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A subsea cable is laid to connect a broadband infrastructure project on Isle au Haut.

Legislative Annual Report

2024 Fiscal Year



**MAINE
CONNECTIVITY
AUTHORITY**

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State of Connectivity in Maine/Executive Summary

Maine is at a pivotal point as we work toward ubiquitous connectivity. Over the past three years, the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) has established a robust approach to comprehensive connectivity and delivered results. We have deployed and are administering over \$250 million of funding to over 100 projects and partnerships enabling high-speed internet for over 86,000 locations.

Established in 2021, the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) serves as Maine's quasi-governmental agency responsible for the planning, development, investment and maintenance of the State's connectivity infrastructure and is funded by a combination of federal and state resources. MCA works to advance three statutory goals:

1. that effective, accessible connectivity be universally available in the state;
2. that there be secure, affordable, reliable, competitive, sustainable, and forward-looking infrastructure that can meet future needs; and
3. that all residents, businesses, and institutions in Maine be able to take full advantage of the economic, health, educational and other opportunities available through connectivity services.

In 2024, MCA engaged thousands of stakeholders around the state to create a Broadband Action Plan combined with the state's first Digital Equity Plan (the first plan in the country to be approved by the Federal government). We have secured funding to develop more resilient, redundant and sustainable middle mile infrastructure through the Maine Open Optical Statewide Enabling Network (MOOSE Net), which will serve as a centerpiece of Maine's long-term connectivity strategy. Simultaneously, we have rapidly ramped up a new high-performing organization with more than 20 staff working to administer grants, advance place-based connectivity, engage and include local partners, and proactively deploy resources to address challenges.

Maine has one of the highest concentrations of people living in rural areas and the country's highest per capita number of older people. Nearly 90% of Maine's population is subject to a structural disadvantage for inclusion in the digital economy and civil society (as defined by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)).

For these reasons, MCA continues to prioritize a connectivity strategy that is comprehensive and multi-faceted to fulfill our commitment to ensure that no one is left in the digital dark. As we braid funding to maximize the long-term public benefits of digital infrastructure, MCA will focus remaining federal Infrastructure funds to address the approximately 3% of locations with slow and unreliable internet. In 2024, MCA confirmed that approximately 1% of households and businesses in Maine are without any internet service or technology of any kind, and created the Working Internet ASAP initiative to ensure an option is available to those locations. This effort, combined with other grant programs, reinforces an "all solutions on the table" approach informed by extensive community engagement.

While these represent some of the most complex and costly areas to address, combining resources and integrating digital equity and infrastructure deployment to maximize benefit is essential. Critical to success will be Maine's ability to leverage current and future middle mile infrastructure to support place-based investments, align public sector infrastructure needs, and integrate diverse technologies to support a diverse and healthy ecosystem that benefits all people in Maine.

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MCA has closely aligned its approach with regional efforts, and Maine continues to be a national leader in the broadband infrastructure and digital equity domains. Through regular communication with fellow State Broadband Offices across New England, the northeast, and the country, MCA is benchmarking its performance against (and learning from) the most competitive and accomplished states. MCA will continue to evaluate the impact of its programs, identifying the impacts of creating an increasingly competitive marketplace while helping ensure maximum affordability and adoption for all users.

Forward Progress

While we have made great strides since MCA was created, it is the coming years that will truly define our collective success in closing the digital divide. Activities critical to success include:

- Facilitating over \$350 million of public and private funding in 2025 to ensure high-speed internet service is available to the final 26,000 locations in Maine through the Broadband Equity Access & Deployment (BEAD) Program.
- Launching a \$15 million campaign to invest in complementary digital equity and inclusion activities to ensure everyone benefits in the digital age.
- Completion of a state-owned middle mile network that will help enable affordable connectivity for community anchor institutions, provide competitive access to ISPs, content providers and data centers, and ensure resilience and redundancy for our state's digital infrastructure for years to come.
- Conducting an analysis of the state's cellular connectivity, identifying areas for improvement, and prioritizing opportunities to align investment to enhance mobile connectivity and also wireless and alternative technologies.

By taking an integrated approach, MCA has worked to both enable expanded access to high-speed, reliable internet and break down barriers to connectivity, especially for populations most impacted by the digital divide. But the work is not done, and our need to connect will not decrease. Our reliance on digital infrastructure, services and skills will continue to increase as all facets of our economy and society rely on digital delivery. As one of Maine's newest Quasi Governmental Agencies, MCA is more committed than ever to ensuring that the issue of connectivity is as integrated as possible into the State's resilience, public safety, housing, energy, economic development, education, and health policy strategies.

We can get EVERYWHERE from here!



Andrew Butcher
President, Maine Connectivity Authority

Introduction

One Maine Agency for Connectivity

In 2022, The ConnectMaine Authority functionally integrated with the Maine Connectivity Authority to serve as a single operational unit. This provides a “single door” solution and simplifies access for Maine citizens, broadband stakeholders, and governmental partners as intended in the passage of the Maine Connectivity Act in 2021, resulting in the creation of MCA to serve as the primary broadband agency responsible for planning, developing, investing, and expanding Maine’s connectivity capacity.

The integration is codified via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and beginning July 1, 2022, contractually assigns ConnectMaine funding, responsibilities, and staffing to MCA. By streamlining operations and financial resources, the State can efficiently plan, develop, fund, and maintain our broadband infrastructure. This allows MCA to accelerate the pace of planning and deployment of funds building from Maine’s model of high-impact and forward-looking broadband policies and practices while also adequately receiving, redeploying, and administering close to \$500 Million in Federal funding.

Broadband Definitions

Maine’s current statutory definition of broadband service is 100 Mbps download by 100 Mbps upload, which ensures access to symmetrical high-speed internet. MCA proposes the consistent application of this definition at this time.

Definitions of broadband service vary amongst federal programs, which has increased the importance of MCA consistently employing this statewide definition to ensure an accurate baseline and measurement. As MCA completes deploying its broadband infrastructure funding through BEAD and other programs in the coming years, maintaining the consistent definition of symmetrical high-speed Internet provides clarity for all partners in the statewide ecosystem.

The successful deployment of funds by MCA and ConnectMaine has only been possible with a strong foundation of data and enhanced mapping tools. As the data available from the federal government becomes increasingly granular and accurate, MCA will continue to provide regular updates about broadband availability on a location-by-location basis through its website and other channels.

Outcomes and Impact

As MCA continues implementing the strategies and programs listed in this document and elsewhere, the organization will continue monitoring progress toward success.

Connectivity Stats at a Glance

- 95% of locations in Maine have adequate or full broadband service.
- Over \$250M of investments have been made since 2020, braiding state and federal funds.
- Over 86,000 connections have been directly funded since 2020, representing a 26% increase in broadband internet access in Maine since 2022.
- Only 4% of locations in Maine remain unserved by modern internet.
- Approximately 3% of the locations (~18,000) in Maine have a slow and unreliable internet connection, and are unserved as defined by FCC (less than 100/20 Mbps). A solution for these locations will ultimately be solved by the BEAD Program in 2025.
- Approximately 1% of the locations (~8,000) in Maine have no type of internet service or technology at all. An option to connect has been provided to these locations through Maine's Working Internet ASAP Program.

Other Impact Stats

- **Leveraged over \$110 Million in private, ISP and community funds** to deploy broadband infrastructure and wireless technologies, to advance digital equity, and to reduce barriers experienced by those most impacted by the digital divide.
- **Executed contracts for 97% of grants** awarded through 2024, with a current average of **90 days between grant award and contract execution**.
- **Engaged approximately 30,000 Maine people** from every county to shape Maine's 5-year Broadband Action Plan (BAP) and Maine's first Digital Equity Plan through the Maine Broadband Survey, committees, partnerships, working groups, focus groups, and more.
- Hosted over **55 public engagement and information sessions**, board/committee meetings, with **more than 1,500 stakeholders in attendance**.
- **Gathered 120 constituents at Maine's first statewide Digital Equity Workshop** to develop 13 Regional and Wabanaki Digital Equity Plans reaching every town and municipality in Maine and to collectively develop Maine's statewide vision for Digital Equity.
- MCA's engagement with Wabanaki communities strengthened during **formal consultations with three Wabanaki leaders** and with Four Directions Development Corporation supporting four Wabanaki Digital Navigator positions, developing a tech support specialist training program, and informing our statewide Digital Equity Plan.

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- **Developed the Maine Broadband Workforce Strategy** to determine critical occupations for deploying broadband across the state, gauge the scale of workforce shortages, and craft strategies for addressing barriers experienced by potential workers.
 - **Launched ACP4ME to increase awareness and enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**. As of December 2023, 96,797 Maine households have enrolled in the ACP (40% of eligible households in Maine). The ACP program was eventually sunset in Spring 2024 when federal funding was not allocated to keep it active.
-

Activity #1: Last Mile Broadband Infrastructure

Capital Projects Funds / All-In Programs

To date, MCA has deployed more than \$110 million from the American Rescue Plan's Capital Projects Fund through the state's All-In Programs. This complementary suite of programs is designed to reach the last mile in Maine's most rural places, connect communities ready to scale their infrastructure, prepare communities for investment, ensure affordable options for everyone, and invest in partnerships to build a modern broadband infrastructure for Maine. MCA estimates that the All-In Programs will bring high-speed broadband to over 57,000 homes and businesses in rural and remote areas.

Connect the Ready Public-Private Partnerships

MCA has allocated \$57 million of CPF funding to successfully develop and deploy two cohorts of competitive Connect the Ready last mile infrastructure grants to support public-private partnerships. MCA designed the program to support community-driven public-private partnerships at a regional scale. Through two cohort application periods, first in fall 2022 and then again in fall 2023, the MCA Board ultimately approved eighteen projects for a total of \$57 million, leveraging \$29 million of community and private funding. Connect the Ready grants will help reach more than 23,000 locations across 63 communities along 1,700 route miles.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/connect-the-ready-grants

Reach Me Line Extension Incentives

As a new approach to achieving last-mile connectivity goals, MCA established the Reach Me Line Extension Incentives program to optimize broadband deployment by incentivizing internet service providers (ISPs) to complete their existing networks by extending service to unserved locations in their coverage areas. The application process for Reach Me opened in October 2022, and eight projects have ultimately been funded with \$16 million, leveraging an additional \$11.5 million of private funding. Reach Me Line Extensions will reach more than 5,000 locations across 56 communities.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/reach-me

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Partnerships Enabling Middle Mile

MCA allocated \$23 million of CPF funds to the Partnerships for Enabling Middle Mile (PEMM) program to address large-scale, regional broadband needs by leveraging middle-mile infrastructure and maximizing private and community financial contributions. MCA has awarded four PEMM projects for a total of \$28 million, leveraging an additional \$41 million in private and community funding. These projects cover almost 30,000 locations along more than 1,000 route miles across 27 communities in Maine.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/enable-middle-mile

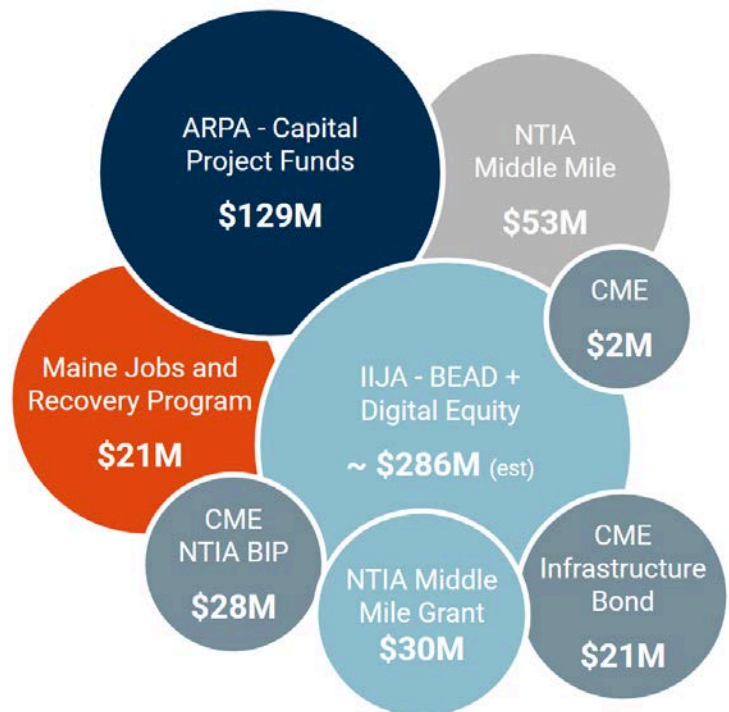
Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program

The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program is funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and provides Maine with a \$272 million grant that will bring critical resources to fund broadband infrastructure and digital equity for the entire state. The BEAD program prioritizes Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs) that have service of less than 100/20 Mbps.

The majority of the fiscal year focused on developing and submitting MCA's Initial Proposals Volumes One and Two, followed by the BEAD State-Led Challenge Process. From July through September 2023, the MCA team worked to gather information and outline a strategy to distribute BEAD funding. This included plans for the State-Led Challenge Process, Applicant Pre-Qualification Evaluation, and BEAD Project Applications.

Following an initial planning period, MCA staff drafted Initial Proposals Volumes One and Two, which were completed and submitted to NTIA for approval in December 2023. After curing was completed, Volume 1 was officially approved by NTIA on March 26, 2024, closely followed by Volume 2 on June 12, 2024.

As MCA awaited NTIA's final approval, the organization launched the BEAD State-Led Challenge Process in late April 2024. The State-Led Challenge Process provided an opportunity to create an accurate map of locations eligible for BEAD funding in Maine. The outcome of the SLCP was approximately 26,000 locations and 3,000 Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) across the state that are eligible for BEAD funding.



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In late 2024, Maine completed the BEAD Pre-Qualification Evaluation, with fifteen prospective applicants qualifying to participate in the BEAD Project Application in early 2025. Prospective applicants were pre-qualified after a thorough review confirming their operational, technical, financial and compliance capacity.

In 2025, Maine will conduct the BEAD Project Application, where applicants will bid on Project Service Areas containing the remaining 26,000 locations with a slow, unreliable, or no internet connection. These bids will be reviewed, scored for competitiveness, and then presented for public comment ahead of submission for approval by NTIA.

Other State and Federal Funding

ConnectMaine State Bond Program

In July 2020, voters overwhelmingly supported a \$15 million High-Speed Internet Infrastructure Bond. The \$15 million bond represented the first significant funding that ConnectMaine had received in its twelve-year history. In May 2021, ConnectMaine approved the first round of broadband infrastructure projects funded by this bond, including \$8,671,323 in grants to 20 projects in 11 counties across Maine, serving 8,571 locations.

In May 2022, a second round of broadband infrastructure awards was announced in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Lincoln, Oxford, and Waldo counties. Through the eight projects, approximately 6,000 Maine homes and businesses were connected in the communities of Buckfield, Chebeague Island, Cooper, Hartford, Hebron, Leeds, Northport, Princeton, Searsport, and Southport.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/connectmaine

NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Projects

The ConnectMaine Authority and its partners received \$28,097,295 in NTIA grant funding to build fiber broadband infrastructure to 14,863 unserved addresses in rural Maine. The Broadband Infrastructure Program allows the state and its Internet service provider partners to construct fiber-to-the-premise infrastructure in areas the private sector finds to be cost-prohibitive. The public-private partnership and federal funding makes it feasible for regional ISPs to expand their fiber-based footprints into some of the most rural unserved areas in the state.

As of November 2024, four projects were complete and fully operational in Jefferson, Blue Hill, Farmington, and Rangeley, connecting 5,566 locations. Three additional projects are nearing completion in the communities of Somerville, Washington, and Isle au Haut, where a subsea cable was recently installed.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/connectmaine

Activity #2: Digital Equity & Inclusion Programs

Approach & Integration

Maine Connectivity Authority is committed to advancing digital equity for all: ensuring that all Mainers, especially those who are most impacted by the digital divide, have access to and can use information and communications technologies so they can fully realize all of the civic, economic, health, educational, social and other benefits that they provide. MCA takes a holistic approach to integrating programs resulting from varying funding sources and is working to closely align the goals and outcomes of all programs. Maine's [Digital Equity](#) and [Broadband Action Plans](#) will provide insight into MCA's strategies moving forward.

Maine's Digital Equity Plan was the first to be approved by NTIA in February 2024. Early implementation of the plan started in advance of receipt of State Digital Equity Capacity Funding, including the development and rollout of the Connectivity Hubs grant program.



The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) estimates that **89% of Mainers identify as at least one population likely to be most impacted by the digital divide**, referred to as “covered populations” in the Digital Equity Act. These important audiences include older adults, low-income households, people living in rural areas, veterans, individuals with a disability, individuals with a language barrier, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and people who are (or have been) incarcerated.

MCA works with its partner organizations to effectively reach these key populations throughout each part of the state. Maine's Digital Equity Taskforce, composed of organizations that serve populations impacted by the digital divide, met on a monthly basis during the 2024 fiscal year. Approximately 30 individuals regularly attended those meetings, providing insight to MCA on effectively reaching covered populations. The Digital Equity Taskforce transitioned to a self-led Digital Equity Alliance this June, and over 70 members have joined. MCA will continue collaborating with this group to share definitions, raise awareness, and close the digital divide.

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On October 4-5, 2024, MCA held a “Start Summit: Innovating to Protect Older Adults from Online Fraud” in partnership with the Roux Institute at Northeastern University, the University of Maine, and AARP Maine. This event brought together people of various backgrounds and ages to learn about the challenges older adults face in staying safe online and work in groups to develop and pitch solutions to address the problem. A panel included experts from the United States Attorney’s Office; Defendify, a Maine-based cybersecurity company; AARP’s Fraud Watch Network, the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, and the Kennebunk Police Department. This event, which 90% of attendees indicated they would recommend to friends or colleagues, raised awareness with the public and partner organizations of the importance of internet safety for targeted populations. It also generated new and creative solutions and highlighted the opportunity to address this issue from a digital equity lens.

Digital Equity Planning & Implementation

In November 2022, MCA received \$542,000 in Digital Equity planning funds from NTIA. These funds have supported the development of Maine’s first-ever [Digital Equity Plan](#), designed in coordination with the state’s BEAD 5-Year Broadband Action Plan. To address barriers and build from the State’s strengths, the digital equity plan for Maine strives to ensure that every person in the state, regardless of their background, resources, circumstances, identity, or community, will have equitable access to the digital world, including affordable, reliable internet connectivity; an affordable device that meets their needs; the opportunity to develop digital skills and access technical support; tools and information to protect themselves and their families online; and online state resources that are inclusive and accessible for all.

MCA has started implementing the plan, namely through the Connectivity Hubs grant program and Regional and Wabanaki Partners program, as well as through additional investments in device refurbishment and digital skills capacity. In November 2024, Maine’s State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program award was approved by NTIA, meaning that MCA can now access and deploy \$5,784,349.60.

This first round of funding will primarily support MCA’s Digital Opportunity Networks Program, which will roll out in January 2025. The program will support networks of partners to enable digital inclusion programs and initiatives for people most impacted by the digital divide, including internet access, digital skill building, access to devices, technical support, and internet safety education. The program is an essential bridge between our efforts to deploy infrastructure to unserved homes, businesses, and communities by investing in digital inclusion programs to address barriers and better serve all Maine people.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/digital-equity

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Capacity Building

Regional & Wabanaki Broadband Partners

The Regional & Wabanaki Broadband Partners program helps deploy, sustain and maximize the benefits of broadband infrastructure investment in all state regions. Program goals include supporting community-driven broadband solutions that ensure universal connectivity, strengthening and growing the number of partners thinking about digital equity and inclusion, and creating alignment and coordination between communities, regions, and the state. In Year 1 (2023), partners will build and lead digital inclusion efforts in their region and tribe while also providing support for community and regional-scale broadband infrastructure solutions and investments. In Year 2 (2024), partners will begin implementing planned activities. In November 2024, MCA's Board approved Year Three awards for the Regional & Wabanaki Broadband Partners Program. This round of funding aims to ensure long-term capacity and resource sustainability with an increased focus on serving covered populations effectively. The partners include 12 returning organizations and six new organizations, with all five Wabanaki communities engaged in direct funding proposals.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/regional-broadband-partners

Get Ready: Community Support Program

The Get Ready program supports accelerated community broadband planning at a regional scale through tailored technical assistance and by coordinating multiple professional service providers to support participants. Key goals include making planning more efficient for all public and private partners while building a pipeline of private-public partnerships ready to leverage and accelerate future state funding deployment. A total of \$200,000 in funding was awarded to 12 municipalities/collaborations of municipalities.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/get-ready-community-support

Partnership Contracts

Maine Connectivity Authority is partnering with two nonprofit organizations to achieve the aggressive goals set in the state's Digital Equity Plan and to break down the barriers that keep Maine people from using the internet: Give IT Get IT and the National Digital Equity Center (NDEC). Give IT Get IT will enhance its refurbishment capacity by investing in additional refurbishment technicians and other necessary resources over 14 months. The funding will allow the organization to increase the number of donated devices, expand the refurbishment team to ensure more devices can be given a new life, and increase efficiency in the program to distribute devices to more people. MCA also provided the NDEC with funding to enhance its capacity through strategic investment in additional digital skills instructors and other essential resources across Maine, such as multilingual classes and translated individual learning plans. This initiative aims to significantly boost the output of digital skills training, with an anticipated increase in the number of partner onsite locations, digital navigators, and increased hours for the instructors.

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Community Anchor Institutions

Connectivity Hubs

MCA allocated \$11.8 million of Capital Projects Funds to develop and execute the Connectivity Hubs grant program. The program was designed to make capital investments in community anchor institutions to enable education, workforce, and health monitoring programming, focusing on addressing barriers experienced by those most impacted by the digital divide. MCA opened a concept submission process in late 2023, through which over 70 project concepts were submitted. Fifteen proposed concepts were invited to complete full applications in March 2024, and 12 projects were approved for funding by the MCA Board in June 2024. The projects will serve a mix of targeted audiences identified in Maine's Digital Equity Plan across the state, including eight counties, with two projects serving Wabanaki Nations. Grants between \$250,000 and \$2 million were awarded for capital improvements, such as facility construction and renovation, and essential assets like affordable devices for public access and lending programs.

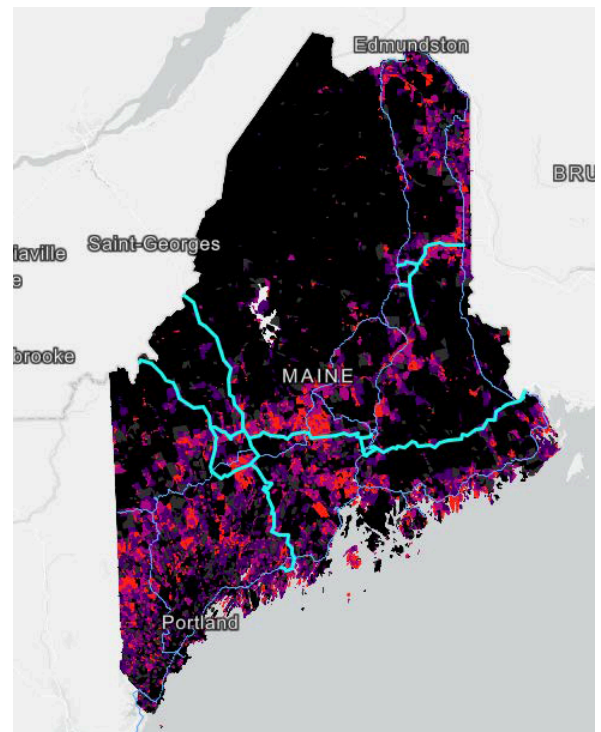
For more information: maineconnectivity.org/connectivity-hubs

Activity #3: Middle Mile Infrastructure

MOOSE Net Middle Mile Project

Ensuring a diverse, resilient, and redundant internet infrastructure is key to the long-term success of Maine's connectivity strategy. Middle mile is the regional fiber optic infrastructure that enables last mile internet connectivity to homes, businesses, and other users at the local level. It is made up of high-capacity fiber that carries large amounts of data at high speeds over long distances and other telecommunications infrastructure (e.g., points of presence, community anchor institutions, etc.) that act as "off-ramps" that connect middle mile fiber to local networks that serve last mile connections to local homes and businesses.

Maine's existing internet infrastructure is a patchwork of individual private networks. The middle mile infrastructure supporting these networks was generally not created to support the goal of universal broadband access throughout the state.



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While public and private investments over the last decade, including notably the federally-funded Three Ring Binder, have added essential infrastructure to support this goal, the job is not done, and too many areas of Maine remain unserved. To address this challenge, MCA, The Maine Department of Transportation, The University of Maine, The Maine Office of Information Technology and others proposed and were awarded a competitive \$30 million grant for the Maine Online Optical Statewide Enabling Network (MOOSE Net) through NTIA's Enabling Middle Mile program, funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. MOOSE Net will be approximately 500 miles of open access, fiber-optic network to extend connectivity to some of Maine's most rural and un(der)-served areas in complement to existing middle mile infrastructure funded through the 2009 Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program.

MOOSE Net will be owned by MCA and operated to preserve a public benefit and optimize Maine's unique geographical position. MOOSE Net will cover 131 communities, representing over 11,000 unserved local businesses and residents, passing through areas—including Somerset, Franklin, Piscataquis, Aroostook, and Washington Counties—that today lack strong middle mile broadband infrastructure. It will also reach more than 200 community anchor institutions, including schools, hospitals, libraries, local government buildings, and civic centers. As of December 2024, pre-construction activities for financing, permitting and compliance are underway, and a competitively bid vendor for design and construction services will be finalized in January 2025.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/middle-mile

Activity #4: Alternative & Wireless Technologies

Working Internet ASAP (WIA)

The Working Internet ASAP Program provides a low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite internet access option for qualified remote and rural locations in Maine. These homes and businesses are extremely difficult to reach and currently have no service or technology option. As of October 2024, less than 1.5% of locations, or approximately 8,000 homes and businesses in Maine, have no service or technology of any kind (including cable, DSL, or fixed wireless) and no current project planned to connect those locations. MCA has coordinated the bulk purchase and deployment of LEO satellite hardware and service reservations to ensure that eligible locations have the option to receive LEO equipment and installation support, and access internet service.

In December, the WIA Enrollment Portal opened for eligible homes and businesses to sign up for LEO satellite internet service with free hardware and the option for free installation provided by MCA. The community outreach and engagement plan to bring awareness to this opportunity will continue into the new year with a second statewide press release, mailing to eligible addresses, and coordination with Regional & Wabanaki Broadband Partners and other statewide partners.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/wia

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Jumpstart Connectivity Initiative

In 2022, MCA launched the Jumpstart Connectivity Initiative (Jumpstart) to provide accelerated low-cost internet access to the least-served areas of the state by trialing the deployment of wireless technology. The program targeted communities across five counties with a high concentration of unserved homes and businesses, where wired deployments are currently impractical.

After an open RFP process in May 2022, MCA selected three different partners, technologies and operating models to evaluate where and how to incorporate wireless solutions into the State's connectivity strategy. The selected projects allow us to trial new technologies and hybrid operating models, leveraging existing infrastructure and deployment to enable speed to market. Three projects are nearing completion in early 2025, and MCA will release a report of findings from the pilot program.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/jumpstart

Cellular & Mobile Connectivity

As MCA looks to future initiatives, an increased focus on cellular and mobile connectivity will be a key complement to broadband internet deployment. In 2025, MCA will initiate a focused wireless and cellular initiative in partnership with DECD, which will build on CME's 2020 cellular analysis and the last four years of infrastructure deployment to better understand the geographic deficiencies of wireless and cellular service. Conversations in development include coordination with the State's wireless and cellular carriers to ensure that MOOSE Net advances a comprehensive connectivity solution.

Activity #5: Reducing Barriers

Maine Connectivity Authority works actively with local, state, and federal policy-makers to ensure that everyone in Maine has a reliable, affordable internet connection by effectively deploying funding broadband infrastructure and ensuring digital equity for all Mainers. The key to MCA's success is focusing on cross-cutting policy, practice, and systems that can eliminate barriers to strategic objectives. Known priorities addressed in 2024 include utility pole access, workforce development, community capacity building, interagency coordination, and broadband affordability.

Utility Pole Strategy

Utility poles are a critical part of Maine's broadband infrastructure. Because of the rocky terrain in Maine, wired networks are almost always less expensive and quicker to install aerially on existing utility poles rather than underground. MCA-funded projects will require access to tens of thousands of poles across the state.

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MCA, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, the Maine Department of Transportation, the Office of Information Technology, and the Public Utilities Commission, leads the Interagency Broadband Working Group, a codified subcommittee of the Governor's Infrastructure Implementation Committee. This group was identified as an effective stakeholder group to bring together relevant state agencies to study the issues presented in LD 1456.

Ultimately, the Public Utilities Commission, in consultation with the Maine Connectivity Authority, submitted a report based on input and analysis from the Interagency Broadband Working Group, informing a study of current pole attachment laws and rules and the effects of those on municipal broadband expansion, either through public networks or public-private partnerships. On November 15, 2024, MCA submitted the study to the Public Utilities Commission, which submitted a final report to the Legislature in December 2024. [Read the report.](#)

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/utility-poles

Workforce Development

In 2024, MCA leveraged \$700,000 to secure an additional \$700,000 in matching funds from the Maine Community College System to create the Fiber Optic Technician Program, with the first site to implement the program at Central Maine Community College (CMCC). In partnership with Central Maine Community College, the Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce, the Fiber Broadband Association, and with funding from the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan, the Fiber Optic Training Program offers a free 4-week course for students to learn the fundamentals of installing, testing, and maintaining fiber-to-the-home networks. After successfully completing this program, students will have the skills to become a FBA Certified Fiber Optic Technician. This course runs on-site in Auburn, with new cohorts starting each month on average. Wraparound support includes resume assistance, employer connections, job matching services, and a \$800 stipend through a learn-to-earn model.

To date, this program at CMCC has completed five cohorts with 40 individuals enrolled, 24 graduated, and 18 now employed. The sixth cohort, now underway, is full, with a waiting list for the next offering, indicating an increase in interest in broadband careers.

Inherent to MCA's workforce development is the goal to diversify the broadband sector by promoting industry career opportunities and training, removing barriers to employment, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Toward this goal, staff collaborates with several statewide inclusionary workforce development efforts, including Governor Mills' [Executive Order to Increase Women's Employment in Maine's Construction Industry](#) and Infrastructure Workforce Alignment for collaboration with other sector efforts. These efforts are built from MCA's 2023 Broadband Workforce Analysis, outlining key areas to improve Maine's education, training and employment opportunities in the Broadband sector.

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/workforce

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Affordability Constraints

Through the Broadband Action Planning process, broadband affordability was identified as the primary barrier to achieving digital equity and universal connectivity for Mainers. As a result, MCA ramped out outreach, engagement and technical support to maximize the number of Mainers participating in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Due in part to the creation of the “ACP 4 ME” outreach campaign, over 96,000 Mainers benefited from the federal subsidy for income-qualified households. MCA estimates that this saved Maine low-income households approximately \$2.7 Million per month until the Federal Communications Commission suspended the program.

Additionally, given the number of low-income households who reside in multi-dwelling units (MDUs), MCA identified the need to address broadband access and costs to improve MDU tenant's access to services in multi-dwelling units. Due to a directive by the Maine State Legislature via LD 240, MCA was charged to facilitate a policy report and public engagement process to include individuals representing real estate, development, and community interests; internet service, cable and wireless technology providers; and landlords.

Public engagement for this process included two separate public sessions targeting the real estate and internet service provider sectors and tenants. On November 22, MCA published the draft recommendations and accepted public comment through December 22, 2024, via a public comment form and Zoom sessions. [Read the recommendations.](#)

For more information: maineconnectivity.org/policy

Community Engagement

Maine has a long and successful history of building broadband projects on a foundation of community-driven public-private partnerships. Through the deployment of infrastructure and digital equity funds, communities continue to be active partners and participants in Maine’s infrastructure programming. MCA continues to adapt its community engagement strategy to ensure communities have a voice in decision-making without requiring a burdensome process for resource-deprived communities. Local knowledge growth was prioritized statewide by supporting *Let’s Talk Broadband* weekly calls, municipal government education and informational sessions, and collaborative decision-making with local leaders to ensure community-supported solutions within all of MCA’s funding programs.

In partnership with MCA’s sixteen Regional & Wabanaki Broadband Partners (RWBP), over 200 partners convened monthly in local coalition building and resource sharing as a pathway to reach Maine’s covered populations as outlined in the Maine Digital Equity Plan. The RWBP program has also invested in stipends and free device distribution for organizations and individuals to alleviate digital access barriers. Those who received access to devices also worked with one of the dozen digital navigators across the state to engage in digital skills training and adult education curriculum to smooth the pathway for digital access.

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Shine A Light + Share the Love Community Engagement Events

MCA engaged with subgrantees and communities to host events that celebrated success around the state. MCA has affectionately named these community events “Shine a Light + Share the Love,” as they serve as an opportunity to acknowledge all of the time, resources, and dedication that goes into each project from the local community level to the internet service provider to MCA staff. Since 2023, MCA organized and supported Shine the Light + Share the Love events for over 55 communities featuring Skowhegan & Madison, Lee & Lakeville, Sebago, Great Diamond Island, Greater East Grand Region, the Blue Hill peninsula, Vanceboro, Franklin County, Waldo County, and Somerset & Kennebec Counties.

Financial Statements (FY 2024)

Funding Allocation & Disbursements (as of June 2024)

The following table outlines revenue allocated to MCA by state and federal funding partners, funding committed by MCA through subgrants and contracts, and funding disbursed as of 6/30/2024.

Program	Revenue Allocated	Funds Committed	Funds Disbursed	Period of Performance
ConnectMaine Bond Fund	\$15,000,000	\$15,000,000	\$13,080,436	7/01/2021 - 12/31/2026
NTIA BIP	\$28,097,295	\$28,097,295	\$24,157,313	3/1/22 - 6/30/25
Capital Projects Funds 1A (Broadband Infrastructure)	\$110,000,000	\$76,814,229	\$25,096,485	2/11/2022 - 12/31/2026
Capital Projects Funds 1C (Multi-Purpose Communities Facilities)	\$11,832,988	\$9,638,008	\$0	2/11/2022 - 12/31/2026
BEAD Planning *	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$2,931,937	11/15/22 - 6/30/32
Digital Equity Planning **	\$542,222	\$542,222	\$542,222	11/15/22 - 10/14/23
NTIA Enabling Middle Mile	\$30,016,472	\$0	\$0	7/01/23 - 6/30/25
MJRP	\$21,000,000	\$7,384,204	\$7,384,204	3/3/2021 - 12/31/2026

* \$267M in additional infrastructure funding approved in July 2024

** \$5.8M in additional digital equity capacity funding approved in December 2024

Audited Financial Statements & Cash Flow Reports

Copies of draft audited financial statements and cash flow reports for both MCA and CME are available here:

- [Maine Connectivity Authority FY2024 - Financial Statements.pdf](#) (Revenues: \$34.4M; expenditures: \$32.7M; net position \$3.6M)
- [ConnectMaine Authority 6.30.24 Issued FS.pdf](#) (Revenues: \$9.9M; expenditures: \$10.4M; net position \$3M)
- [ConnectME Monthly Report from Solix - June 2024.pdf](#)
- [ConnectMaine Cashflow as of June 2024](#)

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Appendix

1. Appendix A: MCA's Mission Critical Activities for [January-June 2024](#) and [July-December 2024](#)
2. [Appendix B](#): MCA's Organizational Chart
3. [Appendix C](#): Service Contract between Maine Connectivity Authority and Connect Maine
4. [Appendix D](#): Triennial Plan, 2022-2024
5. [Appendix E](#): DRAFT Triennial Plan, 2025-2027
6. [Appendix F](#): Broadband Action Plan
7. [Appendix G](#): Digital Equity Plan
8. [Appendix H](#): Capital Projects Fund Annual Performance Report