

# **SANDAG**

## **Digital Divide Taskforce**

### Meeting Summary

June 17, 2021 | 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

**Zoom Recording:** [https://youtu.be/ Nchbs7d25Y](https://youtu.be/Nchbs7d25Y)

#### **Members in Attendance:**

Abu-Bakr Al-Jafri (Caltrans), Adrian Salas (Crown Castle), Alessandra Muse (Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation), Angelica Santiago (National Latino Research Center), Bianca Garcia (Communications Workers of America), Bill Valle (City of Chula Vista), Brian Barry Pollard (The Urban Collaborative Project), Brian Miller (Caltrans), Chris Schmidt (Caltrans), Christine Moore (AT&T), Cody Petterson (County of San Diego), Danny Pasawongse (Chula Vista Elementary School District), David Calkins (Caltrans), David Reed (University of Colorado), Debbie Shireman (California Emerging Technology Fund), Dominique Cano-Stocco (Verizon), Elaine Tulving (Anza Borrego Desert Research Center), Erin Hogeboom (San Diego for Every Child), Gary Knight (San Diego Futures Foundation), Gary Williams (Zayo Group), Gladys Palpallatoc (California Emerging Technology Fund), Hector Murrieta (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers), Irina Prokhorova (San Diego Futures Foundation), Jason Anderson (Cleantech), Jeremy Ogul (Madaffer Enterprises), Joe Britton (SDG&E), Jonathan Behnke (City of San Diego), Katelyn McCauley (San Diego Economic Development Group), Kelsey Baird (City of San Diego), Lucero Chavez (Parent Institute for Quality Education), Matthew Rantanen (Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association), Michael Hadland (Charter Communications), Nerea Urtasun (County of San Diego), Paul Morris (San Diego Housing Commission), Ramesh Rao (UC San Diego Qualcomm Institute), Reyna Ayala (City of Imperial Beach), Russell Montez, representing Elizabeth Dooher (Caltrans), Sal Espinoza (Communications Workers of America), Shahriar Afshar (Verizon), Tim Kelley (Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation), Xiomalys Crespo (City of San Diego), Yadira Whitney (Caltrans)

Anna Lowe, Antoinette Meier, Chip Finch, Jack Christensen, James Jimenez, Kelsie Telson, Krystal Ayala, Lindsey Hansen, Sanjiv Nanda, Tim Hornyak, Yelena Granovskaya (SANDAG)

*Please note that a copy of the chat transcript has also been provided as Attachment 1 to the meeting minutes.*

#### **1. Introduction of New Taskforce Members**

Antoinette Meier, Director of Mobility and Innovation at SANDAG, introduced a new taskforce member organization: San Diego County Office of Education

#### **2. Emergency Broadband Benefit Program Updates**

Krystal Ayala, Senior Partnerships Strategist at SANDAG, shared an overview of the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, including the newly released [EBB program enrollment and claims tracker](#). Since the program launched on May 12, over 2.6 million households have enrolled in the

program. Krystal introduced presentations from Cox Communications, Verizon Wireless, and the City of San Diego on EBB program progress and outreach efforts in the San Diego region.

#### *Cox Communications and Verizon Wireless*

Kristen Camuglia, Director of Government Affairs at Cox Communications, presented an overview of EBB program outreach to increase awareness of EBB and other Cox digital adoption efforts to new and existing customers. Kristen shared that Cox accounts for 4% of total enrollment in the EBB program nationwide. As of June 13<sup>th</sup>, Cox had enrolled over 10,400 households in San Diego County in the EBB program. The majority of EBB enrollees are existing Cox customers and over 70% are registered in a service tier of 150 Mbps or more. About 13% of EBB enrollees subscribe to Cox's 1 Gbps internet service tier.

Javier Oyandedel, Director of Marketing at Verizon, and Myrdna Vargas, Marketing Manager at Verizon, shared an overview of Verizon EBB outreach efforts. Myrdna stated that the program is available for home or mobile internet customers though Javier noted that in the San Diego region, Verizon only offers wireless service to customers.

Elaine Tulving, Anza Borrego Desert Research Center, commented that many Borrego Springs residents have Verizon plans and inquired how residents could sign up for the EBB program offered through Verizon. Myrdna informed the taskforce that eligible mobile plan holders can add the discount following an approval process.

Erin Hogeboom, Director at San Diego for Every Child, asked about the type of data that providers are using to develop targeted outreach campaigns for EBB. Erin emphasized the importance of integrating an equitable approach into their outreach strategy and noted that providers may want to work with SANDAG and other taskforce members on this. Kristen noted that Cox's Connect2Compete program launched in 2012 and works with 218 nonprofits in the San Diego region and local school districts, to reach eligible households throughout the County.

Kelsey Baird, Digital Inclusion and Development Associate at City of San Diego, commented on Cox's low enrollment in the Connect2Compete Program within the San Diego region. Kelsey noted that recent outreach conducted by the City of San Diego revealed that residents were apprehensive about enrolling in the EBB program due to fears of losing access to other programs offered by Cox. Kelsey stated that providers should clarify this and provide assurance to customers that enrollment in EBB would not impact eligibility in other provider subsidy programs. Kelsey also noted that providers should work with the customers to offer internet service packages that are within their economic reach as opposed to offering higher cost solutions that may not be sustainable after the EBB program sunsets.

David Reed, University of Colorado, asked Kristen about the broadness of EBB program eligibility, specifically how Cox pairs enrollees with available plans based on their eligibility status. Kristen responded that eligibility is broad and that an EBB enrollee simply needs to verify loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kristen noted that she does not have customer-specific information to share related to this but will do more research on the question to monitor trends.

Jason Anderson, President and CEO at Cleantech, questioned the significance of the 1% uptick in new customers accessing EBB programs at Cox. He noted that the percentage is not significant for closing the digital divide and if Cox has plans to increase the percentage of new customers utilizing EBB programs.

Kristen clarified that the 1.7% increase in new customers is for the prior week and the new customer increase for the current week (6/13/21) is 2.5%. Kristen also noted that Cox conducts outreach to existing customers and has numerous partnerships in the community to increase visibility on affordable plans offered to Cox customers.

Gladys Palpallatoc, Associate Vice President at California Emerging Technology Fund, via the chat asked what would happen once funding for the EBB program is exhausted, how much time customers would have to switch, and whether limitations on the plans they choose from may exist. Myrdna responded that Verizon hopes to give customers a 30-to-60-day notice of the EBB program ending and there are no plans to place limitations on the plans customers can switch to upon the end of the EBB program. Kristen noted that Cox will continue to participate in the EBB program if it is provided by the federal government and will give customers ample time to prepare for the EBB program's commencement. Christine Moore, Executive Director at AT&T, via the chat informed taskforce members that AT&T's goal is to provide at minimum a 30-day notice but will await FCC guidance to allow sufficient time for customers to make informed choices and plan.

#### *City of San Diego – SD Access 4 All*

Jonathan Behnke, Chief Information Officer at City of San Diego, shared updates on the City's SD Access 4 All program and EBB outreach. Jonathan noted that 53,000 households lack home broadband and 20% of those households are in the City of San Diego's Promise Zone. Jonathan shared a recent partnership with Pillars of the Community to increase EBB household enrollment in Southeast San Diego, Barrio Logan, Mid-City, San Ysidro, and other Promise Zone communities. Outreach began in June 2021 and will continue for eight weeks. He noted that the partnership has already enrolled over 500 households and is committed to reaching 10,000 people and enrolling 1,000 households. Jonathan noted that the EBB's 2-step application process includes a waiting period, requiring follow-up with individual households, poses a challenge to ensuring EBB enrollment is successful. Jonathan also suggested that providers improve coordination with local governments and community organizations to adequately connect customers to available plans.

### **3. Digital Equity Strategy Updates**

#### *Digital Equity Leadership Team & CISCO partnership update*

Antoinette provided an update on the Community Success Roadmap partnership with Cisco Systems. The Cisco team will conduct up to 100 interviews with stakeholders to identify policy barriers that impede broadband expansion in the San Diego region. In support of this initiative, SANDAG formed a Digital Equity Leadership Team to steer the project. The kick-off meeting for the leadership team was held on June 2, 2021, and the stakeholder interview process will begin between July 12<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>. Taskforce members may be asked to participate in the interview and are encouraged to be responsive to the Cisco team.

#### *SR 67 Dig Once Demonstration Project Update*

Krystal Ayala shared an update on the SR 67 Dig Once Demonstration in partnership with Caltrans and the County of San Diego. The project is being rescoped and re-advertised in Fall 2021 in response to initial bid outcomes. SANDAG and the partners will use this additional time to identify partners that may be interested in leveraging the conduit and/or trench to install their own fiber and expand broadband

service in this community. The partners are also coordinating with tribes to expand broadband connections to their communities.

Sal Espinoza, Communications Workers of America, asked if workers would be subject to prevailing wage on the SR 67 project. Chris Schmidt, Caltrans, responded that contracting terms and requirements have not been determined. Hector Murrieta, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, asked whether the RFP would include local labor requirement. Antoinette noted that the focus has been on the development of the scope of work and that the additional contract terms and conditions will be determined prior to the release of the RFP.

Barry Pollard, Urban Collaborative Project, inquired about data on other fiber infrastructure gaps in underserved communities. Antoinette shared that the broadband gap analysis has revealed that rural areas are lacking significant infrastructure and more information would be shared on the broadband gap analysis later in the meeting.

*Note: Broadband gap analyses findings were not shared due to limited time. More information detailing broadband infrastructure gaps and strategies to address this will be shared at the July 1, 2021 taskforce workshop.*

#### **4. Dig Once Partnership Opportunities**

##### *Tribal Broadband*

Matt Rantanen, Director of Technology at the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (SCTCA), provided information on broadband infrastructure conditions and challenges in tribal lands within the region. Matt shared that a significant challenge for tribes is building out the middle mile infrastructure network needed to bring broadband service into the reservations. Dig once opportunities like the SR 67 project are a great opportunity to leverage existing trenching to lay the conduit and fiber needed to connect the reservations. Acquiring and installing infrastructure and building power sources in remote rural terrain, natural hazards, and vandalism are also challenges to implementing broadband infrastructure in tribal lands.

##### *SDG&E Undergrounding*

Tim Knowd, Project Manager of Electric System Hardening & Lynette Aquino, Project Manager of Wildfire Mitigation & Strategic Undergrounding at SDG&E, provided an update on strategic undergrounding efforts. Tim shared that SDG&E is coordinating with the California Public Utilities Commission to evaluate the feasibility of adding fiber to projects in unserved or underserved communities. SDG&E has formed a team to work on this effort and will be sharing more information with stakeholders as the project evolves.

## Attachment 1 – 6/17/21 Digital Divide Meeting Chat Transcript

Krystal Ayala:

As we promote you to panelist, please accept the "panelist" role when prompted by Zoom. This will provide you functionalities to unmute and raise your hand during the meeting

San Diego for Every Child:

I'm curious as to if and which data both Cox and Verizon are using in order to drive any outreach for subsidized programs, like EBB or Connect2Compete.

Dominique Cano-Stocco:

Here is a link to a recent Verizon press release on the EBB program & other digital equity matters.  
<https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-deepens-commitment-vulnerable-communities>

Dominique Cano-Stocco:

Yes, I/Verizon has shared this info with UCSD, SDSU, San Marcos, community colleges, etc. Thanks Ramesh!

San Diego for Every Child:

Great point, Kelsey.

San Diego for Every Child:

Oh, thanks for that clarification.

Gladys Palpallatoc:

What will happen when EBB is exhausted? How much time will customers have to switch and will there be limitations on what plans they can choose from?

Christine Moore:

Good morning, here is the link to AT&T's EBB information: <https://www.att.com/help/ebb/>

Sal Espinoza- CWA :

I Have a Question on this topic

Kristen Camuglia - Cox Communications:

To Gladys's question, the EBB is a federal program and Cox will continue to participate as long as they make it available. Cox continues to urge the FCC to provide us ample lead time before the program ends so that we can ensure our customers are informed and there are no surprises. We also continue to encourage Congress to make the EBB program permanent as an ongoing solution to help bridge the digital divide by addressing affordability.

Christine Moore:

Agree. Our goal is minimum 30 days' notice but we are looking to FCC for that information and urge them to allow for plenty of time for consumers to make informed choices and plan ahead

Christine Moore:

Can we get a copy of this presentation?

Verizon/Dominique Cano-Stocco:

Verizon has a Tribal Liaison. She's quite passionate about your concerns & efforts.

Christine Moore:

Our statewide tribal liaison, Julio Figueroa, is based in Riverside County and would be interested in seeing this.

Gladys Palpallatoc:

Can info on the chat be made available too?

Gladys Palpallatoc:

Thank you for all you do for tribes throughout the state and also nationally Matt!

Matthew Rantanen (SCTCA):

Thank you all for the comments and contacts.

Verizon/Dominique Cano-Stocco:

FYI: the Verizon Crisis Response team works with power companies and first responders to help stand-up emergency communications and to restore service. We have been active in San Diego County.

<https://www.verizon.com/business/solutions/public-sector/public-safety/programs/verizon-response-team/>

Matthew Rantanen (SCTCA):

I need to drop for another meeting at the half-hour... Thanks for having me.

Caltrans, Russell Montez:

Thank You!