



THE CENTER FOR  
STATE POLICY  
ANALYSIS



# STRIVING FOR DIGITAL EQUITY

**Reporting on the challenges and opportunities the Digital Divide presents to Essex County communities.**

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

# THANKING ECCF'S CORPORATE PARTNERS



## 2020 Lead Partners:



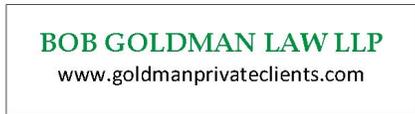
# THANKING ECCF'S CORPORATE PARTNERS



WHERE CARE MEETS CRAFT™



THE HAMILTON GROUP  
A KNOWLEDGE OF WEALTH



**John & Mollie Byrnes**



**Morgan Stanley**  
THE BONHEUR SCOTT TRAINO GROUP  
AT MORGAN STANLEY

**Binkley & Paula Shorts**

**Jon & Beth Payson**



# ECCF'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



## Essex County COVID-19 Response Fund

Raising resources to achieve impact

## Nonprofit & Funder Communications

Connecting people with knowledge and resources

## Community Leadership

Bringing cross-sector leaders together to invest in systems-change



# ECCF'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



## COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Bringing cross-sector leaders together to invest in systems-change

### Virtual Community Think Labs | May 2020

Reimagining a stronger Essex County after COVID-19

- Digital Divide emerged as a great opportunity
- Data Study: our systems-work begins with data



# APPROACH TO THE STUDY



## PHASE 1

Use the best available data to map the digital divide across Essex County, including cities, towns and key subgroups

## PHASE 2

Interview experts, leaders and advocates in significantly impacted communities

## PHASE 3

Integrate findings into a report that can help leaders understand the divides and catalyze change



# DIGITAL DIVIDE ELEMENTS

We treat digital equity as a multidimensional issue, with four core elements:

## **ACCESS**

including secure, affordable broadband

## **EQUIPMENT**

a modern desktop/laptop with a camera for video

## **PRIVACY**

comfortable working and learning spaces for all

## **TRAINING**

to build skills and comfort with computers

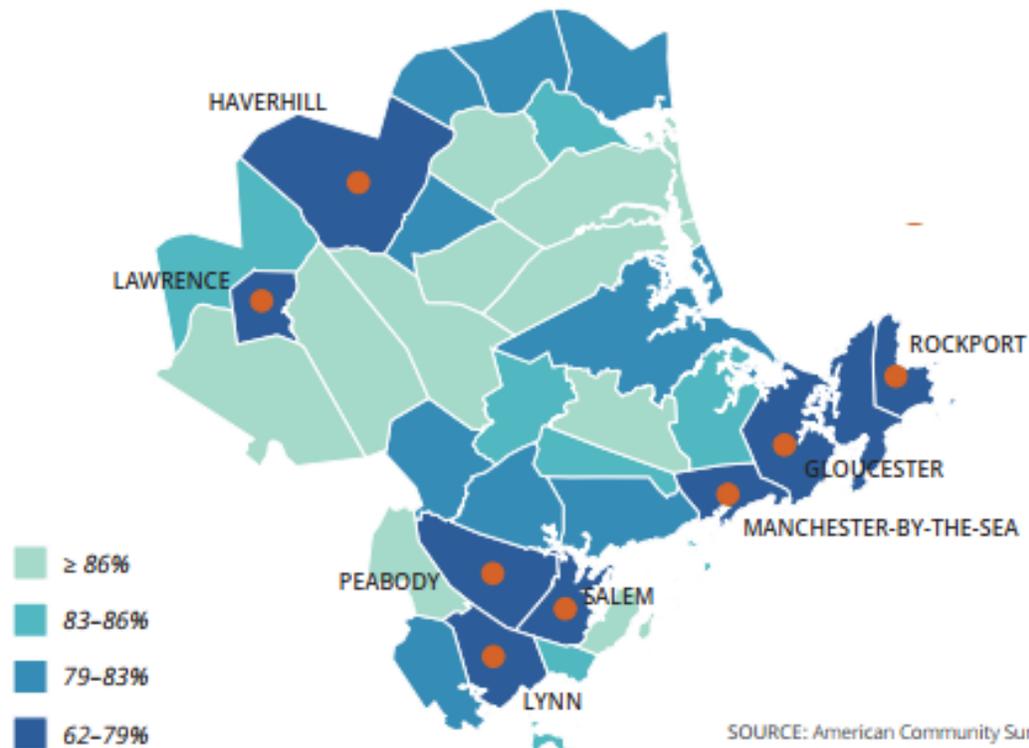
# ESSEX COUNTY'S DIGITAL DESERTS



A few cities stand out as having especially limited digital access.

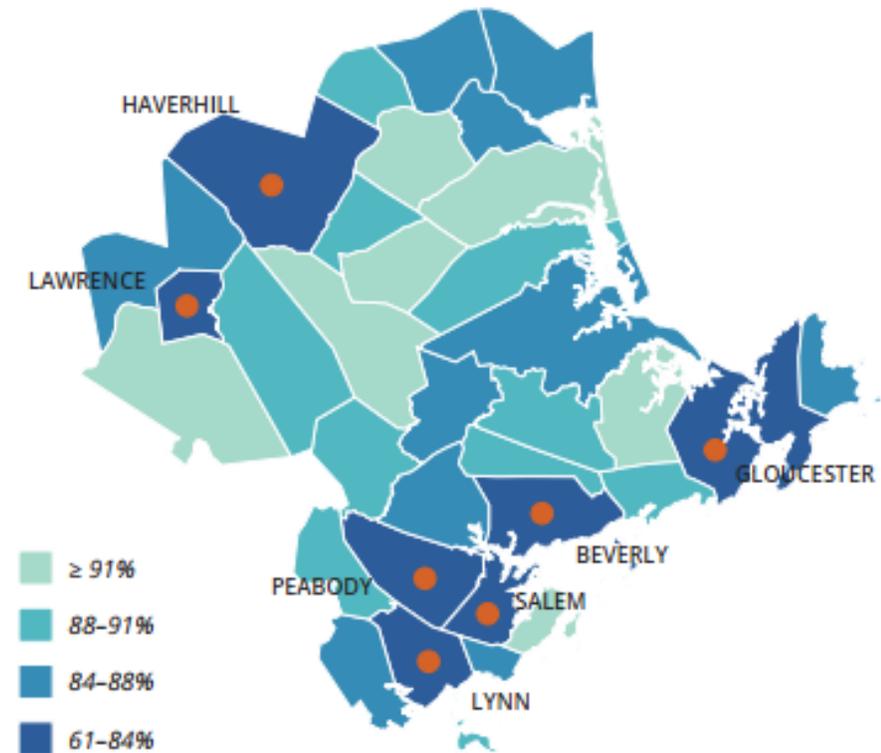
## Across Essex County, nearly 60,000 households lack secure broadband

Share of households with cable or fiber optic broadband



## One of every five Essex County families lacks a basic computer

Share of households with a desktop or laptop



SOURCE: American Community Survey, 2014-2018

# EVERY TOWN HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE



- While the most economically disadvantaged cities fare worse overall, the digital divide cuts across every community.
- Families with incomes under \$35k struggle with digital access, regardless of whether they live in affluent or economically disadvantaged places.

Municipalities where families earning <\$35K have lowest rates of broadband

Town	Broadband rate, overall	Broadband rate, families earning <\$35k
Merrimac	81%	44%
Lawrence	62%	45%
Groveland	82%	46%
Swampscott	83%	47%
Lynnfield	86%	49%
Manchester-by-the-Sea	79%	51%
Wenham	85%	51%

# LATINO RESIDENTS ARE ACUTELY AFFECTED



- Across Essex County, Latino residents are twice as likely to lack broadband access, compared to their white, non-Latino neighbors.
- In some cities and towns, this gap is even larger.

Municipalities with the biggest gaps between Latino and white-non-latino

Town	Broadband rate, white-non-latino	Broadband rate, Latino
North Andover	83%	69%
Haverhill	77%	64%
Saugus	81%	69%
Georgetown	84%	79%
Salem	80%	75%
Beverly	80%	76%
Lawrence	69%	65%

Only includes towns with at least 3% Latino population.

# KIDS AND SENIORS CAN FLOURISH WITH SUPPORT



- Cities and towns worked hard to provide access and equipment for kids. Other issues—like tight living arrangements—raised new challenges.
- Stigma sometimes limits efforts to help seniors, but telehealth is just one area where digital access could be transformative.

## Internet use among seniors varies across Essex County

Share of 60+ population using the internet in the last month, a selection

Town	Recent internet use among 60+ (%)
Peabody	62%
Haverhill	63%
Methuen	63%
Groveland	75%
Rowley	75%
North Andover	78%

SOURCE: CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

# UNIQUE CHALLENGES



To enhance digital equity in Essex County, advocates and thought-leaders need to resolve some complex issues:

## **CATCH-22's**

You can't use cost effective an online surveys to see who's struggling with digital access.

## **EQUITY (old divides)**

Real digital equity might require solving other entrenched issues like poverty and housing instability.

## **EQUITY (new divides)**

Online resources can be tremendous equalizers but relying on these alone risks creating new gaps.

# OPPORTUNITIES



This moment presents real opportunities to redress the digital divide in Essex County, including all four facets:

**ACCESS**  
**EQUIPMENT**  
**PRIVACY**  
**TRAINING**



# OPPORTUNITIES: ACCESS



## MUNICIPAL BROADBAND

be it city-owned fiber or regulated public-private partnerships

## PUBLIC WI-FI

using hotspots and mesh networks to expand access without running physical lines

## SUBSIDIZED ACCOUNTS

where towns negotiate better terms with internet providers, guaranteeing affordable access for all residents

# OPPORTUNITIES: EQUIPMENT



## A COMPUTER FOR EVERY FAMILY

to allow more robust online engagement than is possible via cellphone

## CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

encouraging tech companies to demonstrate commitment to the social good by offering large-scale support or donations

## DIGITAL EQUITY FUND

leveraging public dollars and private philanthropy to provide high-impact grants

# OPPORTUNITIES: PRIVACY



## INTERNET ACCESS CENTERS

using large community spaces to provide free internet and a square of socially-distanced space.

## DISTRIBUTING HEADPHONES AND MICS

an inexpensive way to provide a sense of privacy, even in crowded homes.

## IN-PERSON MEETINGS TO DETERMINE AT-HOME NEEDS

particularly at schools, which have their first opportunity for in-person assessments since March

# OPPORTUNITIES: TRAINING



## DIGITAL SERVICE CORPS

where young, digitally-savvy people help train seniors

## TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS

particularly around best practices for remote and hybrid teaching with diverse populations

## SHORT-TERM INTERVENTIONS, LONG-TERM GAINS

mobilizing businesses to advocate and support digital training that can have substantial long-term benefits for the workforce and the broader economy

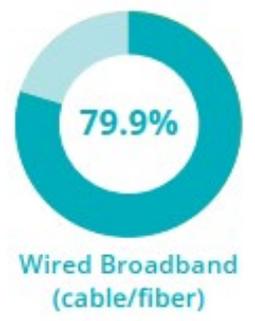
# A TOWN-BY-TOWN ANALYSIS



Our dashboard includes details about every municipality:

**Essex County**

Population	790,638
Median Household Income	\$75,878

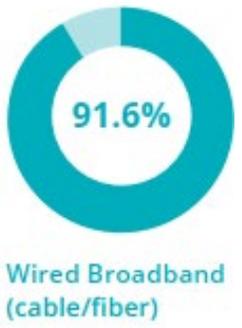


## Andover

! 2 neighborhoods with below-average broadband penetration

[View Neighborhood Map](#)

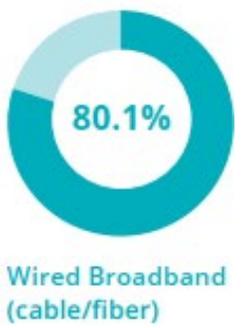
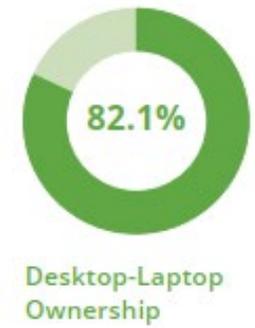
Population: 35,609  
Median Household Income: \$148,125



## Beverly

! Broadband access is below county average among seniors (63.4%) and low-income (52.9%) residents

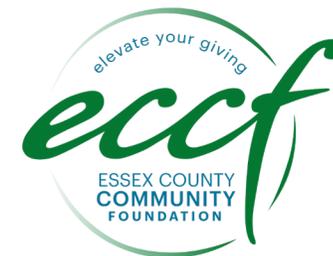
Population: 41,731  
Median Household Income: \$79,483



# NEXT STEPS



- Share Report and Data
- Post Event Survey: Please respond
- Small Group Meetings: Team will be reaching out for follow up
- Future Convenings
- Develop and Share Broader Strategy
- Continued Communication



**QUESTIONS?**