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# **Broadband, Digital Equity, Entrepreneurship & Ecosystem Building**

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***Rural Rise March 2024***

# What's happening?



# Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (IIJA)



## **Broadband Equity Access & Deployment (BEAD):**

- \$42.5 Billion (Planning & implementation)

## **Digital Equity Act (DEA):**

- \$60M Planning
- \$1.44B State Capacity Funds
- \$1.25B Digital Equity Competitive Funds

## **Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program:**

- \$3 Billion

## **Middle Mile:**

- \$980 Million

# Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (IIJA)



## BEAD:

- Maine received **\$5 million** in BEAD Initial Planning Funds from NTIA in November 2022.
- MCA submitted a 5-year broadband plan as 1st step, followed by Initial Proposal v 1 & 2.
- Maine's total BEAD Allocation is **\$272 million**.

## Digital Equity:

- Maine received **\$542,000** in Digital Equity Planning Funds from NTIA in November 2022.
- MCA submitted a State Digital Equity Plan Sep 2023 to access digital equity implementation funding, a portion of the total **\$1.44B allocation** (formula TBD).

## BROADBAND ACTION PLAN:

MCA combined two planning processes, resulting in a comprehensive Broadband Action Plan (BAP) with digital equity at its core AND a stand alone Digital Equity Plan. This ensures seamless integration, maximizes use of our resources, and avoids potential stakeholder fatigue & confusion.



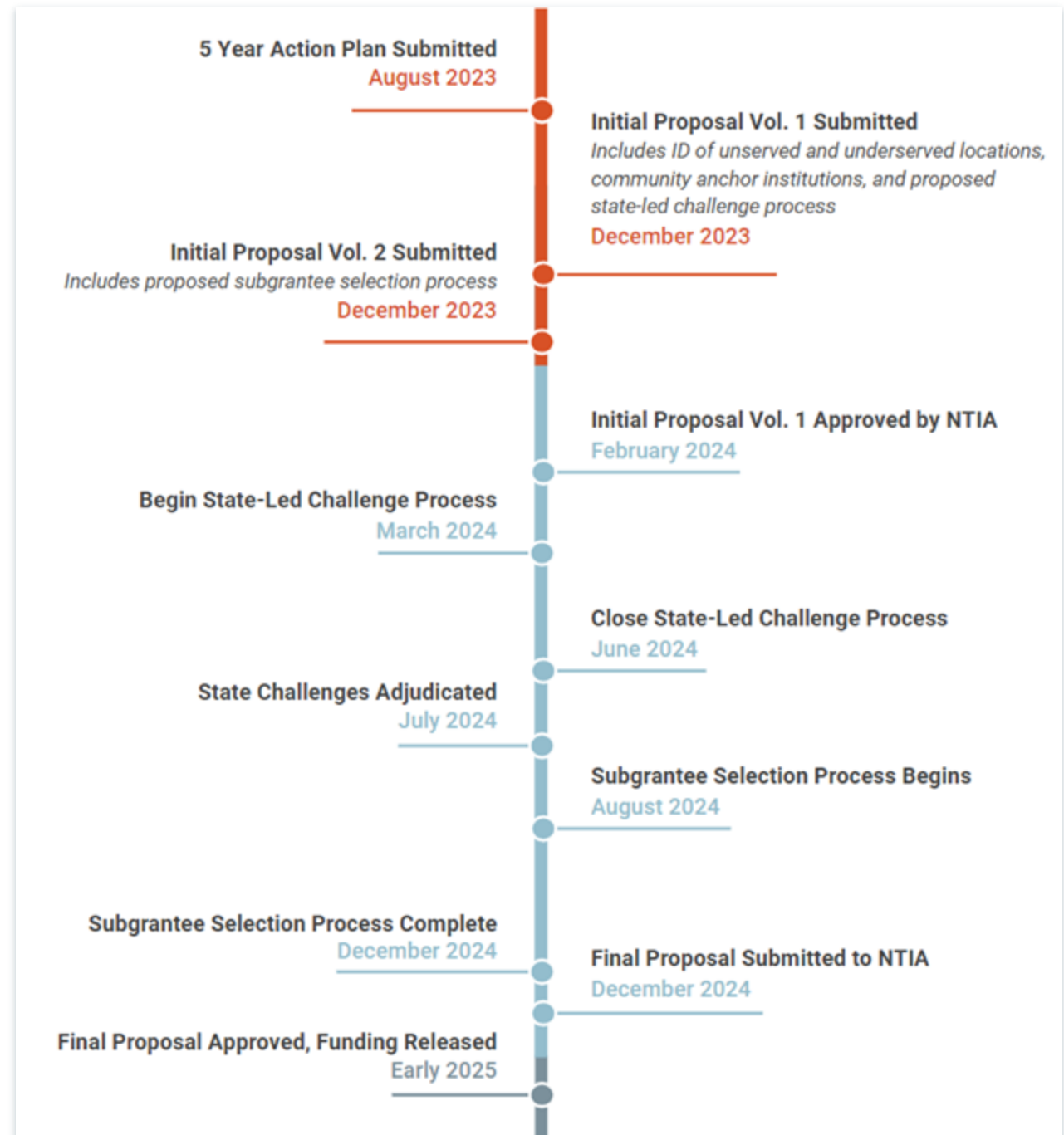
# BEAD Initial Proposal

- **Bead Initial Proposal (both Volumes 1 & 2) were both submitted December 2023**
- **Volume 1 - Spatial data and analysis components**
  - Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)
  - Unserved and underserved locations
  - State lead challenge process
- **Volume 2 - Everything else**
  - Subgrantee Selection Process (SSP) - includes methodology for the Extremely High Cost Per Location Threshold (EHCPLT)
  - Low-cost broadband service option and middle class affordability plan offerings
  - Workforce readiness
  - Climate assessment



# BEAD Timeline

- December 2023 - submit Volumes 1 & 2
- February 2024 - Volume 1 approved by NTIA
- March 2024 - begin state led challenge process
- June 2024 - close state led challenge process
- July 2024 - state led challenge process adjudicated/cured
- August 2024 - subgrantee selection process begins
- December 2024 - subgrantee selection process complete and final proposal submitted to NTIA
- Early 2025 - final proposal approved, funding released
- BEAD infrastructure implementation will take place between 2025-2029



# Digital Equity Act: Who & What

## Who covered populations

- Low Income Households
- Older Adults
- Incarcerated, formerly incarcerated
- Veterans
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with language barriers
- Individuals who are members of racial & ethnic minority groups
- People who primarily reside in rural area

## What elements of digital equity

- Affordable Access
- Digital Skills
- Affordable Devices & Technical Support
- Accessible, Inclusive Public Resources & Services
- Internet Safety



# The Digital Equity Act

- Fall 2023: Notice of Funding Opportuning (NOFO) Expected State Capacity Funds
- Dec 2023: Early Implementation Begins with Existing Partners and Funding Sources
- Spring 2024: State Applies for Capacity Funds; Competitive Grant Program NOFO Expected
- Fall 2024: State Implementation Programs Launched

**Digital Equity Plan Submitted**  
September 2023

**Implementation Begins with Regional & Tribal Partners**

*Year Two of the RTBP program begins, with focus on digital equity implementation.*

December 2023

**State Digital Equity Capacity Fund NOFO**  
*NTIA is expected to release the notice of funding opportunity for the state implementation funding, which should include Maine's allocation.*

Fall 2023

**MCA applies for implementation funding**  
Spring 2024

**Competitive Grant Program NOFO Expected**  
March 2024

**MCA launches implementation funding distribution/programs**  
Fall 2024

**Competitive Program Applications Submitted**  
*Maine agencies and nonprofits may apply for additional competitive digital equity funding*  
Fall 2024

**Funding Deployment Begins**  
January 2025



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# DIGITAL EQUITY IN MAINE



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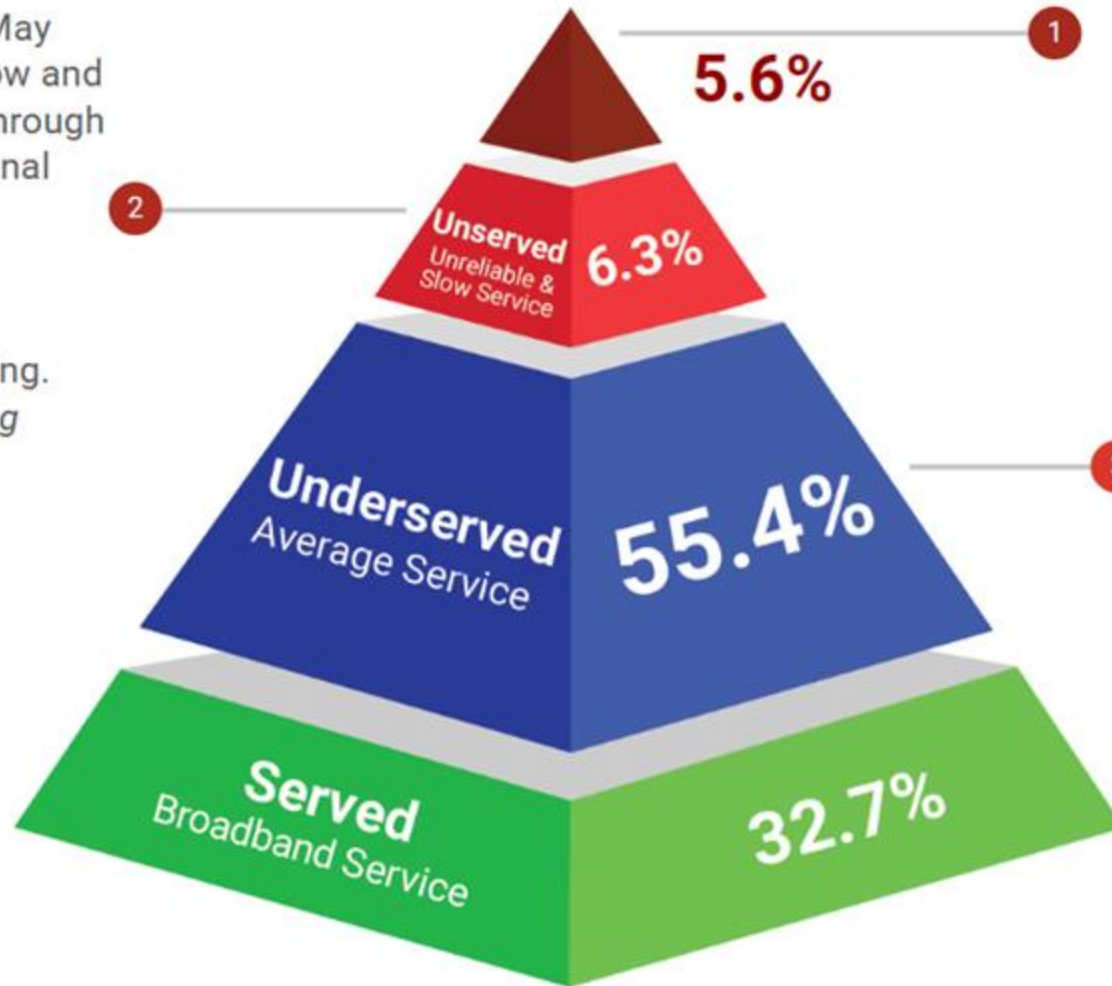


# Service Availability Data (Dec 2023)

## Unserved

Est. 6.3% of locations. May have connection, but slow and unreliable. To address through community-driven, regional scale Public Private Partnerships.

Deployments underway currently via ARPA funding.  
*\*The % may be increasing*



## Most Critical / No Connection

Est. 5.6% of locations. Updated data to target and prioritize in grants and special deployments as needed including wireless.

Decisions and deployment by end of 2024.

## Inadequately Served

Est. 55.4% of locations. May have connection but affordability and speed issues remain. BEAD funding limited. Will need to leverage private funds.



# What is the Scale of the Problem?

Technical Definition	Working / Colloquial Definition	BEAD Definition	Number of Locations	% of Locations
<b>No Connection</b> <i>&lt; 25/3 Mbps</i>	<b>No Service</b>	<b>BEAD Priority Eligible</b>	<b>35,575</b>	<b>5.6%</b>
<b>Unserved</b> <i>25/3 to 100/20 Mbps</i>	Unreliable & Slow Service	BEAD Secondary <i>Ineligible, until all eligible are served</i>	<b>39,578</b>	<b>6.3%</b>
<b>Underserved</b> <i>100/20 to 100/100 Mbps</i>	Average Service	BEAD Ineligible	<b>349,814</b>	<b>55.4%</b>
<b>Served</b> <i>&gt;100/100 Mbps</i>	Reliable & Fast Service		<b>206,981</b>	<b>32.7%</b>



# Beyond Access...

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1. Affordability is a challenge for everyone and a significant challenge for covered populations
2. Covered populations had less confidence in digital skills across virtually every category
3. Covered populations found devices unaffordable and tended to cite device as a barrier & not have enough devices for household
4. Limited resources for digital skills training and technical support; even more limited *awareness* of resources
5. Significant concern about internet safety and lack of confidence & awareness of tools to stay safe online
6. Across the board difficulty navigating government resources online and finding resources in multiple languages

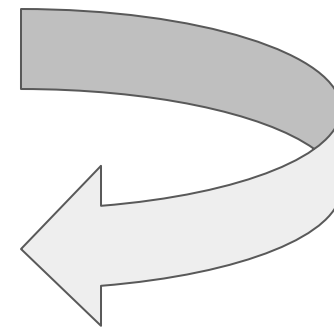


# We have assets!

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1. Core digital inclusion partners
2. “Networks of opportunity”
3. Building on the Laptop Initiative & “Connect the Kids” history
4. Maine School & Library Network
5. History of community driven broadband and public private partnerships
  - a. Digital Equity Taskforce, Regional & Tribal Partners

**Tech Help for ME**



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# WHAT'S IN THE PLAN



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# Digital Equity Strategies

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1. Build a Base to Support Digital Equity in Maine
2. Leverage Partnerships to Reach Places & People
3. Focus on Affordability
4. Launch Statewide Education & Information Campaigns
5. Sustain & Grow Our Investment in Digital Equity



# Digital Equity Goals

- Reach 50,000 underserved Mainers with affordable devices, digital skills, internet safety education and tools
- 100% of devices provided come with technical support
- Enroll an additional 84,000 eligible households/individuals in the Affordable Connectivity Program
- Explore & expand connectivity (wifi & wired) of 41,000 subsidized affordable housing units
- Generate 25,000 donated devices for refurbishment
- User-centered audit on top ten state resources/programs used by covered populations
- Raise \$15M Digital Equity Fund (to complement federal funding)





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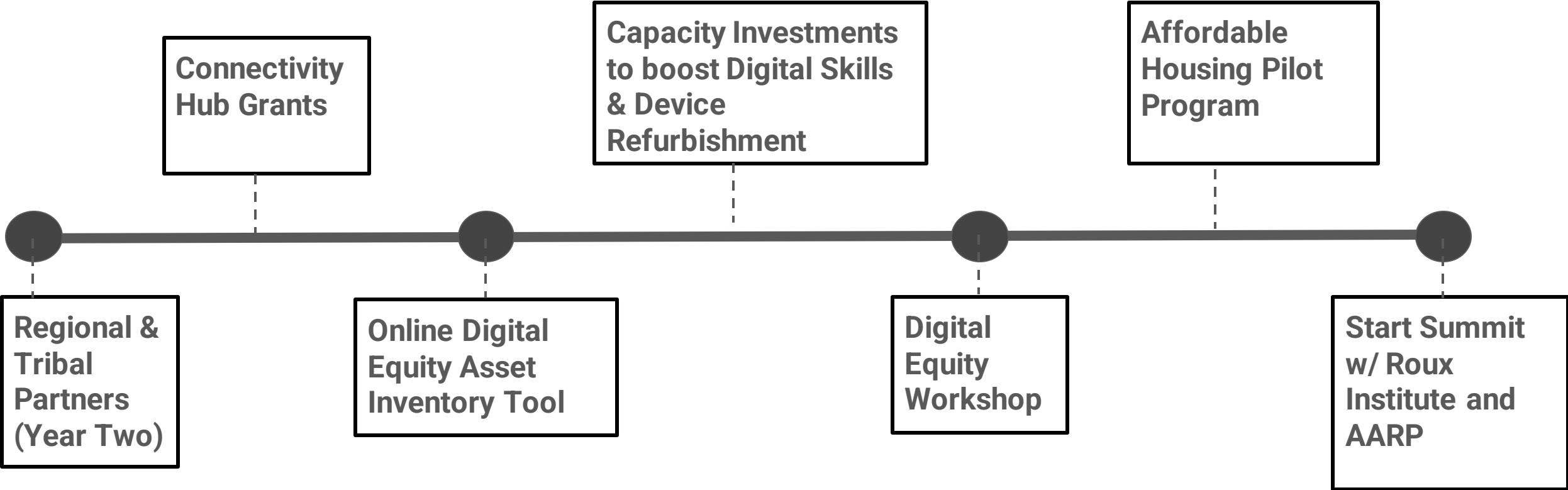
# WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW



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# Early Implementation in 2024



# Why should rural ecosystem builders care?



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With the rise of the internet, entrepreneurs can now reach customers all over the world through online platforms like Amazon, eBay, and Shopify. This has dramatically expanded the potential customer base for businesses, and made it easier for entrepreneurs to reach new audiences and test new markets. Mar 6, 2024

Fast internet speeds provided by FTTH allow entrepreneurs to explore new ideas, conduct extensive research, and innovate at a rapid pace. This empowers startups to develop cutting-edge products and services, driving overall economic growth and igniting a spirit of innovation within the community. Aug 7, 2023

## Digital Equity helps entrepreneurs thrive & innovate, and build connected ecosystems

It allows for easy communication with other entrepreneurs around the world. This enables young people to share ideas, ask questions when they need help, and even form partnerships with other individuals who have complementary skillsets or experiences in order to grow their businesses further. Mar 13, 2022



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What is possible when  
high-speed broadband  
comes to town

CORI - January 12, 2024

# Digital Equity in practice

- We have access to service
- We can afford it
- We have a device that meets our needs (and tech support when it doesn't work!)
- We have the digital skills and confidence to use technology
- Online resources are accessible and inclusive
- We have the ability and tools to keep ourselves safe online



# Underserved Entrepreneurs

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The most underserved entrepreneurs are also covered populations under the Digital Equity Act

- Low income - less access to capital
- Individuals who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups
- Older Adults
- Individuals with disabilities
- Veterans
- People in remote and rural communities
- Individuals with language barriers or low literacy
- Incarcerated, reentry, long-term recovery

# Opportunities

*Linking Innovation, Digital  
Infrastructure & Digital Inclusion*



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# Maine's 10-Year Goals



## Grow Wages by 10%

- Benefit workers of all ages and income levels



## Increase Value of What We Sell by 10%

- per worker
- technology in key sectors

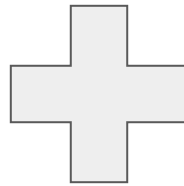


## Add 75,000 people to our workforce

- Talent attraction
- Engagement



## Precision Agriculture: increasing efficiency & productivity



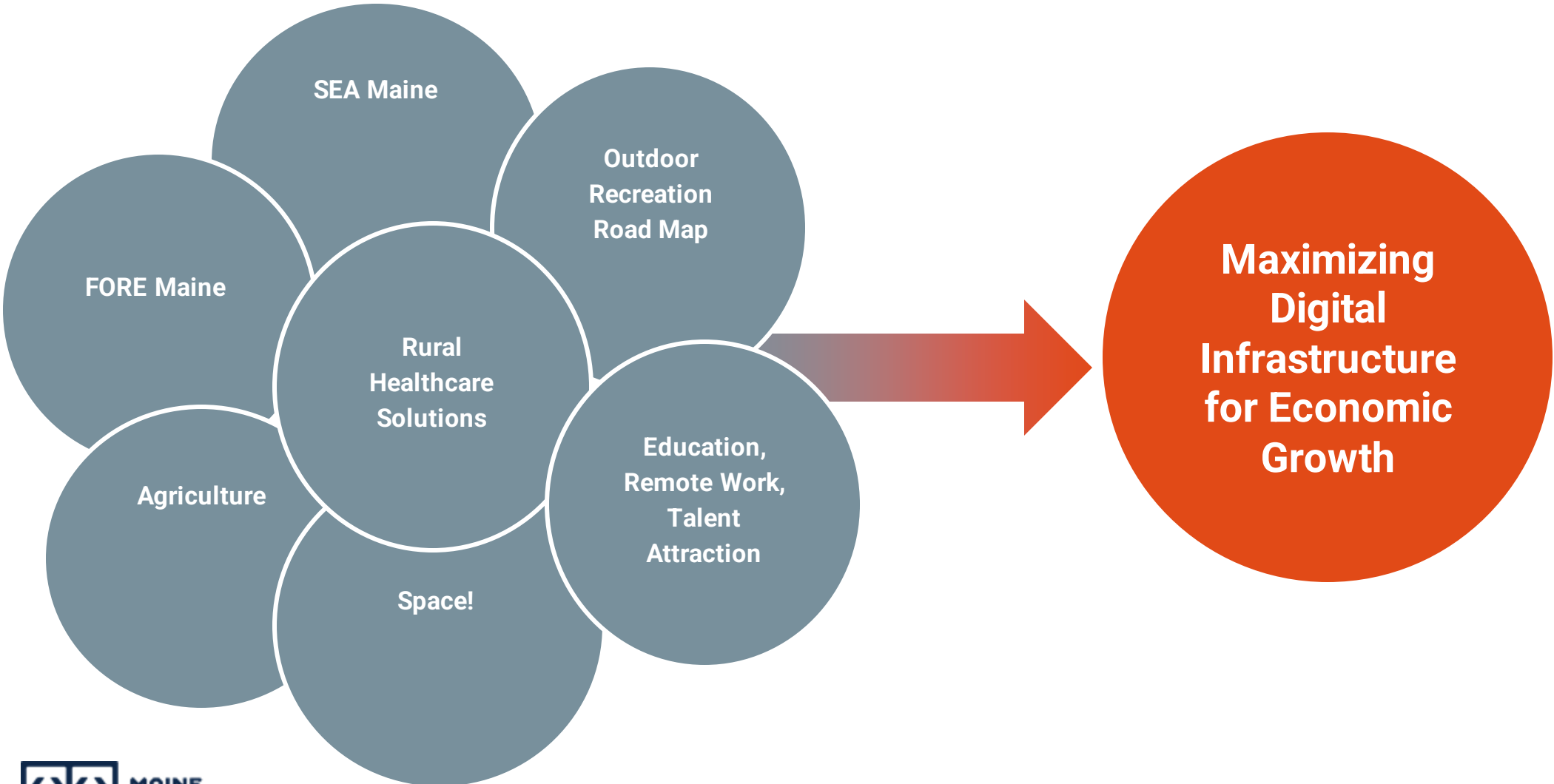
“Ruggedized” Terminals: infrastructure  
to power these innovations in the field

▶ Check out the entire Tech at Work series here: <https://bit.ly/2WUlyFS>

🔍 Learn more about John Deere's precision farming technology: <http://bit.ly/2lrQ5bl>



# Unique Opportunity



# Economic Development Action Plan

*Our first charge: Understanding the current status of innovation-driven industry support efforts*

**FOREST OPPORTUNITY ROADMAP / MAINE**



**SEA Maine**  
SEAFOOD ECONOMIC ACCELERATOR



MAINE  
SPACE  
2030



**MAINE'S 10-YEAR OUTDOOR  
RECREATION ECONOMY ROADMAP**



# Economic Development Action Plan

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## **2. Combining industry support efforts with connectivity assessment - current and future needs**

- a. What connectivity infrastructure is needed to support the industry's strategic plan or initiatives?
- b. How can MCA fund or leverage funds to build this infrastructure?

## **3. What skills, support, or other resources are needed in addition to connectivity infrastructure to support advancement of these key industries?**

- a. What tech support, training, and other solutions are needed to assist businesses and the workforce?



# Connectivity Hubs



# Start Summit



# Examples

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## Skowhegan Main Street

Main St Ecosystem Building Pilot did an assessment of web presence and digital skills training needed by their Main Street businesses and entrepreneurs. Part of their ecosystem assessment.



# Examples

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**SMPDC**  
SOUTHERN MAINE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

A Regional Broadband Partner is combining their work under the State's economic resilience hub programming with digital equity work funded by MCA - resulting in specific targeted loans and assistance to minority owned businesses combined with digital skills assessments/training for entrepreneurs themselves and outreach to employees for Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment support.





# Take Action: How?

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1. Read your state's BEAD and Digital Equity Plans and provide input about how these plans can support entrepreneurs & ecosystem builders - ensure that your goals are integrated.
2. Consider participating in the State Led Challenge Process - get familiar with process in your state.
3. Provide Data: Consider doing a digital equity survey within your ecosystem to identify barriers and specific needs.
4. Integrate digital inclusion: Assess & support digital skill building, training, & internet safety education for entrepreneurs & ecosystem builders
5. Maximize impact of Hubs: Identify Community Anchor Institutions that support entrepreneurs & ecosystem builders and ensure they get served



# Take Action: How?

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1. Accessibility: Ensure your online and digital ecosystem resources are accessible & inclusive to all entrepreneurs.
1. Awareness: Help entrepreneurs and small businesses understand why digital equity matters to them - customers, markets, workforce, etc.
1. Be prepared for state distribution of the digital equity capacity funds. (*National Digital Inclusion Alliance has some great guidance on their website!*)
1. Consult with partners to consider digital equity Competitive Grant Program.



# Opportunities

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- Fiber deployment
- Device Refurbishment capacity & distribution platforms
- Online digital equity asset inventories
- Affordable housing connectivity solutions
- Connectivity solutions for incarcerated
- Rural telehealth solutions
- Tracking progress & evaluating impact



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THANK YOU!



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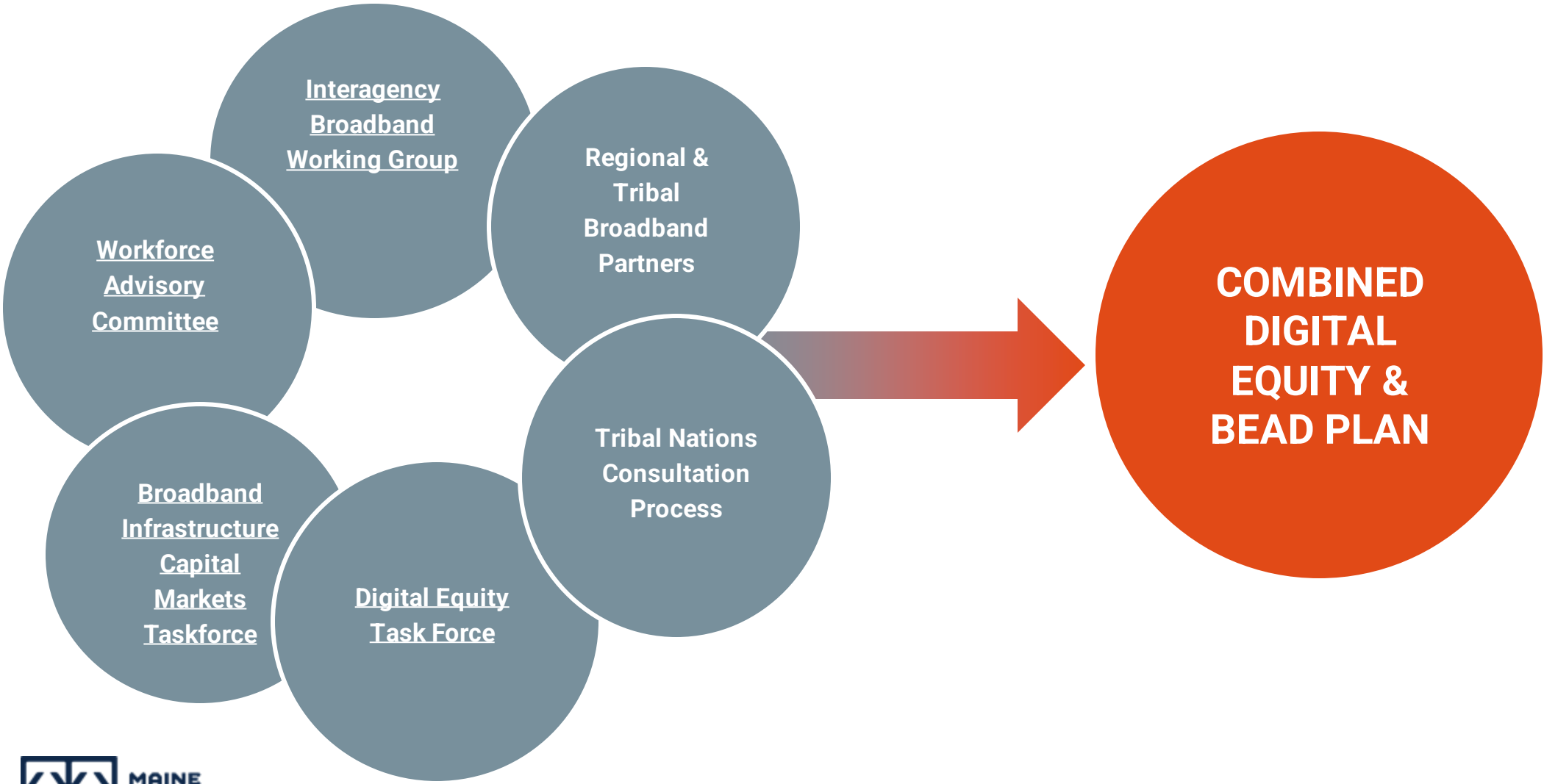
# HOW WE CREATED THE PLAN



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# Strength in Partners



- **Maine Digital Equity Survey**
  - 13 Languages
  - Hard copy & online
- **Focus Groups**
- **Community Meetings**
- **Regional & Tribal Plans**
  - Interviews with individuals
  - Coalitions
- **Stakeholder & Partner Outreach**
  - Industry partners interviews & roundtables
  - Agency partners
- **Collecting existing data, policy, and plans**
- **Print & radio advertising**
  - targeted demographics
  - geographies
  - multiple languages
- **Tribal Consultations**
- **Digital Equity Asset Inventory**
- **Digital Equity Workshop**

## 13 Regional and Tribal Plans

- Vision for digital equity
- Barriers & assets
- Recommendations
- Areas to explore



## 180 Partners

- Regional and tribal coalitions formed for the first time



## 651 Interviews with Individuals & Organizations

- Lived experience
- Organizations closest to the challenges and opportunities



# Essential Challenge Facing States

- ❖ **Urgency**
- ❖ **ACP!**
- ❖ **Relatively Limited Resources (for Maine)**
- ❖ **Significant unknown factors (timeline)**
- ❖ **Long term need to maintain focus on digital inclusion as technology changes**

## Goals:

- Maximize the impact of infrastructure investment
- Demonstrate impact of digital inclusion
- Ensure broad understanding and integration of digital equity & inclusion
- Build a healthy digital equity ecosystem that can sustain itself