Agenda

1 Final Plan Overview

2 Supporting Context

3 Recommended Strategies

   • Project Highlights

4 Next Steps Toward Implementation

5 Discussion

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Three key inputs informed the development of the final Lake County Broadband and Digital Equity Plan

1 Stakeholder & Community Engagement

2 Current State Assessment

3 Strategic Framework & Solutions

Broadband & Digital Equity Plan

Internal and external **stakeholder interviews**, a dedicated focus group meeting, stakeholder questionnaires, and a public community meeting were conducted to gather insight on the county's current broadband and digital equity landscape, **understand on-the-ground challenges**, and identify county priorities, including key feedback from the **Special Committee on Broadband**.
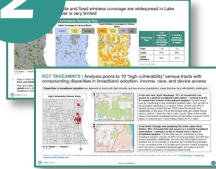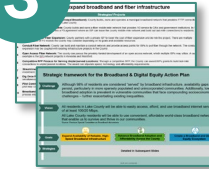
Research, mapping, data analysis, peer benchmarking, and stakeholder insights informed the current state assessment report. This report identifies **needs and gaps related to broadband adoption, affordability and access** as well as key opportunities for improvement. The report can serve as an internal resource for tracking progress on the County's goals.

Visioning and goal setting discussions, review of existing strategic County priorities, and **leading practices research** led to the development of a strategic framework that serves as the foundation for Broadband and Digital Equity Action Plan. This framework guided the development of **targeted and actionable strategies** to address gaps, guide resource allocation, and inform decision-making.

Guided by insights from stakeholder and community engagement, the current state assessment, and the strategic plan framework, the final **Broadband and Digital Equity Action Plan** outlines the County's path to providing high-speed, reliable and affordable internet to all Lake County residents.

Key Partner:

KP ADVISORY,LLC

Key Partner:

JULES MADISON

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Through the planning process, we have engaged partners organizations, stakeholders, and members of the public

Stakeholder and Community Engagement: Methods

One-on-One Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one interviews provided the opportunity for stakeholders from across the County to provide their insights on the current state of broadband and digital equity and impacts to their organization's operations. Stakeholders included County departments, elected officials, state and federal agencies, libraries, educational institutions, public housing agencies, non-profit organizations, and internet service providers (ISPs), and more.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire for government agencies, ISPs, elected officials, and other stakeholders garnered additional feedback from across the county. Responses identified existing digital inclusion activities and highlighted communities currently facing digital equity challenges.

Focus Group Meeting

A Focus Group meeting of leading stakeholders was convened to help identify potential strategy areas and collaboration opportunities for Lake County and partner organizations, providing direction for final plan recommendations.

Community Meeting

Community members from across the county came together at a public meeting to discuss their lived-experiences and what role Lake County should take in addressing the digital divide.

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Stakeholder feedback emphasized the digital equity challenges faced by residents – while also highlighting strong organizations and assets

Stakeholder and Community Engagement: Lake County Voices
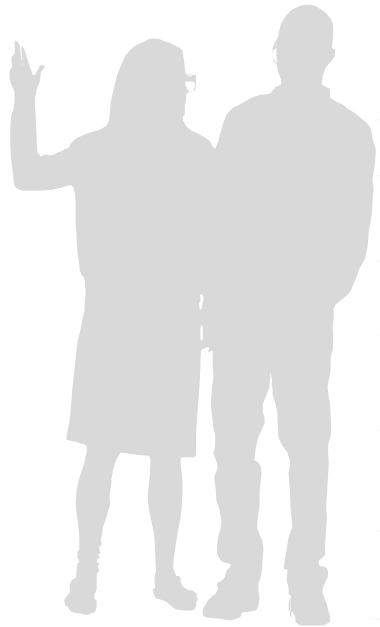
"In many areas, the issue is more about **adoption and affordability**"

"People without **digital skills** lose out…[we] need to be more conscious of local people who aren't digitally educated"

"**Digital literacy efforts** targeting seniors and the Spanish-speaking community would make my life easier"

"It's a lot of buffering and dropped signal…it is not just bad…it is all the time [and] **we feel cut off** from things"

"[We] need to **convene organizations** to ensure they are addressing actual needs"

"Access to **digital devices** allow[s] people to complete classes and become employed "

"The **challenge with ACP** is getting people to sign-up…and stay signed-up"

"**Digital inclusion** is awareness of information…we miss out on information if you don't have digital access"

For Discussion

How can the County keep engagement momentum going, while avoiding "engagement fatigue" from stakeholders? What is the County's interest in continuing engagement coordination activities?

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Disconnected pockets of low broadband availability and socioeconomic gaps in broadband adoption perpetuate the Lake County digital divide

Map of Lake Broadband Adoption and High-Speed Broadband Service Availability[1]
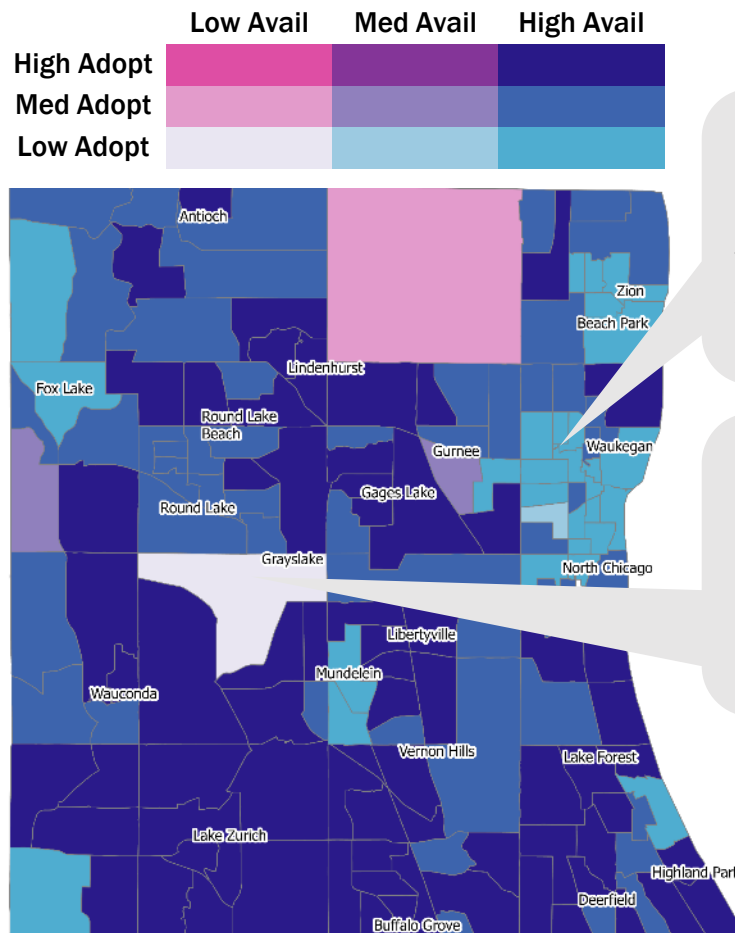
While areas like **Waukegan**, **North Chicago**, **Zion** and **Beach Park** have high levels of available broadband infrastructure, they face barriers to broadband adoption – and see compounding socioeconomic challenges that impact affordability.

The greatest availability gaps are observed in **Grayslake**, **Newport Township**, and **Old Mill Creek**. Residents in these areas generally have fewer options for ISPs (one or no providers), limited access to high-speed technologies (such as fiber or cable), and experience slower speeds on average.

Source: [1] A bivariate map was constructed using household broadband subscription rates from the 2021 ACS 5-year Summary Estimates and percent of broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) served by 100/20 Mbps internet at the census tract level from the FCC Broadband Availability Public Data. A natural breaks method was used to account for the distribution of data

Quick Facts...

3,870 county locations are considered unserved or underserved by broadband (eligible for BEAD support)

8% (19,400) of households do not have any kind of broadband subscription, including through a cell phone plan

19% (47,600) of households do not have a broadband subscription such as fiber, cable, or DSL

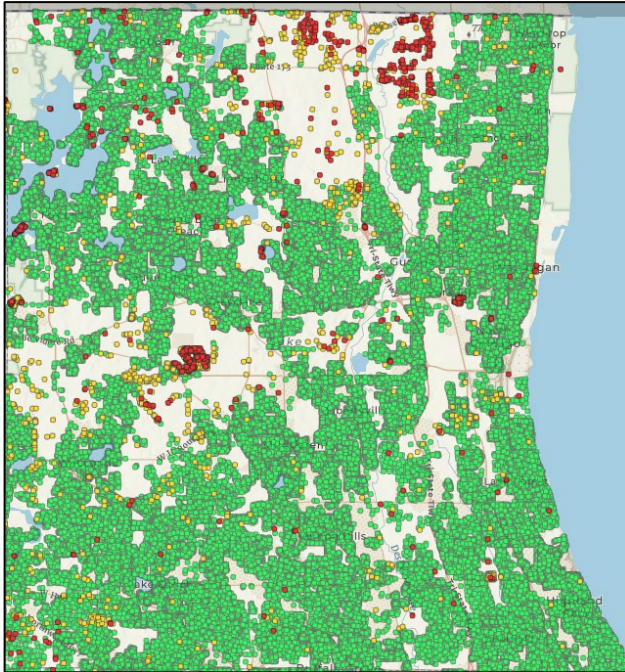**14%** (35,800) of households do not own a desktop or laptop computer

26% of households have a median annual income below $50,000

Sources: 2021 ACS 5-year Summary Estimates, FCC Broadband Data

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We do not anticipate that substantial BEAD funding will be available to Lake County

BEAD-Eligible Residential Locations

Source: Illinois Broadband Lab Map

🔴 Unserved Residential Locations (<25/3 Mbps)

🟡 Underserved Residential Locations (≥25/3 Mbps and < 100/20 Mbps)

🟢 Served Residential Locations (≥100/20 Mbps)

- **Less than 2% of Lake County locations (3,100 residential locations) are considered unserved or underserved by broadband infrastructure and are eligible for funding through the Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program**. More than 98% of County locations are considered "served" by broadband – since they have (or *can have*) access to broadband at speeds of 100/20 Mbps or higher.

- Through the State-run grant process, **ISPs will apply and receive grant funds to deploy infrastructure to connect all unserved and underserved locations across Illinois**.

What is Lake County's role?

- **Coordinate with ISPs and encourage them to claim un- and underserved locations in Lake County for funding.** Encouraging multiple ISPs to bid can increase competition and maximize the use of funds.

- **The State will allocate up to 10% weight to evidence of ISP and local government coordination.** Lake County can provide letters of support to ISPs with plans deemed congruent to the County's goals for improving broadband and digital equity.

- **In the near-term, Lake County can prioritize the use of ARPA funds to help close core gaps in broadband adoption, affordability, and digital equity** – while identifying future opportunities for enabling high-speed infrastructure.

- **We anticipate that Lake County <u>will</u> be able to apply for upcoming Digital Equity Act funding.** Nearly $2.7B is allocated to the federal Digital Equity Capacity Building and Competitive Grant Programs, expected open in 2024. The State of Illinois is planning to release its Digital Equity Plan in **January 2024**.

💬 **For Discussion**

Are there additional questions on the role of Lake County in the BEAD process?

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How to read the Broadband and Digital Equity Plan

VISION — The vision summarizes the ideal future state for digital equity in Lake County **(Where to?)**

GOALS — The goals detail the outcomes that Lake County will work to achieve through the plan **(What?)**

STRATEGIES — The strategies describe the solutions for how the County will achieve its goals **(How?)**

PROJECTS — The projects are the detailed County activities that drive the strategies forward **(Actions)**

IMPACTS — The impacts are the potential reach of each project on communities and residents **(Outcomes)**

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To close the digital divide in Lake County, the Plan includes three core goals and seven actionable strategies

VISION

Our vision is a connected, thriving, and inclusive Lake County where the internet is accessible and affordable and where all residents are equipped with the resources needed to participate in an increasingly digital society.

GOALS

GOAL 1.
Availability & Access
Expand county-wide access to reliable, high-speed broadband infrastructure

GOAL 2.
Adoption & Affordability
Remove barriers to affordable internet, device access, and digital skills training

GOAL 3.
Governance & Sustainability
Build an ecosystem of local partners to drive digital inclusion efforts

STRATEGIES

1 Facilitate expansion of broadband service to un- and underserved areas

2 Enact policies to streamline broadband infrastructure deployment

3 Expand public internet access in high-need areas

4 Increase access to affordable internet and digital devices

5 Improve digital literacy and training opportunities

6 Create a governing structure for the coordination of county broadband and digital equity activities

7 Establish a funding mechanism to support long-term sustainability

For Discussion
Do the County's vision and goals for digital inclusion resonate? Do they help to forward the County's strategic mission and vision?

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Availability & Access: Expand county-wide access to reliable, high-speed broadband infrastructure

The County can improve access to high-speed broadband through implementing broadband friendly policies, supporting infrastructure deployment, and improving public Wi-Fi access in high-need areas

STRATEGY

1 - Facilitate expansion of broadband service to un- and underserved areas	2 - Enact policies to streamline broadband infrastructure deployment	3 - Increase free, public internet access in high-need areas

PROJECTS

	2-1 Implement a Dig Once Policy Create a Lake County Dig Once Policy to increase coordination among departments and agencies and require (or encourage) that relevant parties have the opportunity to install broadband infrastructure during planned infrastructure projects to minimize right-of-way disruptions.	**3-1 Pilot Public Wi-Fi Hotspots** Expand access to free public Wi-Fi in communities with low broadband adoption rates and significant affordability challenges, while making outdoor spaces more digitally connected, by installing Wi-Fi hotspots at public buildings and community anchor institutions.
1-1 Support the BEAD Process Engage with ISPs through the BEAD process to connect unserved and underserved locations.		

IMPACT

Provide access to broadband for 3,000+ previously un- and underserved households	Potential cost savings of 15% to 33% per mile on average for infrastructure projects	Provide 15+ pilot locations with free, outdoor public WiFi access

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Adoption & Affordability: Remove barriers to affordable internet, device access, and digital skills training

The County can build-on existing programming to improve equitable access to affordable high-speed internet and connected devices, while delivering important digital literacy support

STRATEGY

4- Increase access to affordable internet and digital devices

5 - Improve digital literacy and training opportunities

PROJECTS

4-1 Device Distribution Campaign
Partner with nonprofits and private entities to expand distribution of low-cost and free digital devices to households in need, including recycled County devices

4-2 ACP Outreach & Enrollment Campaign
Conduct a countywide effort to raise awareness regarding the ACP program and assist eligible households with applications.
Note: ACP funding could run out in 2024 if the program is not continued by Congress.

5-1 Expand Digital Navigators
Facilitate a network of digital navigators to provide a range of support services to residents, particularly in areas with low broadband adoption and other equity challenges.

5-2 Coordinate Digital Literacy Programming
Take an increased role in coordinating digital literacy standards, expanding digital literacy programming, and promoting additional training opportunities.

IMPACT

Potential to provide 3,000+ residents with devices

Potential to reach 50,000+ unenrolled households

One Digital Navigator can reach 100+ residents per year

Digital literacy programs can help residents find a new job

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Governance & Sustainability: Build an ecosystem of local partners to drive digital inclusion efforts

The County can serve as a leader and convener of local stakeholders to deliver broadband and digital equity programming in a collaborative and sustainable way

STRATEGY

6 - Create a governing structure for the coordination of county broadband and digital equity activities

7 - Establish a funding mechanism to support long-term sustainability

PROJECTS

6-1 Create a County-led Broadband and Digital Equity Coalition
Assemble a coalition of local partners and stakeholders to drive digital inclusion strategies forward.

6-2 Hire a Digital Equity Plan Manager
Hire a dedicated Digital Equity Manager for a three-year term to drive implementation of the Plan's strategies and to coordinate the Coalition.

6-3 Launch a Digital Equity Website
Create a digital equity resource website that provides centralized information on all the county's available digital equity assets, affordability programs, and partners.

7-1 Establish a Digital Equity Fund
Create a centralized fund to enable the County to make strategic investments in meeting digital equity goals via a local granting process.

IMPACT

Increased coordination among stakeholders

Primary point of contact for digital inclusion efforts

Increased visibility of programs and resources

Leverage additional funding through public and philanthropic grants

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Project Highlight: Expand Digital Navigators

Source: The State's Illinois Broadband Lab Digital Navigators are hired via the AmeriCorps program. Fellows receive a $30,000/year stipend and are eligible for higher education scholarships. https://broadband.uillinois.edu/2023/09/19/illinois-launches-statewide-digital-navigator-program/?utm_source=sendgrid&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Newsletters
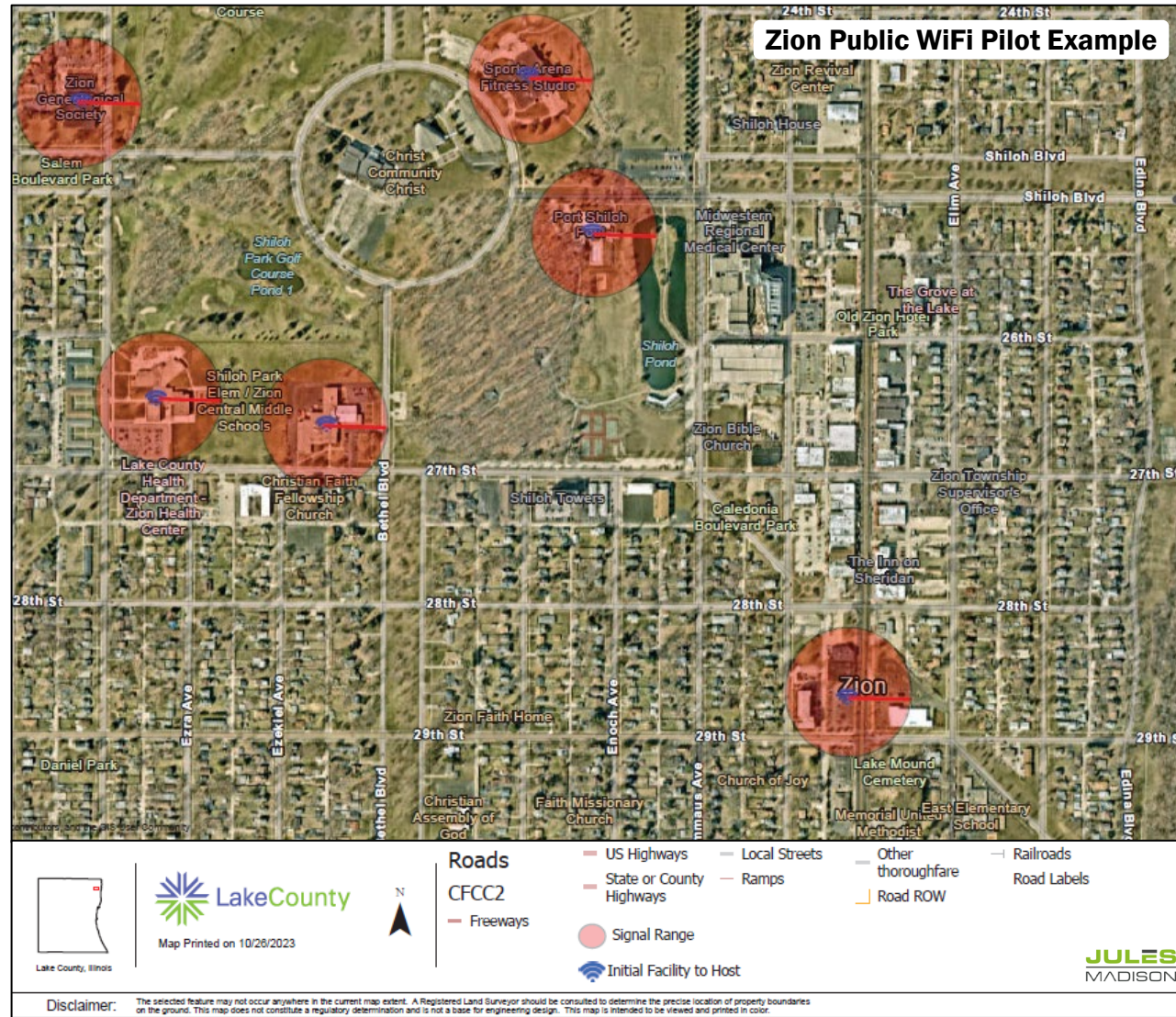
- **Digital Navigators are a proven, replicable model for improving digital literacy and technical skills, device access, and internet adoption.**

- Digital Navigators are formally and informally deployed in existing organizations across the county and state – but could be strengthened with additional expansion via county resources and coordination.

- Could be hired as **part-time staff and deployed at community organizations –** nonprofits can apply to receive County grant funding for a Digital Navigator

- In the short-term, Digital Navigators can fulfill staffing needs for ACP outreach and enrollment or device distribution events. In the long-term, Digital Navigators can serve as "one-stop-shops" for providing a larger suite of digital inclusion wraparound services.

- **The cost of a part-time Digital Navigator is estimated at $30,000 per year**. The County can dedicate an initial $300,000 for the deployment of **ten digital navigators** at community organizations across the county.

- The County could also hire student intern digital navigators through a partnership with the College of Lake County's Computer Information Technology program.

- **Potential partners**: Connect Lake County, Lake County Libraries, College of Lake County, Lake County Housing Authority, community organizations and nonprofits, and more.

For Discussion

How should Digital Navigators be hired: by the County or by community organizations? How should the County run a digital equity sub-granting process?

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Project Highlight: Pilot a Public Wi-Fi Hotspot Program

Zion Public WiFi Pilot Example

Source: Engineering and costing estimates provided by Jules Madison

- **An estimated 19,400 county households lack a broadband subscription of any kind.** The most concentrated areas of low broadband-adoption are seen in Waukegan, North Chicago, and Zion.

- The County can pilot a **community WiFi project** that provides funding to equip public buildings, community anchor institutions, and parks with Wi-Fi hotspots to make public spaces more digitally connected.

- **Fifteen locations in low-adoption areas were selected for a pilot scoping analysis.** Locations were also chosen for their proximity to commercial corridors highlighted by local planning and development efforts**.**

- **Estimated $150,000 cost for access point equipment and installation across all pilot locations** (approximately $10,000 per location). Estimated maximum of $1,000 per year in maintenance costs.

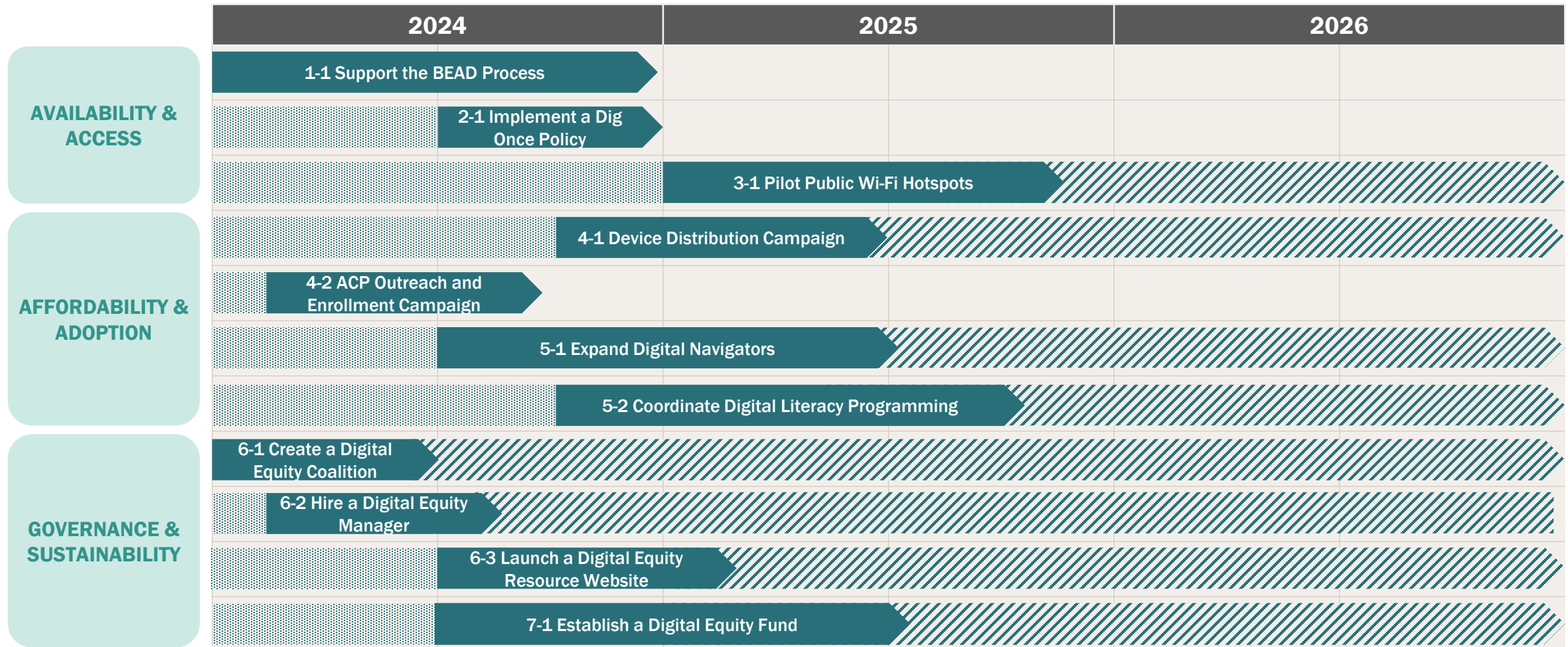- **Access points provide a 300-foot signal radius per location.**

For Discussion

Are these the right pilot locations? Should funding for County-funded WiFi hotspots be made available to all cities, villages, and townships in Lake County?

The Plan includes a mix of short-, medium-, and long-term projects – with key implementation activities over the next three years

	2024	**2025**	**2026**
AVAILABILITY & ACCESS	1-1 Support the BEAD Process		
	2-1 Implement a Dig Once Policy		
		3-1 Pilot Public Wi-Fi Hotspots	
AFFORDABILITY & ADOPTION		4-1 Device Distribution Campaign	
	4-2 ACP Outreach and Enrollment Campaign		
		5-1 Expand Digital Navigators	
		5-2 Coordinate Digital Literacy Programming	
GOVERNANCE & SUSTAINABILITY	6-1 Create a Digital Equity Coalition		
	6-2 Hire a Digital Equity Manager		
		6-3 Launch a Digital Equity Resource Website	
		7-1 Establish a Digital Equity Fund	

KEY: Planning   Deployment   Ongoing Management

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Lake County can drive and coordinate implementation of the Broadband and Digital Equity Plan

In the short-term, key next steps for implementing the Plan include:

1. **Establishing a Broadband and Digital Equity Coalition.** Convene relevant stakeholders and partners and create a mechanism for implementing the plan and overseeing progress. The Coalition will consist of government, nonprofit and private organizations, establishing the County's position as a convener and coordinator of these important cross-county efforts.

2. **Hiring a Digital Equity Plan Manager.** The County does not currently have an individual dedicated to broadband and digital inclusion. The County can hire a dedicated Digital Equity Manager for a three-year term to drive implementation of the Plan's strategies and to oversee the Coalition.

3. **Supporting the BEAD Process.** Coordinate with the private sector to encourage multiple bids for BEAD funding from ISPs to deploy infrastructure to unserved and underserved locations.

4. **Developing Implementation Plans**. Collaborate with Coalition partners to establish and enhance detailed next steps for implementing the Plan's proposed strategies and projects.

5. **Promoting Public Transparency.** Create a process to regularly report on plan progress.

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Questions & Discussion

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DIGITAL GROWTH INITIATIVE