768 (39%)

- **Over 50**
  378,248 (36%)

  - ➤ **Over 60**
    231,151 (22%)

Montgomery County Population By Age (2019)

Legend: ■ Age ■ 0-9 ■ 10-19 ■ 20-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50-59 ■ 60-69 ■ 70-79 ■ 80+

County Digital Equity Gap by Income

- **By income, families with income less than $50,000:**

  - ➢ **28,325 (36%)** have no wireline home broadband

  - ➢ **21,041 (27%)** have no computer

County Digital Equity Gap by Income

➢ **Issue is more acute in 3 of the County's 7 Public Microdata Use Areas (PUMAs) in County:**
3 areas where % with No BB, No Computer is greater than County average

- **East Central – Wheaton, Aspen Hill & Glenmont: 42%, 34%**

- **East – Fairland, Calverton, White Oak, Burtonsville: 42%; 29%**

- **Southeast –Takoma Park, Silver Spring: 41%; 41%**

County Digital Equity Gap by Race/Ethnicity

- **By race and ethnicity, families without home broadband:**
  - **25% of Hispanic families (12,493)**
  - **22% of African American families (16,438)**
  - **13% of White and Asian families (28,634, and 7,702)**

- **By race and ethnicity, families without a computer*:**
  - **20% of Hispanic families (9,661)**
  - **13% of African American families (9,545)**
  - **7% of White and Asian families (16,150 and 4,085)**

*No Computer means no tablet or cell phone either

Lack of Broadband in County by Race/Ethnicity

- **Issue is more acute in 4 of 7 County PUMAs**
  Latinos (L) and Blacks (B) do not have home broadband in:

  ➢ West Central – Germantown & Montgomery Village: **31% Latino**

  ➢ East Central – Wheaton, Aspen Hill & Glenmont: **31% B, 27% L**

  ➢ Southeast –Takoma Park, Silver Spring: **30% Black, 26% Latino**

  ➢ Central – Rockville, Gaithersburg, N. Potomac: **30% Latino**

County Digital Equity Gap by Age

- **By age, population without home broadband:**
    - ➢**13,802 under 18** (6% of those under 18)
    - ➢**8,475 over 65** (5% of those over 65)
    - ➢**12,368 over 25 without a high school diploma** (9% of over 25)

- **By age, population without a computer:**
    - ➢**2,158 under 18** (1%)
    - ➢**6,791 over 65** (4%)
    - ➢**6,278 over 25 without a high school diploma** (10%)

County Digital Equity Gap by Age

- **Issue of 8,475 older adults without broadband is more acute in 3 of the County's 7 PUMAs.**

- Percentage of people over 65 without home broadband (County average is 5% of people over 65)
  - **16% in Fairland, Calverton, White Oak, Burtonsville**
  - **18% in Wheaton, Aspen Hill and Glenmont**
  - **19% in Takoma Park and Silver Spring**

Reasons for Lack of Broadband

- **While some families want broadband but have financial or physical access barrier to getting it, other families choose not to get it because:**

    - **They don't know how to use it, they don't see the value of getting it, or they use a cell phone for broadband service**

- ***6% of families with incomes of more than $150,000 do not have home wireline broadband (21,922)***

- **Some low-income families may also choose not to order broadband**

New Federal Broadband Programs

- **Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)(April 2021 sign-up)**
  - **$50 discount off monthly broadband service (will last until funding runs out)**
  - **$100 discount off computer offered by eligible provider**
    - More than $10 and less than $50 subscriber contribution requirement
  - **Available to low-income families and people with Covid-related income loss**
    - Federal government is defining this as ability to show termination or layoff notice, or unemployment
  - **County is working with RCN, Comcast and Verizon Fios**
    - Trying to allow County to provide income qualification letter if participating in County health, rental, etc. program that required income documentation
- **E-Rate through Libraries**
  - **$7.1 billion nationally – details coming soon**

Low-Cost Broadband Programs and EBB

- **Qualify for $50 EBB credit per month under any program below:**
- **Qualify for $50 EBB credit & $10-$35/mo. home broadband under:**
  - **Medicaid, Housing Assistance, SNAP (Comcast, RCN, Verizon)**
  - **School Lunch, Head Start, WIC, TANF, SSI, LIHEAP (Comcast/RCN)**
  - **Pell Grants (RCN)**
  - **VA Survivors Benefit (Verizon)**
  - **Earn less than 135% of poverty ($29,322 for family of 3) (Verizon)**
  - **Current Lifeline subscriber (Verizon)**
- **EEB may last 6 to 9 months until funding runs out Maryland is planning on $15/month subsidy afterwards**

How to Enroll in EBB and Low-Cost Programs

- Current subscribers can contact provider and be enrolled online or by phone in EBB

- People not currently subscribing to broadband:
  - Need to enroll in National Verifier database and get registration #
  - Then contact provider to enroll
  - Then follow through to get installation

- Providers can rely on enrollment in EBB-qualified programs **OR** request permission from FCC for Alternative Eligibility Verification

EBB Providers in Montgomery County

EBB Providers will offer up to $50 discount per month on broadband service until EBB funds run out

Wireline Service	Wireless Service
• Comcast Xfinity • RCN (in progress) • Verizon	• AT&T • Boost Mobile • Cricket Wireless • PC for People • T-Mobile* • Verizon

T-Mobile is only carrier to offer $100 computer discount

New Maryland Broadband Programs

- **Maryland State Programs (FY22 July 1, 2021)**
  - $45 million for broadband subsidies (~$15/month for 1 year)
  - $30 million for devices for qualified households ($150 x ~200,000 computers)
  - $4 million Digital Literacy program development (Univ of Maryland System)
  - $2 million Digital Navigators to provide training
  - $2 million Digital Inclusion Fund to support non-profits and local government digital equity work
  - $166 million Rural Broadband (~300 rural properties in Montgomery County do not have access to wireline broadband)
  - $45 million Municipal Broadband (County needs $18 million to connect ~70 affordable housing developments)
  - $5 million Gap Networks providing free broadband

Computer Devices

- **State Broadband and Federal E-Rate programs are under development**
    - County estimates computer with case and optional headset is $350
    - Federal EBB program requires computer to be provided by Eligible Provider but only T-Mobile is opted into program. Customer must contribute more than $10 and less than $50 to receive $100 discount
    - Montgomery County would like to pair $100 EBB and $150 MD computer discounts plus County or philanthropic funding to support devices.
    - Alternatively, County wants to qualify as E-Rate Provider to distribute devices and broadband to library patrons at home.

Montgomery County Digital Equity Goal

10 By 10

10,000 More Families with Home Broadband

10,000 More Families with a Computer

Montgomery County Digital Equity Strategies

1. **Partner with non-profits** who interact with low-income families, or who need their clients to have home broadband, to promote awareness and enrollment in home broadband, device, and training programs

2. **Partner with commercial providers and state and federal government** to enable County to certify enrollment in existing income-restricted County programs (e.g., medical, housing) as proof of eligibility for income-restricted low-cost home broadband programs.

3. **Go Big.** Now is the time to rededicate ourselves to close the digital divide.

4. **Focus on families that want broadband and computers first.**
    Focus on people who need to be persuaded to use the Internet later.

5. **Promote personal stories.** How connectivity improves lives!

Montgomery County Initiatives

- **Seek infrastructure funding from MD to provide no-cost broadband in ~70 affordable housing developments**

- **Seek funding from EBB, MD, and E-Rate for computers and home broadband subsidies**

- **Seek funding from MD for digital literacy training**

- **Convening Digital Literacy and Equity summit with USM (June 23)**

- **Partner with other Urban Counties to lobby for programs** (54% of MD households without Broadband are in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George's, and Montgomery Co)

- **Work with Connected DMV to promote awareness of EBB**

Montgomery County Low-Income Programs

- **Asking MD and Eligible Broadband Providers to support use of Montgomery County program enrollment to certify EBB+ eligibility, and lobbying FCC to make the County an eligible E-Rate provider**
  - **36,784 families receiving SNAP (food stamp) benefits**
  - **27,402 families receiving Medicaid**
  - **8,105 families in HOC properties and 8,033 receiving housing vouchers**
  - **5,823 approved for emergency assistance relief payments**
  - **3,238 residents approved for emergency rental relief**
  - **2,130 families in Infants and Toddlers Program**
  - **1,151 families receiving Temporary Cash Assistance**
  - **973 childcare subsidies for school-aged children remote learning**

County Wants to Be an Eligible Provider

- Montgomery County could make significant progress closing the digital divide if we can leverage participation in current social safety net programs.

- Most of the people in low-income social safety net programs are either in school or patronize libraries. But it is the County's HHS, Housing, and Food programs that have current relationships with low-income families.

- These program works can likely help people navigate the processes to enroll and follow through on installation. They are better equipped to do this type of client counseling and outreach than libraries and school staff, who are largely educators thrust into a role of trying to ensure their students and patrons have broadband access and computers to access their programs.

- We are lobbying federal and state governments to make local governments Eligible Providers for E-Rate and future Broadband Benefit programs.

What Can You Do

- **Help identify low-income families who need home broadband and computer**

- **Identify programs have income documentation**

- **Identify outreach and publicity channels**

- **Identify where outreach is needed in languages other than English**

Montgomery County Resources

- **www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OBP
  (Office of Broadband Programs)**

- **Low-Cost Home Internet Programs for Low-Income Families
  https://montgomerycountymd.gov/obp/low-cost-internet.html**

- **Digital Equity Map – coming soon (montgomerycounty.gov/DigitalEquityMap)**

  - **Filters will allow you to find Census Block Groups, for example:**

    - **Most older adults**

    - **Most households without home broadband**

Questions?

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