

Southern California Transformation Workshop on Connecting Publicly Subsidized Housing Complexes to High-Speed Internet

On October 21, 2021, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), in partnership with a coalition of stakeholders known as Southern California Transformation, hosted a workshop on “Connecting Publicly Subsidized Housing Complexes to High-Speed Internet”. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss opportunities to bridge the digital divide in public housing that would ultimately: (a) connect all residents in publicly subsidized housing complexes to high-speed internet service; (b) help residents acquire affordable computing devices; and (c) provide digital literacy training to ensure that residents can utilize the internet to improve their lives. The workshop featured a roundtable discussion among affordable housing developers & administrators, internet service providers (ISPs), and state and federal agencies.

A recording of the workshop can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zkaihg-UhCO>.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Panelist presentations are also attached to this summary.

PERSPECTIVES OF HOUSING LEADERS:

LUIS YATACO, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR

Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA): www.hacla.org

- An important goal for HACLA is around internet adoption and ensuring that residents have the skills and tools needed to benefit from and utilize the digital resources provided to them within housing developments.
- Broadband connectivity isn't solely a conduit issue, building materials and out of date wiring are barriers to strong signals and/or powerline connectivity.
- HACLA has experience partnering to improve internet access and adoption:
 - Partnership with T-Mobile to distribute hotspots to communities
 - Partnership with Starry Internet and Microsoft to provide the necessary infrastructure and connectivity in high-rise buildings directly into units via a point-to-point wired connection.

Key themes raised during the roundtable included the need to sustain digital equity programming and resources long-term, the importance of treating internet as an essential utility not a building amenity, and the ongoing need for collaborative partnerships with ISPs to deliver internet to households.

PAUL MORRIS, DIRECTOR, PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT

San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC): www.sdhc.org

- San Diego Housing Commission has a portfolio of approximately 2,400 affordable housing units from South County (Tijuana border) to North County (Del Mar) in San

Diego County. A recent survey revealed that on average, SDHC residents have a fixed income of \$15,000 per year and are typically paying between \$50-250 per month for internet service. Many residents prefer to use cellular services as subscription fees and home equipment fees are too expensive.

- SDHC has vast experience deploying internet infrastructure in public housing developments. A key issue is around ongoing funding to operate and maintain internet services for residents as revenue for operating expenses is limited through traditional funding sources and programs. Many funding programs don't address long-term operations but rather focus on initial capital costs and are available on a short-term or temporary basis.
- Opportunities to improve internet access and adoption may include partnerships with ISPs to provide more affordable service; collaboration with equity and community-based organizations, local jurisdictions, community anchor institutions and other key stakeholders to provide education, outreach on available resources such as digital literacy training or computer donation programs, and advocate that broadband should be considered a utility not an amenity.

WALTER BEAUMONT, GRANTS MANGER

Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation (CEDC): www.cabrilloedc.org

- Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation develops affordable housing units/properties and provides housing services to its serving communities. CEDC serves 25 properties spread throughout Ventura County, primarily in rural areas (including farmworker communities).
- Of the 1237 units (3800 residents) all residents earn less than 80% of the area median income.
- All units provided by CEDC include internet and Wi-Fi. CEDC community centers serve to assist communities with digital literacy, English as Second Language, wellness, immigration, and financial classes.
- The CEDC highlighted the importance of deploying internet services that provide adequate connectivity to communities as well as the need for ongoing funding sources to sustain and further implement internet access and adoption programs.
- Highlighted upcoming webinar: **Future of Affordable Housing** which occurred on November 17, 2021.
 - To watch the recording of the webinar: follow this [link](#), register with your email, and key in this password: 1EnrE2&u

MICHAEL WALSH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Housing Authority of the County of Riverside (HARIVCO): www.harivco.org

- The Riverside Housing Authority administers the development, rehabilitation, or financing of affordable housing programs for Riverside County.
- A total of 469 sites the HARIVCO administers, none include on-site computer labs/facilities.
- HARIVCO has explored innovative approaches to expand internet service in areas that are hard to reach. For example, in the Coachella area hotspots were attached to expand the reach of internet service for students. While this program was well-utilized, the service provided by hotspots as not adequate and suffered from low speeds.

- Despite challenges with providing internet access, digital equity programs have a significant impact on households and families.

PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS:

CAROLYN MCINTYRE, CEO

California Cable Telecommunications Association (CCTA): www.calcable.org

- CCTA is a leader in the development of video, broadband and communications policy in California, and represents the industry before the California Congressional Delegation, the State Legislature, state regulatory agencies and the state and federal courts. CCTA and its member companies support broadband deployment in public housing.
- CCTA has sponsored legislation that would support broadband deployment and adoption in public housing complexes and farm worker housing. As part of the California Public Utilities Commission rulemaking process, the CCTA is also advocating and supportive of the inclusion of residents in public housing as beneficiaries of SB 156 funding programs in addition to allocating funding for digital literacy and equipment.

CHRISTINE MOORE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

AT&T: www.att.com

- AT&T has a history of partnering with CBO's to conduct digital literacy and outreach to households. For example, AT&T partnered with the Parent Institute for Quality Education to implement a [digital literacy program](#) to assist parents who are learning English. The pilot in San Diego was a huge success and efforts to expand this program throughout country is underway. The [Promises2Kids](#) is a program that provides foster youth with the tools, opportunities and guidance they need to overcome the difficulties of their past
- AT&T participates regularly in the SANDAG [Regional Digital Divide Taskforce](#) and welcomes partnerships with public housing leaders, CBOs, cities, and others to advance internet access and adoption.

ALLISON ELLIS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, REGULATORY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Frontier: www.frontier.com

- Frontier is focused on expanding fiber deployment and has a goal to deploy fiber to 10 million location premises by 2025, including public housing units.
- Unique challenges found in public housing are related to older housing units that make internet access difficult to provide. Often times, internet connectivity may be a barrier for specific units within a site or for the entire building.
- Frontier is open and welcoming of partnerships with CBO's, public housing groups, and jurisdictions to increase internet accessibility for underserved groups as the technology advancements are made and demands change.

PERSPECTIVES FROM STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES:

DINA LEHMANN-KIM, PROGRAM MANAGER, OFFICE OF PUBLIC AND INDIAN HOUSING

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): www.hud.gov

- The Public Housing Operating Fund for in-unit internet expenses has been updated to provide greater flexibility in use of funds: [Use of Public Housing Funding to Support Internet Connectivity for Residents 1.19.21 \(hud.gov\)](#)
- HUD recognizes that there are many challenges with broadband deployment including affordability of services and devices, lack of service provider competition, and lack of resources to provide digital resource training and technical support.
- Regarding comments of digital literacy/sustainability, Dina suggested housing communities implement a digital ambassador program that is led by residents in those communities, to empower and teach their neighbors on available resources, equipment training, etc.
- HUD is looking into expanding existing programs to allow for technical assistance/analysis. While funding isn't currently available, HUD would like to provide housing developers with additional funding in the future.
- The [FCC's E-Rate Program](#) is a great resource, it provides funding for technology equipment, information and broadband services to schools and libraries.
- Other funding programs that could help expand broadband for public housing residents include the [Capital Projects Fund](#), State & Local Recovery Funds, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Community Reinvestment Act.

PAVLOS MAYAKIS, POLICY ANALYST

California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD): www.hcd.ca.gov

- Implementing new multi-family household program. The program is included the provision of criteria to enable broadband adoption within housing. This includes the provision of internet service standards consistent with the State's new broadband threshold, affordability of services, device support and digital literacy training.
- HCD stressed the importance of coordinating with other agencies such as the CPUC, and the State Treasury Department.
- HCD staff will regularly review program criteria and requirements to ensure broadband requirements are adequate and address the demands of a modern household.

JAMES TANG, CALIFORNIA ADVANCED SERVICES FUND (CASF) PROGRAM AND PROJECT SUPERVISOR

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC): www.cpuc.ca.gov

- With the passage of several significant legislations, CPUC has several rulemakings in place regarding the CASF, which provides funding for broadband services and digital equity programming.
- CPUC has approved over 300 infrastructure projects and over 100 adoption projects for broadband, many of which focused on public housing; 412 have been completed.
- Through the grant programs, CPUC highlighted some challenges with internet adoption including that internet services provided to households were not affordable

enough and difficulties with communication engineering and requirements around broadband accessibility.

NEXT STEPS:

- SANDAG and SCAG to coordinate development of workplan with stakeholders
- Develop a survey template for public housing organizations, developers, and jurisdictions to gather baseline conditions on internet access and household adoption.
- Provide best practices for public housing developers to incorporate high-quality and affordable broadband for residents.
- In partnership with CBOs, explore opportunities to conduct and expand outreach to residents that are unaware of affordable broadband programs.