

Digital Inclusion Plan

Town of Bowdoin

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April 3, 2018
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Appendix A

Town of Bowdoin

Digital Inclusion Report

This part of our report describes our work to better understand the needs of your community and includes an overview of our business surveys, the business interviews, an analysis of the community surveys, a catalog of available public access computers, and recommendations and pricing for a Digital Inclusion program. At Axiom, we believe that a strong Digital Inclusion program is an investment in community members and enhances a larger community connectivity effort such as what is being contemplated in the Town of Bowdoin.

Benefits include:

- **Higher Take-rates**, as people understand the value of an internet connection to their lives, they are more likely to take service
- **Reduces barriers** to adoption and helps community members access learning tools for increased on-line presence
- People with service are more likely to **upgrade service**, again increasing the viability of a project being successful
- **Helps businesses understand how to leverage on-line tools and cloud services** to add value and productivity to their business
- Helps individual community members **access life enhancing content, including e commerce, telemedicine services and educational opportunities**
- **Bridges the Digital Divide**, helping teach disadvantaged members of the community to participate in what is increasingly an on-line world.

By removing barriers and exposing people and businesses to educational opportunities that improves their understanding of on-line benefits Axiom believes we can change the economic status of a region

Surveys, Interviews and Meeting Results

Axiom interviewed businesses, community and municipal leaders, as well as residents to discuss Computer Skills/Digital Literacy Training and workforce development skills training.

Business

For the business community, an online survey was distributed, followed by interviews. The Town of Bowdoin Broadband Committee identified key businesses to target during this process. In addition to the survey being available to the general public, Axiom contacted 52 businesses via email or phone calls. A total of 13 businesses responded to the survey and/or interviews. (See Addendum 1 – Town of Bowdoin Business Survey Results)

Business Survey Results:

- **100% of businesses state that broadband is extremely important for their business**
- 36% of businesses state that they could work and sell more efficiently online
- 36% of businesses are sole entrepreneurs; 36% have 2-5 employees; 9% have 5-10 employees; 18% have 10-25 employees; and 0% have over 25 employees
- **55% of businesses have a website**
- **50% of businesses do not use a domain email address**
- 50% of businesses do not use VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) telephone service
- 58% of businesses use the internet for online sales; and 45% for social media
- **67% of businesses state that internet speeds have not kept up with business needs over the past few years**
- 45% of businesses state improved broadband will be critically important to their business in the next 1-2 years
- 45% of businesses do not offer telecommuting
- 50% of businesses that do offer telecommuting report that employees struggle with it
- **30% of businesses see a need for computer skills training**

Residential

As with Business, Community & Municipal leaders, the residential community was invited to participate in a Community Broadband Survey by the Town of Bowdoin Broadband Team. It was the goal of the survey for residents to become engaged in providing better broadband to the town. A total of 245 residents completed the survey.

Community Survey Results:

- **85% have a home-based business**
- 100% state that the internet is important for their business
- 86% of homes have internet
- 97% are interested in having internet at their home
- 78% of homes use the internet for education; 47% use the internet for health and wellness; 85% use the internet for entertainment; 93% use the internet for communications; 78% use the internet for news and weather; and 31% use the internet for other reasons
- **53% of homes state that they are not happy with their current internet service provider**
- **40% state that they would pay more for faster speed and reliable service**
- 60% state they have children or adults that use the internet for homework – 61 are children and 39% are adults
- **27% of residents are interested in computer class training**

Community & Municipal Leaders – It is evident in our work across Maine and the surveys in your community that the need for Digital Training and Literacy is a growing and important way to invest in both your businesses and community members. A deeper understanding of what is technologically possible to do when you have a broadband connection, including distance learning education, telehealth, telecommuting, cloud-based services and software availability begins the process of developing and implementing a Digital Literacy plan for a community, as the community needs are assessed.

What is Digital Inclusion?

Digital inclusion is a national priority in the United States, and increasingly a priority in Maine. High-speed Internet access is widely recognized as a necessity for full participation in today's society. Employers, educators, businesses, healthcare providers, and civic institutions expect people to have access to computers and broadband connectivity. However, accessible, reliable, and affordable broadband service continues to be out of reach for millions of Americans, many of whom live in low-income households. This gap in adoption of high-speed Internet and the lack of skills needed to use broadband-enabled tools in meaningful ways continue to be significant problems that policymakers, researchers, and practitioners need to focus on in the United States and in Maine.

The Digital Inclusion Program for the Town of Bowdoin includes four components:

1. Affordable Internet – Cost continues to be a major barrier to broadband adoption. The Town of Bowdoin should consider addressing “ability to pay”. The following providers have been contacted regarding low-cost broadband availability:

- **FairPoint Communications:**
 - Eligible low-income FairPoint residential customers can qualify for a discount on qualified internet service at their primary residence under the Lifeline Program. The discount consists of federal monthly support of \$9.25.
 - Eligible FairPoint residential customers residing on tribal lands may qualify for an additional federal discount of up to \$25 per month and installation assistance.
 - Further information, including applications forms, can be found at: www.fairpoint.com/home/residential/phone/lifeline.html
- **TDS Telecom:**
 - Eligible low-income TDS residential customers can qualify for a discount on qualified internet service at their primary residence under the Lifeline Program. The discount consists of federal monthly support of \$9.25.
 - Further information, including applications forms, can be found at: <https://tdstelecom.com/content/dam/tdstelecom/pdfs/lifeline/LifelineApplication.pdf>

- **Town of Bowdoin Technology Fund:** A fund ~could~ be established to offer a discount to low-income families to address broadband adoption and take-rate
 - Axiom is working with the Broadband Committee to determine the feasibility of establishing a fund

2. Affordable Equipment Assessment – Low-cost or free computers are often just as important as having access to low-cost or free Internet options, particularly for people in low-income communities.

- **PC's for Maine** www.pcsformaine.org offers refurbished, older computers that are donated by businesses in Maine and are available to low-income families.
- **PC's for Maine** will consider installing a kiosk at a local business to sell low-cost computers locally. Axiom would be happy to work with a local business and facilitate a conversation with PC's for Maine, should the Town of Bowdoin decide to move forward.
- **Goodwill's "Good Tech"** program offers refurbished, used computers to low-income residents. <https://goodwillnne.org/stores/goodtech>
- **Lending Library of Devices**, laptops, desktops, iPads, etc., could be established for residents to borrow on an "as-needed" basis. The devices might be donated or the Town of Bowdoin could seek grant funds to purchase equipment.

3. Digital Literacy Training* – Computer Skills Training /Digital Literacy Training plays a critical role in technology and workforce development training.

- **Axiom Education & Training Center** offers Digital Literacy classes for residents and businesses. We recommend offering the residents and businesses in the Town of Bowdoin digital literacy courses over a 6 to 12-month period of time, one class per week, ensuring that the program has predictability over some period of time for full residential and business participation.
- **Merrymeeting Adult Education** is located in Topsham and serves the towns of Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, Brunswick, Harpswell and Topsham. Merrymeeting Adult Education offers computer skills classes at the following locations: Topsham and two locations in Brunswick. <https://merrymeeting.coursetorm.com/category/computers-and-technology>
- **Maine Dept. of Labor's CareerCenter**, www.mainecareercenter.gov is located in Brunswick and Lewiston and is committed to assist with workforce development skills efforts.

In rural communities, time, distance, travel is a barrier to educational attainment; holding classes that are in accessible locations that are familiar and not intimidating will increase participation and are geographically spread out throughout the designated service ensure strong, widespread participation and good, measurable impacts.

Recommended Class Locations:

- Town of Bowdoin Town Office
- Business Locations

Recommended Classes include:

- Introduction to Computer
- Windows 7, 8, 10
- Internet Safety
- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft Outlook
- Microsoft Publisher
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- QuickBooks
- PhotoShop
- Social Media including FaceBook for Business & Individuals, Twitter, etc.
- WordPress
- Video Streaming
- iPad
- Gmail
- Google Docs, etc.
- Targeted classes:
 - Aging in Place
 - Tourism
 - Business and/or Community Center
 - Business Growth and Support
 - Websites, Social Media and Domain Email
 - Cutting the Cord

**Digital Literacy Training program pricing included in Appendix A.*

Axiom will work with the Town of Bowdoin to pursue funding for digital literacy classes for residents and businesses.

4. Public Computer Access – Increasing Public Access Computing allows residents to access technology in places in which they feel comfortable and supported is essential. If a business or resident cannot afford equipment or an Internet subscription, and if broadband is not available at their location, Public Computer Access is essential.

- **Bowdoinham Public Library** has 1 computers available for public use, and 1 other is available in the public meeting room.. Wireless internet is also available for residents and businesses with their own computer to use during library hours.
- **Merrymeeting Adult Education** has 12 computers available for public use. Users need to call ahead to reserve a computer.

- **Community HotSpots** are open access networks that allow citizens in a downtown or other public spaces access to the Internet. This is a simple, straightforward way to help a town or region get more connected. It is an affordable, convenient way to help visitors and residents easy, seamless connectivity.

Digital Literacy Budget

Budget (Based on 10 Students per Class)	1 class/wk.
Teacher and/or Tutor (Fringe & Salary)	\$ 20,000
Travel	\$ 2,000
Survey Monkey (Annual Fee)	\$ 204
Supplies	\$ 1,000
Academic Services Group (Curriculum)	\$ 796
Administration	\$ 6,000
Total Budget	\$ 30,000

*Budget based on 1-year program, 1 class per week, 10 students per class.