

equal access to broadband

Senate Finance

Committee

February 10, 2023

We're not connected until **everyone** can afford broadband.

Holly Groschner, Chair holly@equalaccesstobroadband.org

Hello,
I'm
Holly
Groschner

30 Years Telecom Experience:

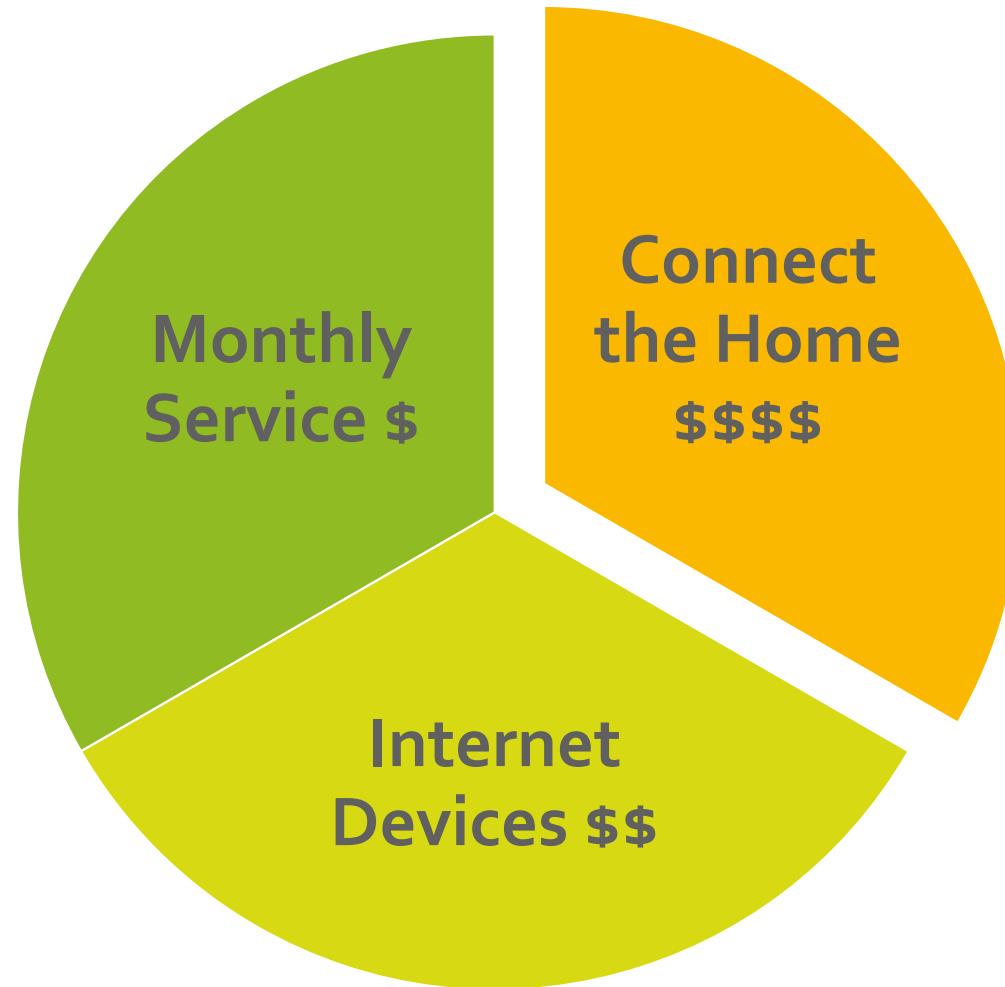
- Director, Downs Rachlin & Martin, utilities law
- Vice President, Crown Castle International
- General Counsel, Vermont Telecom Authority
- CEO, Vermont PBS
- Resident of Corinth, VT: ISP = Topsham Telephone

Telecom nonprofit volunteer:

- **Equal Access to Broadband**, Board Chair
- EC Fiber (CUD), Governing Board (former)
- Founder, Womens Wireless Forum
- Member, Vermont Community Broadband Board

Why am I here?

Rural broadband is not affordable for many Vermonters and that's a problem.



For a moment, think about your broadband beliefs



Affordable access?

- More megabits are better
- CUDs rates are better
- CUD funding will meet low-income needs
- People register if you advertise the federal subsidy
- Broadband carriers must provide an affordable rate and the federal subsidy
- Social service agencies assist with broadband service and subsidies
- People use the web to register for low-cost service

**Many can't connect
to a network right
outside their doors**

The next Vermont
broadband gap is
affordability

DON'T GET CONFUSED:

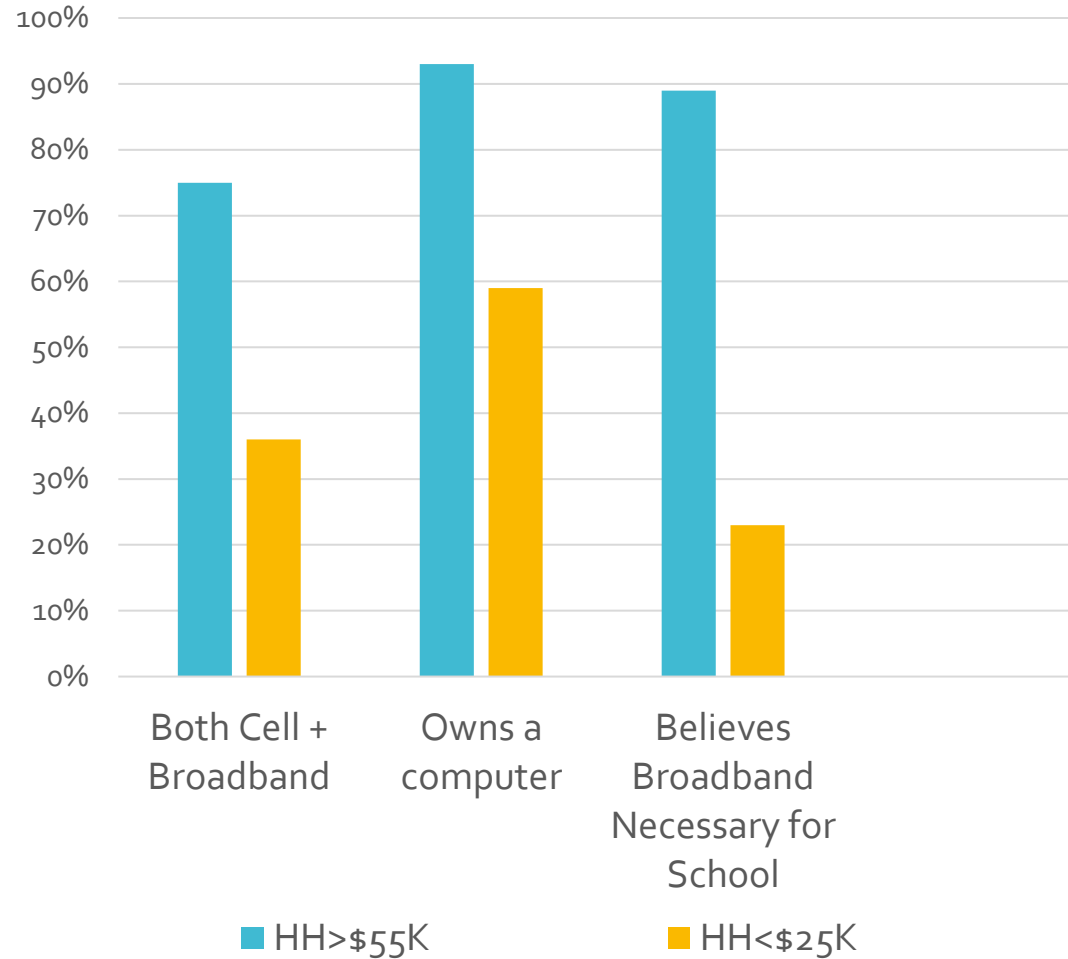
In some areas where 90% of the households have access to 25/3 mpbs (basic broadband) 68% are living below the federal poverty level...

there is a network there, but is it affordable?

Is it important?
Yes.
Healthcare
Education
Employment
Community

108,370
(41.3%) Vermont
households are
subsidy eligible
- most don't get help.

The National Gap



Affordable Connectivity Program: federal subsidy

The ACP is a
\$30
monthly benefit
for internet service

Extras

\$75 on tribal lands
\$100 for a device

Qualification

Income < 200% poverty line
Participation in assistance program

Rules

One ACP per household
One member must qualify

Background

Formerly the EBB
Launched May 12, 2021

As of Jan. 16, 2023

15,701,207
households were enrolled.

Three Steps to get the ACP

- 1. Qualify**
Confirm household eligibility
- 2. Apply**
Complete enrollment process
- 3. Buy**
Purchases internet plan

Vermont's participation is only half the national average.

Why?
+ not urban
+ not organized

Enrollment can be hard.

- X Lack of awareness
- X Mistrust
- X Application challenges
- X Eligibility requirements
- X Poor service offerings
- X Confusing customer service

1 in 3 eligible households participate.

The image displays a collage of various online enrollment forms, illustrating the complexity and length of the process. The forms include sections for:

- What is your full legal name?** (First Name, Middle Name (Optional), Last Name)
- What is your home address?** (Street Number and Name, Apt, Unit, etc., City, State, Zip Code)
- Choose your username.** (Username)
- Choose your password.** (Password Requirements: At least 8 characters long, At least 1 capital letter, At least 1 number (0-9), At least 1 special character (@#%&*'), No restricted phrases; Confirm Password)
- Identity Verification** (Please select your form of identification from one of the following: Social Security Number, Tribal ID Number, Driver's License, Military ID, Passport, Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), or other Government ID)
- Are you in any of these?** (Check all that apply: SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or Food Stamps, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance, Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit Programs, Federal Pell Grant in the current award year, Free and Reduced Price School Lunch or Breakfast Program in the current school year, Enrollment at USDA Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) School, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Tribal Specific Program (only choose if you live on Tribal lands), I don't participate in one of these programs, I want to qualify through my income, I am not in any of these, but my child or dependent is in one of these programs.)
- Your Contact Information** (What is your email address?, I want to provide an alternate email., What is your phone number? (Optional), I have a mailing address that is different than my home address.)

Participation perspective:

If barriers are high, motivation is low, for both ISPs and HHs.

Of the households that do not have access to the internet, **77% believe that internet service is too expensive or is not necessary for school**

US Dept of Ed

For households earning less than \$50K/year, **40% believe that broadband is too expensive to be part of the family budget.**

everyoneon.org

- **Only 15,802 (15%) eligible Vermonters applied for ACP subsidies through October 2022**
- **Only 7,607 (48%) received the benefit**

WHY ????



Personal support to access the internet

A place to call, someone to explain, help online. It's more than signing up for the benefit ... its **connecting with the ISP for social service**

Equal
Access to
Broadband's
solution:

a shared
bridge to
subsidized
service

**PROCESS FOR
ENGAGEMENT**

**DATA TOOL
FOR
REGISTRATION**

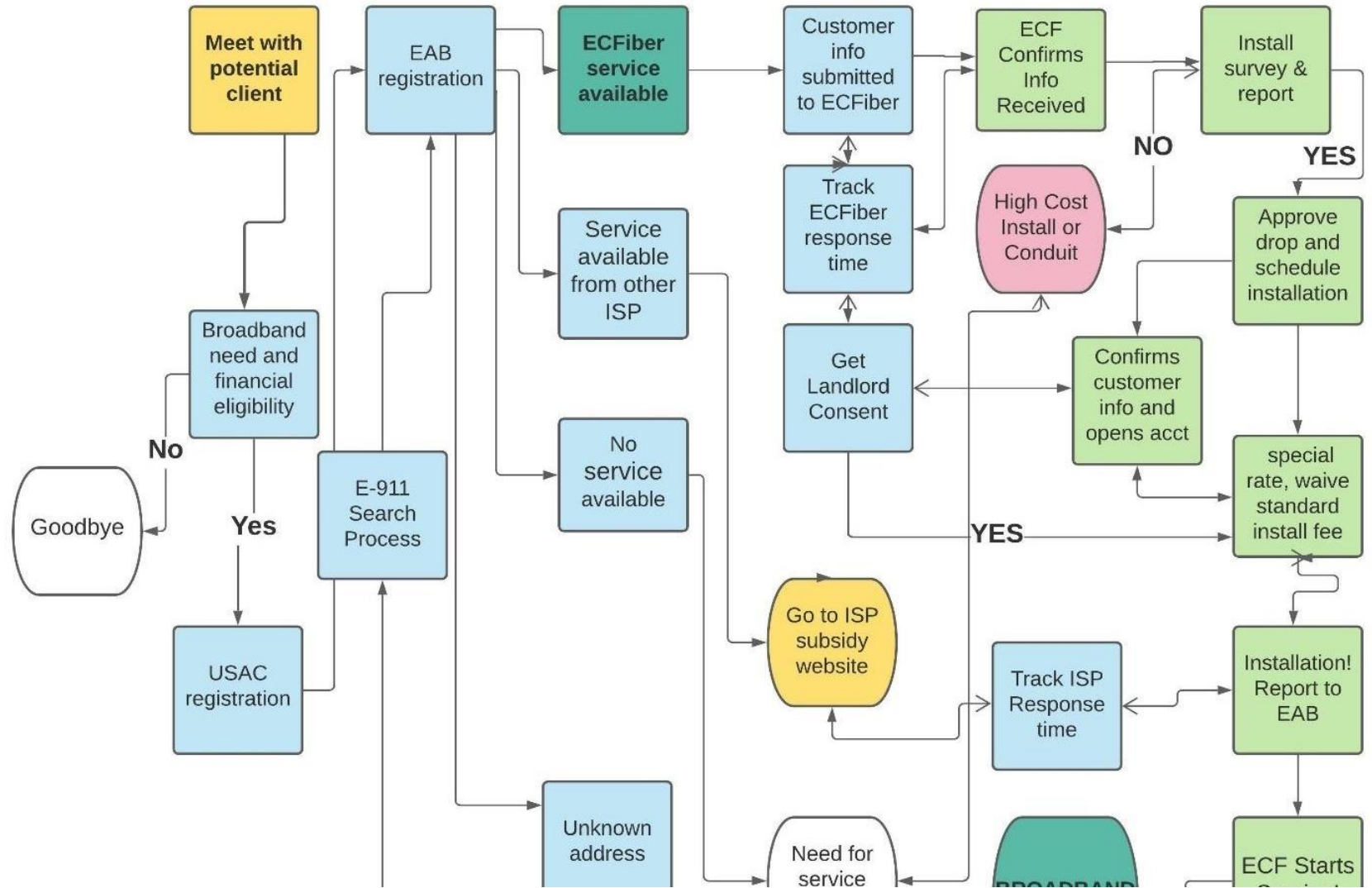
**FORMALIZE
NAVIGATOR
TRAINING**

**SUBSIDY
PROCESS & GAP
FUNDING**

**MINIMIZE COST
BY SHARING
PROCESS**

Making the Connection for Low-Income Vermonters isn't easy

It takes an average of an hour per consumer, 2.2 contacts, and over 30 data points or steps to qualify households for subsidies, installation, and initiate service.



The CUD difference is that every household counts.

But subsidized drops and affordability programs must wait for positive cash flow.



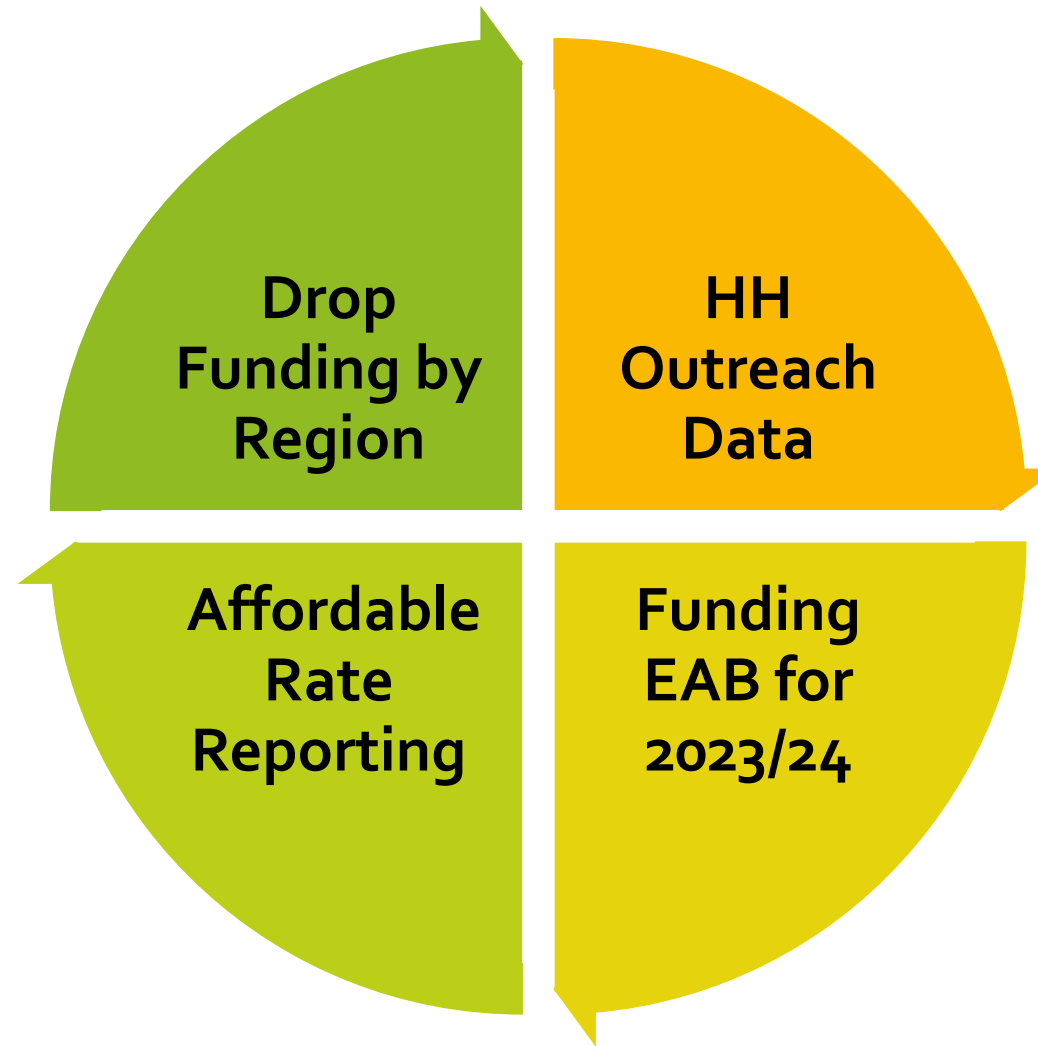
We will get there!
Helping connect
Vermonters is
rewarding for
everyone

We are changing the
culture and enabling a
new digital population

- “I’ll never go back (to DSL), you couldn’t make me. As far as I’m concerned, internet is practically as important as my rent.” -SJ
- **“It was impossible to homeschool with DSL last year. Everyone got booted out of their class and sometimes the kids had to take turns going to class. I would do anything to keep this (ECFiber) service.” -AW**

What would help Vermonters?

Gap
Appropriation(s)
and Coordination
of Access to
Vermonters in
Need



Equal Access to Broadband Inc.

we're not connected

until everyone can afford broadband

Thanks for your service
and your time...

Holly Groschner

www.equalaccesstobroadband.org

holly@equalaccesstobroadband.org