



County of Los Angeles
INTERNAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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To: Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell, Chair
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ACCELERATING DIGITAL EQUITY IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

In November 2021, the Board of Supervisors approved a motion directing the Internal Services Department (ISD) to pursue immediate and longer-term initiatives that facilitate affordable and reliable high-speed internet services to underserved communities impacted by the digital divide. We have submitted quarterly progress updates in February and May 2022, and the next update will be submitted in August 2022. However, we feel it necessary to advise the Board of time-sensitive developments related to the deployment of residential broadband networks through public-private partnerships. In response to our competitive solicitation, some proposers offered cost models that may be financially advantageous to the County and could potentially enable economies of scale for free or low-cost internet service to multiple underserved communities. The purpose of this correspondence is to present information and actions that can better position the County for successful outcomes in supporting constituents who need assistance and in acquiring Federal and State grants.

Board Motion

On November 16, 2021, the Board approved a motion titled Investments to Accelerate Digital Equity. The motion designated ISD as the lead department responsible for coordinating the County's efforts on all community broadband infrastructure and residential service initiatives to close the digital divide. The motion also included several directives, including an instruction for ISD to administer a competitive solicitation to acquire a Managed Service Provider to coordinate and manage implementation of a Community Wireless Network. This network was intended to be a 5-year demonstration pilot that provides free reliable, high-speed internet service through public-private partnerships to 12,500 or more households in a single underserved community. The

prospective neighborhood was to be identified based on census tract data indicating an area within Los Angeles County where a high density of constituents lack internet service due to affordability, limited access, and/or low adoption rates.

Competitive Solicitation

In March 2022, ISD released a Request for Statement of Qualifications (RFSQ) to establish a shortlist of companies deemed qualified to build and implement wireless broadband networks to households. The solicitation was tailored for wireless technologies but allowed proposers to present alternative solutions (including fiber installations). ISD received 12 responses to the RFSQ in May 2022, which are currently being evaluated.

The RFSQ respondents proposed different wireless technologies as well as fiber solutions to deliver high-speed internet service to households. Preliminarily, some options offer cost models that may be financially advantageous to the County. This presents an opportunity to reassess the original goal of implementing a demonstration pilot in a single community, which was based on conservative cost projections. The submissions under evaluation provide more certainty regarding the costs of capital investments. Consequently, there is a potential for economies of scale to deliver broadband internet service to multiple communities at relatively lower costs than initially projected.

ISD expects to complete evaluations this month to qualify a shortlist of companies. We will then seek Board approval to establish master agreements with the selected companies. After Board approval, ISD will develop work order solicitations for selected neighborhoods as prioritized by the Board based on data-driven factors and those shortlisted companies will be invited to bid on the projects.

Digital Navigator Program

ISD has designed a Digital Navigator Program to provide a community-centered approach to improving broadband adoption and digital literacy. The navigators will be trusted guides and skilled support technicians trained to help families connect to and confidently use the internet, find affordable devices, and apply for subsidies to offset the costs for internet services and computer devices. They will also assist with related training or tutoring and serve a critical role in the successful deployment of the County's residential broadband projects.

ISD and the Department of Economic Opportunity are collaborating on an implementation plan for the Digital Navigator Program. The goal is to employ local hires who reside in the communities where they provide assistance and work in unison with partner community-based organizations. Navigators will offer services through in-person visits to residences, community outreach events at resource centers and public venues, and assist constituents via telephone with dedicated call centers.

Federal and State Grants

On November 15, 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The law appropriates \$65 billion for broadband improvements. This is on top of \$550 million from the American Rescue Plan Act’s Capital Project Fund and \$2 billion from California’s SB-156 Last Mile Federal Funding Account. The primary purpose of these federal and state investments is to build internet infrastructure across the nation, create more low-cost internet service options, and address digital equity and inclusion needs in unserved and/or underserved communities. The funding will be administered through federal and state agencies, and mostly through grants that will sunset within 5 years.

The County of Los Angeles will be eligible to apply for certain competitive grants for technical assistance, digital literacy, and infrastructure projects. The application filing period for the major grants of interest have yet to be announced. However, both the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) have issued public statements that funding preferences will be for infrastructure projects utilizing fiber technology.

Next Steps and Actions

In the interest of better positioning the County to achieve its residential broadband objectives and to be more competitive for Federal and State grants, we wish to advise the Board of the following time-sensitive actions:

ACTION	TIMELINE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Addendum to RFSQ ISD and County Counsel will publish an addendum to the RFSQ clarifying that submissions for fiber-specific solutions are accepted and will be eligible for future work order solicitations. Additionally, references to “Community Wireless Networks” will be changed to “Community Broadband Networks”. The addendum will not delay existing solicitation processes.	July 2022	NTIA and CPUC have indicated that grant funding preferences will be for projects utilizing fiber technology.
Complete Evaluations Evaluate RFSQ submissions to establish shortlist of qualified Managed Service Providers that can deploy reliable, high-speed internet service to households.	July 2022	Twelve submissions are currently being evaluated. The RFSQ is open and continuous and allows for responses at any time. New submissions will be evaluated on a rolling basis.

ACTION	TIMELINE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Master Agreements Obtain Board approval of master agreements with shortlisted companies.</p>	<p>September 2022</p>	<p>The item will be scheduled for consideration at an Operations Cluster prior to placement on a Board Meeting Agenda.</p>
<p>Community Broadband Networks Administer work order solicitations for shortlisted companies to bid on projects in underserved communities.</p>	<p>Starting September 2022</p>	<p>The Board will have access to data-driven factors to prioritize selected communities. Shovel-ready projects and cost estimates will be identified through the solicitation process.</p>
<p>Digital Navigators Program A community-centered approach to assist constituents with broadband adoption and digital literacy through support services provided by community-based organizations and local hires.</p>	<p>Pending</p>	<p>The program capacity and duration are contingent upon financial support. Efforts include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) ISD requested funding from the County's ARP Tranche 2 allocation. 2) ISD applied for a California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Adoption Account Digital Literacy Grant on July 1, 2022.
<p>Grant Applications Submit applications for Federal and State grants to fund Community Broadband Network projects.</p>	<p>October 2022</p>	<p>Grants are competitive and expected to sunset within 5 years. The County will need to be efficient in completing master agreements with shortlisted companies, prioritizing selected communities, and administering work order solicitations to develop shovel-ready projects.</p>

If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 267-2101 or shollins@isd.lacounty.gov.

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- c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
- Chief Executive Office
- County Counsel
- Department of Public Works
- Department of Economic Opportunity