

Southern Maine Digital Inclusion Plan

January 2026



SMPDC
SOUTHERN MAINE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

UPward
consulting



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Introduction

Over the course of three years, the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) has worked diligently on Broadband and Digital Inclusion efforts. Thanks to the collective effort and commitment of community partners across Southern Maine, digital inclusion efforts have increased across the region. Though the digital divide persists, the work that has been conducted to mitigate the digital divide provides a model for future community-based efforts to pursue further endeavors.

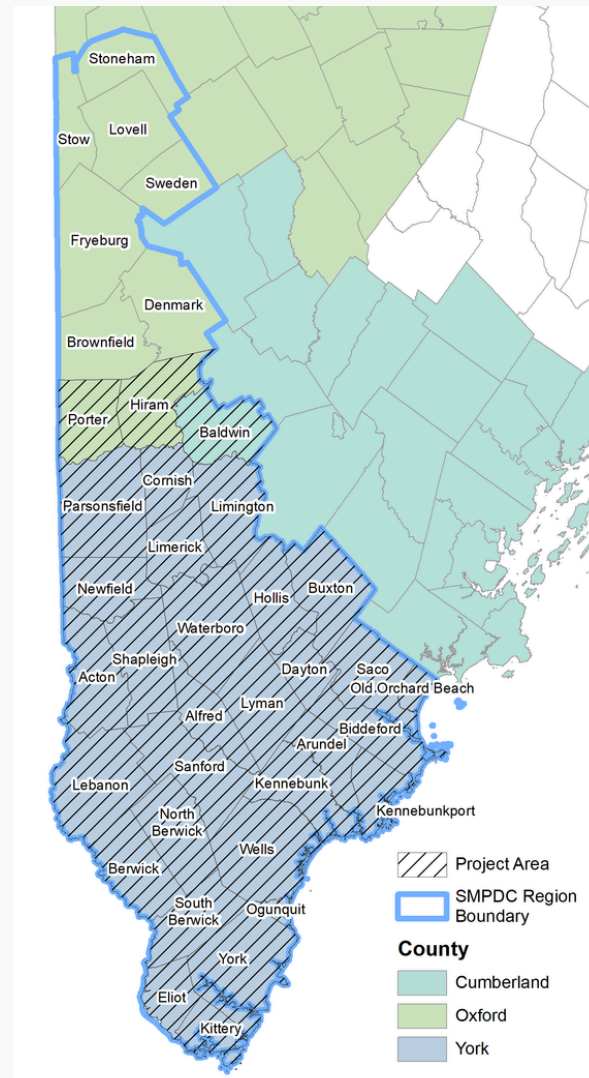
Thank you to all community partners who have spent various hours providing feedback, ideas, and words of wisdom that have assisted with this initiative's efforts.

Purpose

The creation of the Southern Maine Digital Inclusion Plan update aims to inspire the next wave of digital opportunity in Southern Maine. This document presents a framework of strategies that aim to empower digital inclusion efforts & support the specific digital needs of our region's unique communities. By implementing these strategies, community leaders can strengthen their network of partnerships, align their goals, and improve their success in building capacity for digital inclusion work.

Project Area

The SMPDC Broadband and Digital Inclusion program was funded and guided by the Maine Connectivity Authority's Regional and Wabanaki Broadband Partners Program to support broadband accessibility and digital inclusion in the communities of York County and the northerly neighboring towns of Hiram, Porter, and Baldwin. This geographic area is referred to in this plan as "Southern Maine."



Sector-based Approach

To inform the content of this plan, Southern Maine Planning Development and Upward Consulting conducted a range of community engagement activities to solicit feedback from community partners. Based upon community partner response and initiative engagement, this plan focuses primarily on identifying strategies and recommendations for Libraries, Adult Education Centers, and Organizations serving Seniors (community members 65 and older). Though these strategies and recommendations can be applied to a variety of community partners in many different sectors, the outlined strategies are informed primarily by the needs and barriers of Libraries, Adult Education Centers, and Organizations Serving Seniors due to response and engagement.

Applicability

This plan includes case studies that serve as a reference point for future community-based digital inclusion projects. Though these projects aim to provide both example and inspiration, such projects have not been tested for generalizability. Each community has different strengths and challenges that may yield different project outcomes upon implementation.

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Goals

1 Digital Device Access

Increase opportunities for people to access appropriate and affordable digital devices necessary for engaging fully in education, work, and modern life;

2 Digital Skills Development

Increase pathways available for people to develop the digital skills necessary for full participation in work and life;

3 Adaptability

Assist people, businesses, organizations and municipalities in preparing for and responding to new advancements in digital technology and shifts in the digital landscape to achieve and maintain their prosperity.



Goal 1

Digital Device Access

Increase opportunities for people to access appropriate and affordable digital devices necessary for engaging fully in education, work, and modern life.

Barrier: Organizational Capacity

Sector Impact: Organizations Serving Seniors

Entities in Maine that are categorized as organizations serving seniors do not follow a standard organizational form or structure. Some organizations are committees associated with local government, while others are certified 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. Due to such network diversity, some organizations struggle to maintain capacity due to a lack of volunteers or paid staff. Such limitations may negatively impact an organization's ability to offer community members access to free or affordable digital devices or to meet its goals for digital device distribution.

Recommended Action

Create collaborative multi-stakeholder programming to bolster operational capacity and overall reach of community members within a targeted service area.

How to Get Started

- Identify community partners who share common interests pertaining to digital inclusion or the assistance of community members 65 and older.
- Upon identifying potential partnerships, conduct an asset map to better understand how each partner can help with their available resources.

Resources

Asset mapping:

- [National Digital Inclusion Alliance Asset Mapping Guide](#)

Barrier: Funding Limitations

Sector Impact: Adult Education Centers

Adult Education Centers across Southern Maine offer online programming that allows adult learners the ability to access classroom content from a variety of convenient locations. However, not all community members have access to affordable internet or digital devices to participate. Such a challenge is exacerbated by funding limitations that inhibit adult education centers efforts to meet the digital device needs of their students.

Recommended Action

Develop grant applications that weave the identified digital device needs of the community into funding opportunities for workforce development and enrichment.

How to Get Started

Conduct a semester needs assessment of how many current adult learners are in need of personal digital devices for online participation. Combine the initial assessment with an integrated digital device needs assessment for new students during intake processes. Such data collection integration will provide an estimation of need for long range grant planning.

Resources

Conducting a Needs Assessment:

- [Digital Connect: Household Device Assessment](#)
- This questionnaire developed by Gila River Communications aims to assist community partners and digital navigators with establishing a technology needs baseline.

Barrier: Circulatory Limitations

Sector Impact: Libraries

Libraries aim to provide their community members access to free communal resources and services. Due to variation in operational procedures, circulation system processes, staff capacity, and fundraising efforts across institutions, circulating individual digital devices that allow community members to engage fully in education, work, and modern life may strain staff capacity and existing circulatory systems within Libraries. Additionally, pilot programming that has occurred over the past two and a half years has highlighted how libraries may face challenges with device lending due to occasional lack of device returns and damaged devices.

Recommended Action

Increase collaborative community based partnerships to create population targeted small scale digital device lending programming to mitigate circulatory challenges.

How to Get Started

Meet with staff who manage circulatory operations to conduct a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) analysis of the existing circulatory system map to better understand areas of system flexibility and strain for a potential lending device programming.

Resources

Conducting a SWOT Analysis:

- [Mind Tool's SWOT Analysis Overview](#)
- [Community Toolbox: SWOT Analysis Introduction](#)

Echo Dot Program

Age Friendly Biddeford & McArthur Library

Age Friendly Biddeford, in partnership with McArthur Library, conducted a community-based smart appliance project that has enabled community members 65 and older in the area to access free Echo Dots, smart plugs, and smart bulbs. This program was made possible through Lifelong Maine and the support of Age Friendly Saco.

In the Fall of 2025, the program provided 20 community members with digital devices.

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Keeping Kids Connected

Grahamtastic Connection

Grahamtastic Connection provided five students facing life-threatening illnesses with technology packages that included a \$500 internet voucher and a digital device. Devices provided were either an iPad with a protective OtterBox case or a laptop. In addition to distributing these technology packages, Grahamtastic Connection partnered with reputable repair shops to address any device repair needs. Such partnerships ensured that the equipment remained functional and reliable for learning, communication, and connection.

Maine Health was an essential partner for ensuring the project reached its targeted audience and to maintain the privacy of its participants

Project Contact: Kathy Tranchemontange, kathy@grahamtastic.org

Clean Energy Digital Access Project

Biddeford Adult Education



Biddeford Adult Education (BAE) provides students in its virtual Clean Energy Training Program with Chromebooks and mobile hotspots to ensure they have reliable access to digital devices and internet connectivity. This initiative supports adult learners who face significant barriers to participating in online education due to limited access to technology.

In addition to distributing devices, BAE staff offer device orientation and ongoing digital support. Students receive guidance on using their Chromebooks, navigating online coursework, conducting job searches, and communicating effectively with advisors. Through this combined approach, the program strengthens digital equity and ensures that all learners can fully engage in their training and career development.

BAE's Clean Energy Digital Access Project highlights how workforce readiness can be strategically woven to address digital inequities.

Project Contact: Dave Durkee, ddurkee@biddefordschools.me

Digital Devices for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

Volunteers Of America Northern New England (VOANNE) & the National Digital Equity Center (DECD)

Through an SMPDC-facilitated partnership, VOANNE partnered with the NDEC to provide digital skills classes and to create a digital device lending system for veterans experiencing homelessness. This initiative strengthened the support for veterans by expanding access to essential technology and creating pathways for veterans to connect with virtual services and resources.

This project replaced dated desktop computers with up-to-date laptops and tablets to create a flexible digital device lending system.

Project Contact: Kayla Lewis, upwardconsultingllc@gmail.com

Hotspots for Change

Biddeford Education Foundation

Biddeford Public School Education Foundation partnered with Aid for Saco Kids to provide low-income households in Biddeford and Saco with reliable internet access through mobile hotspots for one year. As a result of this project, identified students and their families have access to reliable internet, device orientation, and digital device support. This project aims to ensure that families have the technology and assistance needed to complete coursework, conduct job searches, and maintain full communication with advisors.

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Through an SMPDC-facilitated partnership, the Louis B. Goodall library partnered with SCAE to raffle five student packages, each consisting of a mobile hotspot, a Mid-grade laptop for online classes, a mouse and pad, and a \$20 Hannaford gift card. The raffle also circulated an additional fourteen \$20 gift cards to students attending SCAE.

The collaboration also furnished Louis B. Goodall with 11 hotspots for community lending.

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Sanford Hotspot Project

Sanford Community & Adult Education (SCAE) and Louis B. Goodall Library

Ensuring Access to Devices for Adult Learners

Sanford Community Adult Education



SCAE provided computers to learners who lacked the financial means to purchase their own devices. This support promoted equitable educational outcomes for all students enrolled in SCAE.

In addition to providing access to technology, instructors offered guidance and ongoing support to help students navigate digital tools, including email, Google Workspace, online learning platforms, and internet research tools. Additionally, digital skills instruction was integrated into classroom activities and tailored to each learner's skill level.

Project Contact: Jane Perkins, JPerkins@sanford.org



Goal 2

Digital Skills Development

Increase pathways available for people to develop the digital skills necessary for full participation in work and life.

Barrier: Digital Skills Hesitancy

Sector Impact: Organizations Serving Seniors

Over the past three years, organizations that serve seniors within the York County area have voiced concern that community members 65 and older have hesitancy to adopt new digital skills. Additionally community partners that serve community members 65 and older have expressed concern for how loneliness exacerbates such hesitancy.

Recommended Action

Create programming that couples digital inclusion centered group conversation and individualized one-on-one tech support.

How to Get Started

With a multitude of digital skills programming available online, choosing the right support tools for community conversation and one-on-one tech support can be challenging. To assist with designing programming to facilitate group conversation and one-on-one tech support, utilize a project centered logic model to clearly articulate desired outcomes and necessary activities.

Resources

Logic Model:

- [NACCHO Logic Model Guide](#)

Digital Skills Support:

- [AARP Digital Fraud Fighter](#)
- [Monet Digital Navigator Training](#)
- [National Digital Navigator Corps Stories](#)

Barrier: Limited Content Specialists and Capacity

Sector Impact: Adult Education Centers

Adult Education Centers rely on community based instructors to deploy specialized enrichment curriculum. Due to a limited pool of digital skills instructors, Adult Education Centers must create innovative ways with limited staff capacity to address digital inequities and gaps in their students' digital skills knowledge.

Recommended Action

Create strategic flexible in-house digital skills offerings that aim to empower both community members and staff through digital skills training.

How to Get Started

Meet with current staff to discuss the possibility of community based digital skills offerings. To assist with such discussion, try conducting a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) analysis to facilitate structured dialogue to understand capacity and existing workload pressure points that would impact potential project deployment.

Resources

Conducting a SWOT Analysis:

- [Mind Tool's SWOT Analysis Overview](#)
- [Community Toolbox: SWOT Analysis Introduction](#)

Barriers: Organizational Capacity

Sector Impact: Libraries

Libraries conduct a multitude of programming ranging from toddler reading time to assisting community members with archival resources. Though program offerings vary, many libraries offer needs based digital skills support. However, such offerings may be limited and infrequent due to limited organizational capacity.

Recommended Action

Increase efficiency and quality of current digital skills offerings by evaluating the effectiveness and gaps of existing programs.

How to Get Started

To conduct a simple analysis of current digital skills offerings, try conducting a SWOT analysis to understand the current status of digital skills offering and opportunity for scaling digital skills offerings. Upon conducting such analysis, follow up with a simplified gap analysis to better understand what resources cause a gap between current and desired offerings.

Resources

Conducting a SWOT Analysis:

- [Mind Tool's SWOT Analysis Overview](#)
- [Community Toolbox: SWOT Analysis Introduction](#)

Barrier: Organizational Capacity, cont.

Sector Impact: Libraries

Libraries conduct a multitude of programming ranging from toddler reading time to assisting community members with archival resources. Though program offerings vary, many libraries offer needs based digital skills support. However, such offerings may be limited and infrequent due to limited organizational capacity.

Recommended Action

Develop partnerships with organizations that are directly impacted by emerging digital advancement to bolster offerings and funding opportunities.

How to Get Started

Traditionally, digital inclusion work comprises community partners such as internet service providers, libraries, and adult education centers. However, the consequences of the digital divide extends beyond such entities to the local economy (plan update, 81). Banking, social service, and business organizations are also impacted by the effects of digital inequities. To develop strategic partnerships with community partners, explore creating a stakeholder map that comprises community partners within your targeted service area. By working with community partners in your targeted service area, future projects will be more likely to reach community members in target service areas.

Resources

Stakeholder Map Resource Tool:

- [World Health Organization Stakeholder Mapping Guide](#)

Community Member Tech Support

Sacopec Valley Adult Education



Computer Literacy for Adults and Seniors

Sacopec Valley Adult Education Center began offering a two-session one-on-one tech support class. During these sessions, community members learn the basics of transferable skills that focus on what they want to do and how to simplify their use of technology. Instructor Renee encourages community members to bring their own laptop or tablet. However, if a community member needs to borrow a digital device, one could be provided upon request.

How to Use A Smartphone: No, You're Not A Dummy

Sacopec Valley Adult Education made one-on-one tutoring available by appointment to community members interested in learning basic smartphone skills. The instructor, Renee, encourages community members to bring their Android or Apple phones so Renee and the community can learn together. Offerings are held onsite at Sacopec Valley Adult Education Center.

Project Contact: Renee Payeur, rpayeur@sad55.org

Tech Time, Tech Talk Line, & Kennebunk Free Library Mobile Computer Lab

Kennebunk Free Library

Tech Time

Kennebunk Free Library (KFL) offers Tech Time appointments on certain days of the week for scheduled one-on-one, 45-minute technology help sessions. Appointments can include, but are not limited to, using smartphones and tablets, navigating websites and emails, and accessing digital library resources. Patrons can sign up for one time slot a week to continue building their skills.

Tech Talk Line

KFL's Free's Tech Talk Line facilitates calls which can include, but are not limited to, using smartphones and tablets, navigating websites or emails, or accessing digital library resources. Staff provide support on a first-come, first-served basis for community members with issues that can be addressed in 10 minutes or less. If during a session it is determined that the problem requires more time than 10 minutes, a Tech Time appointment is scheduled.

Kennebunk Free Library Mobile Computer Lab

FKL's Mobile Computer Lab provides reliable technology for hands-on, group-style digital skills training and instruction for patrons. Potential learning opportunities include the following: OS Basics, Avoiding Frauds and Scams Online, and Software Training. Programming also aims to inform users on how to best care for their devices.

Project Contact: Emmaline Arena-Bruce, ebruce@kennebunklibrary.org



Small Business Digital Inclusion

Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission

Mastering the digital skills required to manage a business's online presence and marketing is a significant hurdle for new entrepreneurs in competing with larger firms and reaching the next step for their business. From maintaining a user-friendly online product inventory to achieving Search Engine Optimization, digital skills are essential for a successful business but present a high barrier in both cost and attainment.

Technical Assistance

From 2023 to 2025, SMPDC leveraged multiple grant awards to provide technical assistance to assist small businesses and nonprofits in southern Maine. Through its Economic Recovery Hub (Hub) & Small Business Digital Inclusion Programs, more than 90 small businesses and nonprofits were sponsored for technical assistance with bookkeeping, web design and social media planning services from an array of local providers. Selected business owners were paired with an expert provider who coordinated with them to carry out an individualized work plan to meet the specific needs of their business or organization.

Skills Workshops

The Hub program also partnered with local Adult Education Centers to offer a free business skills workshop series, including a Social Media Marketing session tailored for small businesses.

These opportunities were made possible by ARPA funds awarded by the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development and with support from the Maine Connectivity Authority's Regional and Wabanaki Broadband Partners Program.

Project contact: Brookelyn Tilton, btilton@smpdc.org

Goal 3

Adaptability

Assist people, businesses, organizations and municipalities in preparing for and responding to new advancements in digital technology and shifts in the digital landscape to achieve and maintain their prosperity.

Key Issues

Our digital world is changing every day. The positive and negative consequences of emerging technologies, specifically Artificial Intelligence (AI), are still unclear. Over the course of three years of Broadband and Digital Inclusion work, discussion of emerging technologies such as AI has become more prominent toward the closure of this initiative.

Coalition partners have identified other changes in the digital landscape that are impacting their community members, especially a marked increase in the frequency and sophistication of online fraud and scam activity throughout Maine.

Due to the novelty and uncertainties surrounding AI technology, the following recommendations and resources will be focused on this subject. Resources for fraud and scam prevention can be located elsewhere in this document.

Barriers: Knowledge Acquisition and Mental Models

Across all three sectors, community partners expressed uncertainty about Artificial Intelligence (AI). Some community partners expressed a desire to fully embrace and learn how to incorporate AI, while others were unsure of where to begin with curriculum or organizational adoption.

Recommended Actions

- Explore resources that aim to empower organizational staff and community members in becoming informed, educated or trained in the latest technological developments that are likely to impact their participation in the digital world;

Recommended Actions, continued

- Conduct a community impact assessment to monitor negative and positive impacts of AI technology;
- Develop a transparent AI use policy for your organization to guide the ethical use of generative AI by staff, promote best practices and prevent misuse.

Resources

AI Literacy and AI Digital Skills Trainings:

- National Digital Inclusion Alliance: Resource Library; “An Exploration of AI in Community Learning”
- Digital Promise: “Artificial Intelligence in Education”
- AIGN: “How Can Education and Awareness Contribute to Strengthening AI Governance in Society?”

AI Policy Development:

- Maine Association of Nonprofits: “AI and Nonprofits: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)”
- Techsoup: “How to Create a Generative AI Use Policy”
- International Center for Journalists: “How to Develop an Ethical AI Use Policy for a Nonprofit”

AI Impact Assessment:

- AIGN: “AI Societal Impact Assessment: Measuring the Broader Effects of AI Initiatives”
- State of Maine: “Maine Artificial Intelligence Task Force Report”



Dyer Library Digital Newsroom

Dyer Library & Saco Museum

In response to the recent transition of local papers switching to online formats, Dyer Library provides on-site devices to assist community members with transitioning to paperless media platforms. As a result of this project, community members who are patrons of Dyer Library will have access to skills-based training opportunities and on-site iPads with full and easy access to Maine Trust for Local News' entire digital portfolio, including publications like the online-only Biddeford-Saco-OOB Courier. The library also provides subscription access to visitors using any device to browse the Portland Press Herald, Sun Journal, and Central Maine papers online, empowering residents to stay connected with the news in their community.

During Dyer Library's kickoff event, staff hosted a communications panel featuring Saco Bay News and the City of Saco's Director of Communications to highlight free local news content online.

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Lessons Learned

1 Tap into Your Partner Network

To develop strategic partnerships with community partners, explore creating a stakeholder map that comprises community partners within your targeted service area. By collaborating with multi-stakeholder community partners with shared interests, future projects will be more likely to obtain competitive funding and reach community members in mutual service areas.

2 Understand Your Community's Needs

Utilizing a project-centered logic model can assist in clearly articulating desired outcomes and necessary activities. Conduct a needs assessment to provide an estimation of community need for funding attainment and long range grant planning.

3 Activate Your Strengths & Improve Upon Weaknesses

Conducting a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) analysis can facilitate structured dialogue to understand capacity and existing workload pressure points that would impact potential project deployment.

An asset map is a useful tool that can help an organization better understand their own strengths, identify gaps, highlight opportunities for collaboration of partners with available resources, and overall reach of community members within their targeted service area.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the York County Region Digital Inclusion Coalition members and community partners for your commitment to SMPDC’s 3-year-long initiative implementing the Maine Connectivity Authority’s Regional & Wabanaki Broadband Partners Program in our region, and for carrying on the torch to continue lighting the way for digital opportunity and partner collaboration in the communities of Southern Maine.

SMPDC would especially like to recognize and thank Kayla Lewis of Upward Consulting LLC, whose role in this program was imperative to its success and the breadth of regional and cross-sector collaboration. This work could not have been done without her hard work, passion and perseverance.

