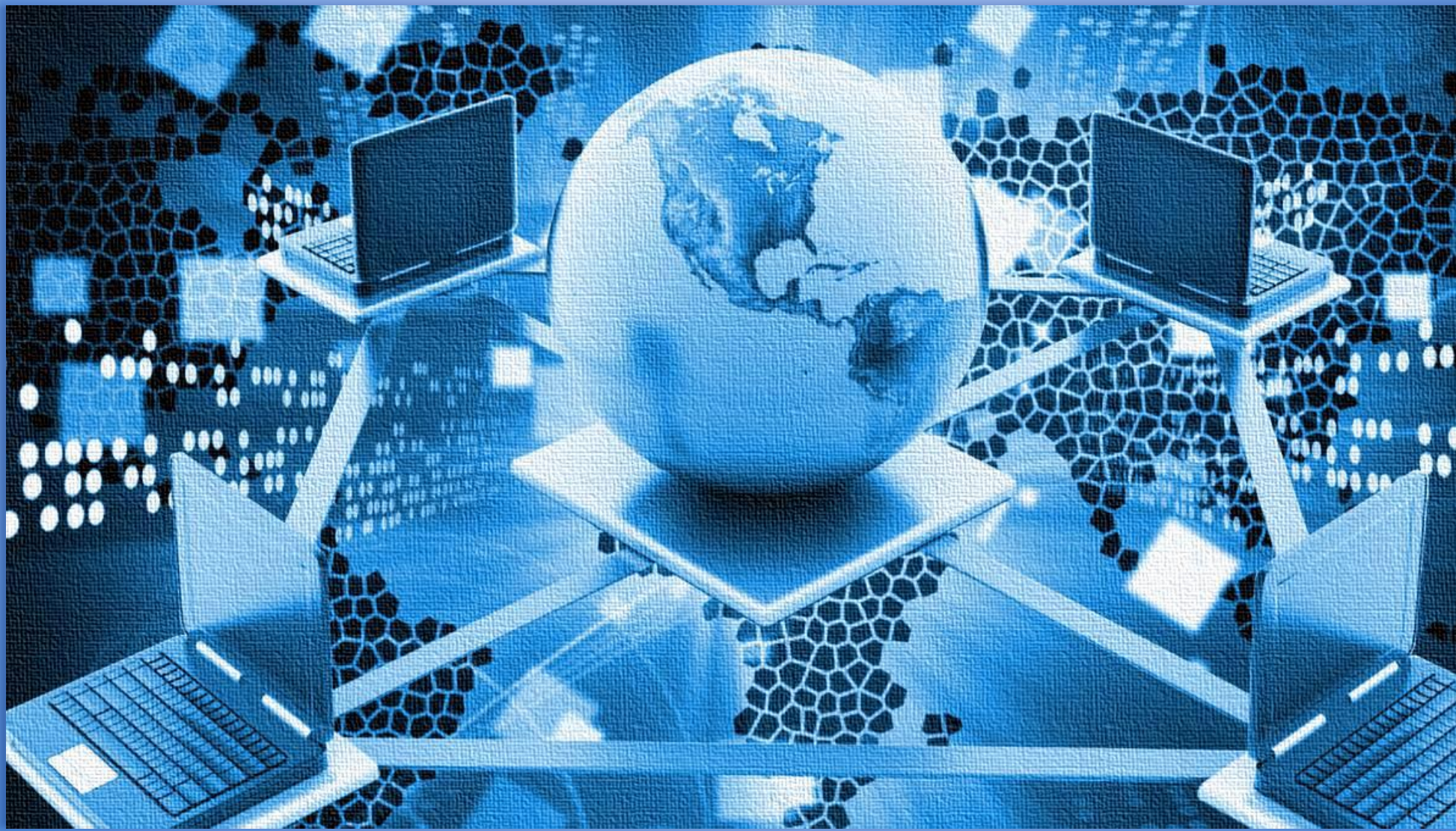


Southern Chester County Digital Equity Coalition

Update – February 2, 2023



Jim Mercante



DIGITAL EQUITY¹

- Digital Equity is when everyone has access and use of computer literacy training, the Internet and technology devices to be successful in society, democracy and the economy regardless of their background, neighborhood or identity.

VISION¹

- Every individual, regardless of background, neighborhood or identity has high quality, accessible, technology resources and services to be civically engaged and socially and economically empowered.

1 – National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)

What is causing digital divide?

Research shows there are three main causes of digital divide:

- **Affordability:**

- Cost of devices and broadband service is not within reach for some users.

- **Accessibility or Availability:**

- Broadband is not available to users because the service does not exist, the speeds or quality are inadequate, or devices to use the internet are not available.

- **Skills/Literacy:**

- Users do not have the skills/literacy necessary to use technology (internet, devices, etc.) or to navigate successfully.

SCC Digital Equity Context

**Chester County is a wealthy County—
median income in 2020 was \$104,161.**

- This is not true for Southern Chester County, which holds the title of Mushroom Capital of the World.
- It has migrants serving the industry for over fifty years and has homes of the low-income and non-English speaking residents. It is primarily agricultural land.
- Southern Chester County is a microcosm of several other pockets of Chester County where there is a disparity between the wealthy and the poor.

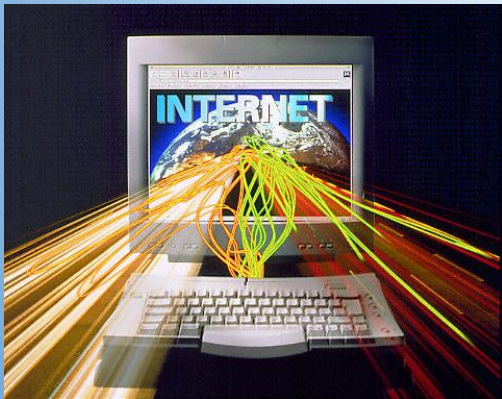
SCC Digital Equity Coalition



Municipalities, County, State



School Districts & CCIU



Internet Service Providers



Regional Chamber of Commerce



Funding: Federal – FCC;
State/County; Private



Community Based Organizations

Southern Chester County Digital Equity Coalition Partners

- June 2023: New Kennett Area Library-Plans for Rooms for Digital Literacy Education and Digital Navigator
- ChristianaCare: Taking over new hospital---Interested in Telehealth
- Sycamore International: Refurbishes computers/Community-minded
- Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce: Strong advocate; relationship with municipalities
- Non-Profits who work with the vulnerable population
- Transportation Management Association of Chester County (TMACC)
- Chester County Economic Development Council & Chester County Planning Commission helping with Mapping Challenge
- Chester County Commissioners designating County Agencies (CCEDC; CCIU) to take lead for Digital Equity Management across the County
- NDIA and NTIA serve as an inspiration for guiding principles and development of Coalition

SCC Digital Equity Coalition Goals

- Digital Equity Funding
- Expansion Of Digital Navigator Network
- More Devices Provided To More Residents In Need
- More Options for Internet Service
- Continuing Outreach & Training For Digital Skills/Literacy

Joan Holliday

The Internet is the backbone of today's world.

Digital Equity has become an essential infrastructure backbone of economic growth and community life.

Education



Workforce Development



Housing



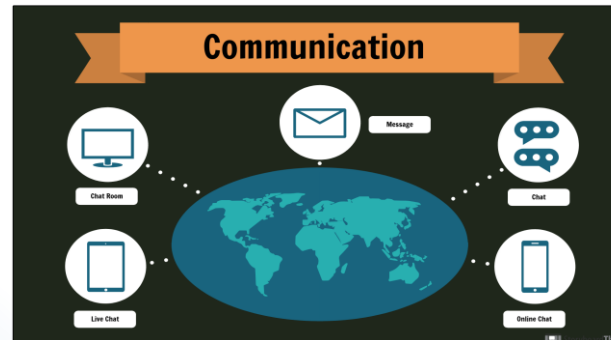
Emergency Services



Healthcare



Communication: Zoom, Email, Messaging



Economic/Commerce Participation



Digital Equity = Access, Speed, Affordability, Skills/Literacy

Digital Skills/Literacy is the ability to participate in the economy and culture surrounding information technologies.



Orientation to Computer Skills



Social Media



Internet Security
Stay safe online.



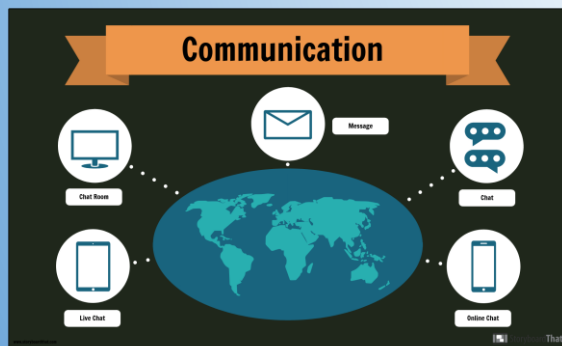
Economic/Commerce Participation



Workforce Development

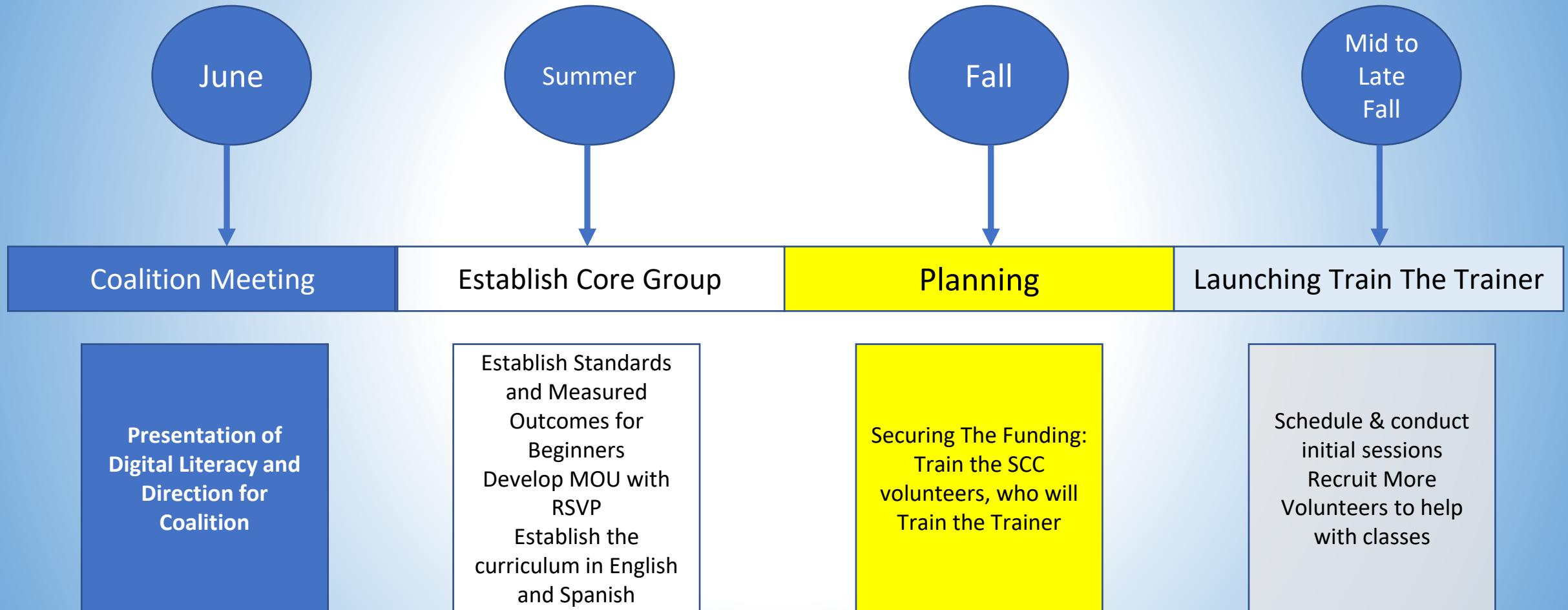


Computer Based Research



Communication: Zoom, Email, Telehealth

Digital Skills/Literacy Timeline -- 2021



"Train the Trainer" conducted by RSVP, non-profit virtual digital education

Teaching the essentials of using an I-Phone or Android.

- **Topics:** Cyber security; web browser; email; apps; Zoom.
- Moodle digital education platform was developed to be used during and after the training.
- **When:** Three 14-hour sessions in 2022. A fourth session will be offered March 2023.
- **Funds for 2022:** SCC Digital Equity Coalition solicited local funds from Kennett Square Roots; Longwood Rotary; United Way; American Mushroom Institute and a private funder adding up to \$41,000.
- **RSVP** has now received ARPA funds to be used over 3 years.

"Train the Trainer" conducted by RSVP, non-profit virtual digital education

14 local organizations - employees & volunteers completed 14 hours of training with Upcoming Plans (51 individuals)

- **3** After School Programs--Classes for parents of students at Parent's Night
- **2** School Districts--Classes for parents ongoing
- **2** Libraries--One-on-one training along with ESL for Guatemalans. Classes in new Kennett library.
- **1** Mushroom Company--Classes at lunchtime for employees with ESL
- **2** Pre-School--Classes for parents on a monthly basis
- **3** Non-Profits for Adults---One-on-one training
- **1** Senior Center--First class completed. To be ongoing.

Lead Agency for "Train The Trainer" **R S V P**

Agencies that have completed "Train The Trainer"



Schools



Oxford Area Neighborhood Services Center

The Heart of the Community



Tick Tock Early Learning Center

Southern Chester County Day Care Association

Providing Quality Child Care and Early Childhood Education Since 1964



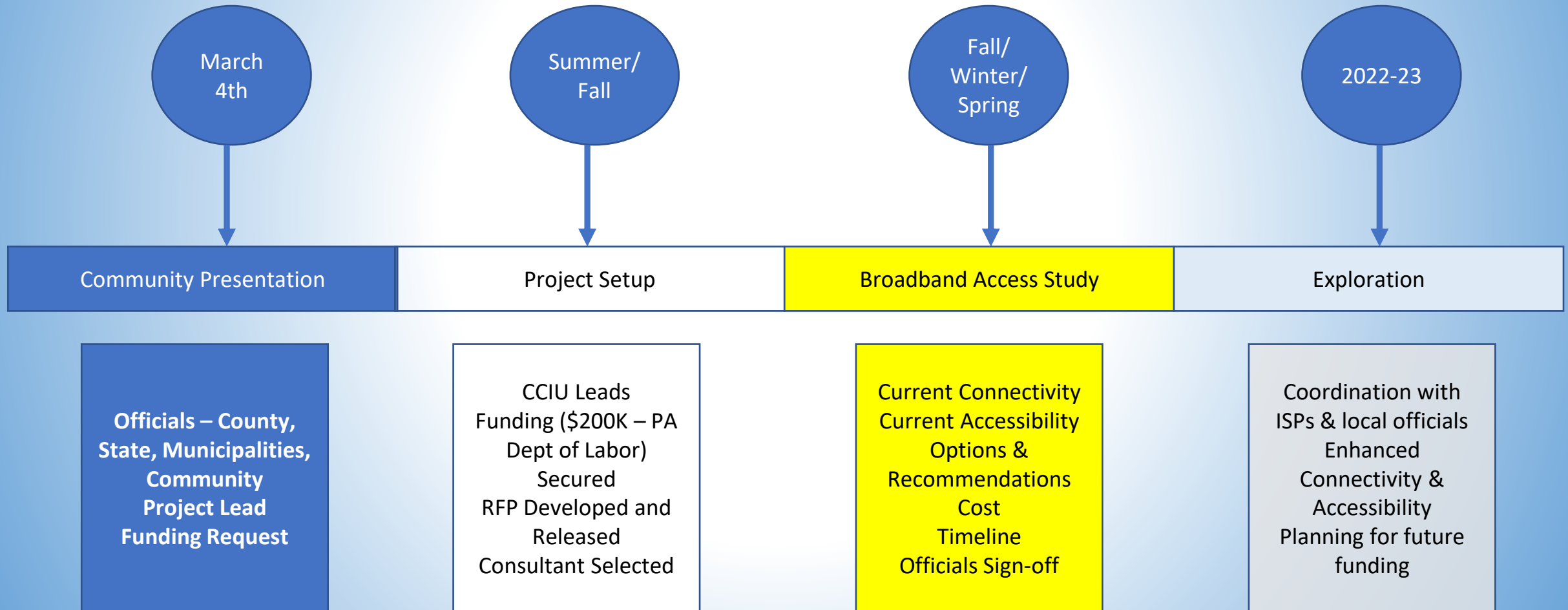


Vision for Digital Skills/Literacy

- Doors are opened to new potential for achieving good health, employment, education and social connection.
- Barriers are removed to becoming an engaged, contributing community member.
- A sustainable organization (e.g., library or local/state department) will carry on the Mission.

Jessica Sahl

Digital Connectivity Project Timeline (2021-22)



Assessment Project Process

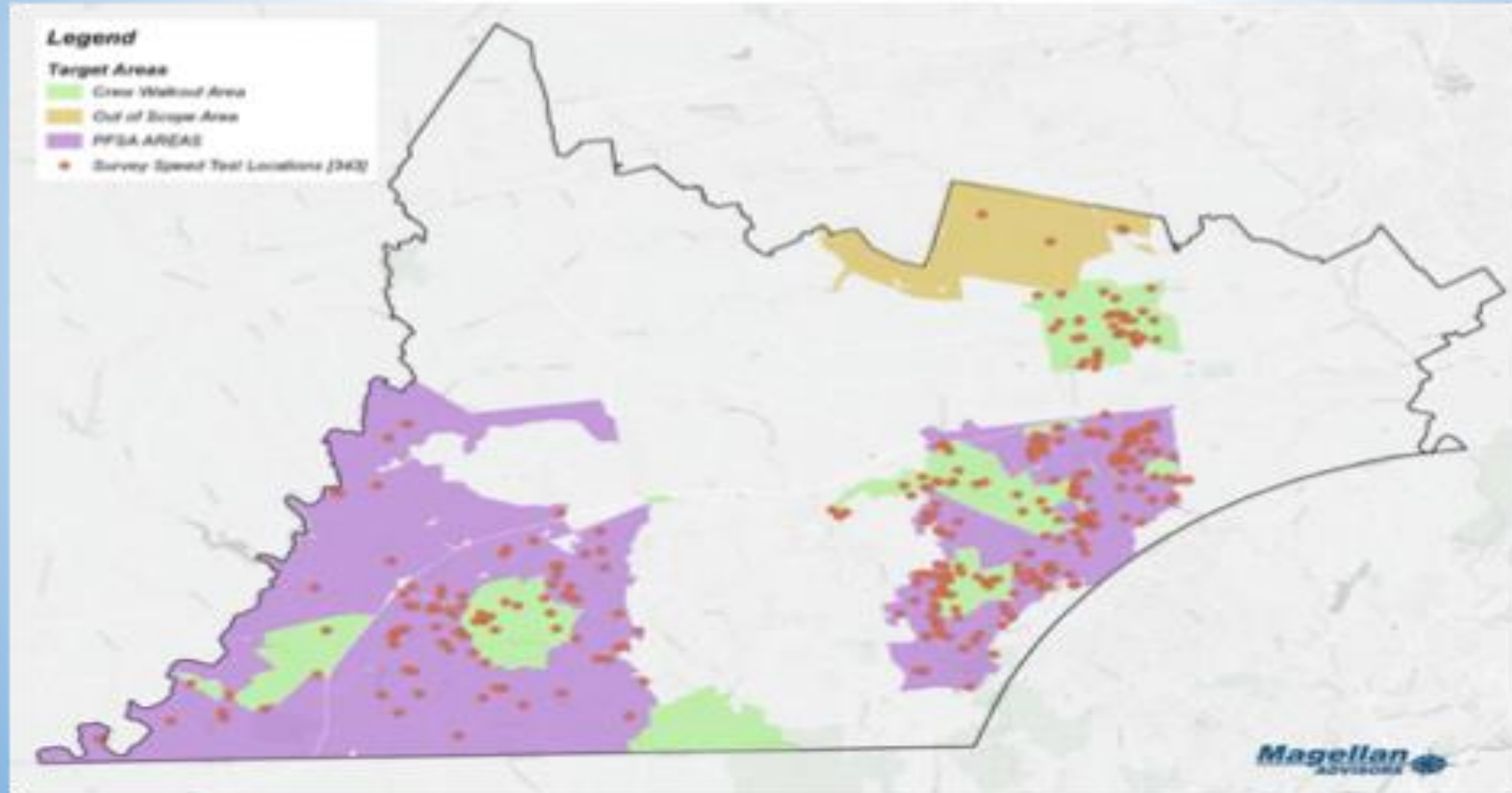
- \$200,000 grant-PA Dept of Labor & Industry to fund SCC study
- 1,000+ survey responses
- “Boots On The Ground” analysis for unserved/underserved areas
- Stakeholder Outreach: interviews/focus groups with 45+ organizations
- Community Social Service organizations; Community Anchor Organizations; Local Businesses; Local Townships; Local Fire & Police; County and State officials
- Used study data to collaborate with state experts on FCC Fabric Map challenges
- Identifying lead county agencies to plan for BEAD & Digital Equity grants and manage projects

Assessment Findings -- Overview

- Broad pockets of unserved and underserved access
 - Both broadband and cellular
 - “Marginal” middle mile infrastructure
 - Significant last mile issues – particularly in agricultural areas
- Main issues
 - Affordability
 - Access
 - Lack of adequate devices – widespread use of Smartphones
 - Need for digital literacy skills
- Informal funding and resource capacity
 - No formal Digital Equity Office in Chester County
 - Primarily volunteer-driven initiative
 - Digital Skills/Literacy Funding initially funded by private sector, subsequently by ARPA funds

Areas of Concern – based on field analysis

The map indicates the areas of greatest need (shaded in purple) are located throughout Kennett, Avondale, Elk Township, Oxford, Freemont, East Marlborough, Landenberg, East and West Five points and Penn Township. Areas of Concern Identified for Further Field Analysis.



Assessment Findings – Overview

Internet enabled activities performed in the home among cell phone respondents

- Based on survey responses, majority of survey respondents utilize their cell phone for a variety of basic needs including homework/school assignments. Yet, their level of service quality is intermittent and unreliable in the home.
- Consumers paying on average \$169 per month for cellular services which is in addition to what they are paying for Internet access in the home.
- Survey respondents use their cell phone for most needs either because they do not have adequate Internet access in their home and do not have a computer for personal/school use or they cannot afford to have both.
- Affordability and access are significant barriers for these users in Southern Chester County.

Broadband Options for Southern Chester County

- From the school district technology directors and numerous stakeholders – the primary barriers for consumers in the region are:
 - Lack of affordability & access to reliable, high-quality broadband in their home or business location
- Broadband access (providing connectivity to the end user premises) is lacking throughout most communities in the region
- Assessment study recommends pursuing a fixed wireless solution to provide 100% last mile connectivity directly to farms, homes and businesses
- This option is far less costly than pursuing fiber to the premises in the short term

Jim Mercante



PENNSYLVANIA BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

EXPANDING BROADBAND SERVICES ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

- The Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority, signed into law on December 22, 2021, is charged with –
 - creating a statewide broadband plan
 - distributing Federal and State monies for broadband expansion projects in unserved and underserved areas of the commonwealth.
- As the Commonwealth’s official broadband-specific Authority, they will seek to close PA’s ever-present digital divide, allowing Pennsylvanians to get connected at home, at work, or on the road.
- This newly established Authority acts as an independent agency of the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and will be charged with administering Federal and State funds allocated for the purposes of expanding broadband services in Pennsylvania.

The background of the slide features a photograph of the Pennsylvania State Capitol building in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The building is a large, classical-style structure with a prominent central dome and multiple wings. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is positioned in the upper left corner of the slide.

PENNSYLVANIA BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

EXPANDING BROADBAND SERVICES ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

- Actively working to create a statewide broadband map with information on unserved, underserved, and served areas in PA
 - Working to evaluate other useful data sources to provide a more holistic view of broadband in PA
- Collaborating with Penn State Extension to incorporate relevant data from local communities and government partners to refine the statewide broadband map
- Ongoing evaluation of the statewide broadband plan to more accurately reflect the implementation of broadband connectivity across the state



**PENNSYLVANIA BROADBAND
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**
EXPANDING BROADBAND SERVICES ACROSS
PENNSYLVANIA

Subcommittees

- Data & Mapping
- Outreach & Education
- Workforce & Supply Chain
- Technical

Coalition Advocacy

- Significant connections with the PA Broadband Development Authority
 - Established relationship with Executive Director (Brandon Carson), Deputy Director (Erin Wachter), and Outreach & Engagement Manager (Kalie Snyder]
 - Established relationship with NTIA Technical Resource (Nicole Ugarte) assigned to assist the Authority in development of statewide Digital Connectivity and Literacy plan
 - Regular attendee at Authority meetings – both virtual and in Harrisburg
- Helped start the PA Statewide Digital Equity Coalition with the Greater Pittsburgh Digital Equity initiative and the City of Philadelphia Digital Equity initiative
- Established and maintained regular communication with Senator John Kane and staff regarding Digital Equity in Southern Chester County. Senator Kane sits on the PA Broadband Development Authority Board



Joan Holliday

How Counties/Cities/Municipalities are bridging the digital divide²

Critical Success Factors:

- The local government has or directly funds at least one full-time **staff** member dedicated to digital inclusion initiatives, policies and/or programs.
- The local government has a **digital inclusion plan** or is developing a plan.
- Representatives of the local government participate in an open-access **digital inclusion coalition**.
- The local government has conducted or plans to conduct and publish **survey research** on residents' internet access and use.
- The local government **directly funds** community digital inclusion programming.
- The local government is taking steps **to increase affordability** of home broadband service.

Concluding Thought

The future path has potential with key stakeholders at the table. This is an overview of the whole system working on digital equity--local, state and federal.

This project needs everyone's Advocacy!

WE NEED YOURS!

Broadband Access

The community equity issue of the 21st century

"We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow citizens".

Herman Melville