

**MUNICIPAL BROADBAND,
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION:
A CALIFORNIA DIALOGUE**

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HOSTED BY:

Broadband Institute of California
California Community Technology Policy Group
Great Valley Center
Media Alliance
Santa Clara University’s Center for Science, Technology & Society

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PURPOSE OF MEETING

Many cities and regions across the state and the country are taking an active role in developing broadband systems to meet the needs of their residents. Cities such as Philadelphia and San Francisco have incorporated digital inclusion policies (or community benefit agreements) into their plans for municipal broadband systems. These policies spell out the ways that public and private entities involved in building and operating municipal broadband networks will ensure that underserved residents and organizations can take full advantage of these networks.

This event brought together by videoconference over 50 representatives from community-based organizations, community technology centers, local governments, foundations, and other key stakeholders in Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area/Silicon Valley, Los Angeles, and San Diego to:

- Define the main elements of digital inclusion policies for municipal broadband projects
- Define strategies for community involvement in the process of planning and overseeing municipal broadband projects to increase digital inclusion

Notes on ideas mentioned at the meeting by all participants follow below. These notes do not represent a consensus statement of all participants, some of whom may differ in their support for various elements of digital inclusion policies or community engagement strategies.

AGENDA AND NOTES

9:00 Welcome

Welcome, introductions, and agenda for the day, led at each site by the site leaders:

- Sacramento: Carol Whiteside, Great Valley Center
- Los Angeles: Richard Chabran, California Community Technology Policy Group; Oscar Madrigal, Community Partners
- San Diego: Xavier Leonard, Heads on Fire; Jeff Hancock, San Diego Futures Foundation
- Santa Clara (San Francisco, East Bay, Silicon Valley): Al Hammond, BroadBand Institute of California; Jeff Perlstein & Sydney Levy, Media Alliance

9:30 Issue briefing and update on projects in each site (by videoconference, moderated by Chad Raphael, Santa Clara University)¹

Community Involvement – Al Hammond, BBIC

- Meaningful public involvement in planning for broadband requires thinking of people as community members, not just consumers.
- Traditional means of involving the public in planning and policymaking have serious shortcomings. People are offered little time to comment at public hearings. Real involvement often requires resources (including expertise, time, and money) that are not widely available.
- Community involvement at each stage of planning broadband projects is crucial for ensuring that these projects meet community needs, especially through digital inclusion efforts aimed at supporting underserved groups to take full advantage of broadband.
- The consensus conference model – recently used in Silicon Valley by BBIC and Santa Clara University’s Center for Science, Technology and Society – is one way of engaging the community in articulating its needs and interests in broadband projects.²

San Diego Update

- There are no citywide plans to provide municipal broadband service in San Diego at this time.
- The Public Broadband Working Group, with representatives from community-based organizations and city government, is taking the lead on gathering and disseminating information and best practices on community broadband and municipal broadband.
- Several promising pilot projects exist. So Cal Free Net (<http://socalfreenet.org>) is connecting public housing residents. Community Development Corporations and Community Technology Centers are working on community and municipal broadband.

Los Angeles Update

- Mayor Villaraigosa recently announced an initiative to build a citywide WiFi network, starting construction in 2009; the city is hiring a consultant to help develop outreach plans and an RFP for building the network.
- Supervisor Yvonne Burke is considering a motion to explore a WiFi network to cover all of LA County.
- The city has been experimenting with public wireless hotspots in parks and open spaces over the past three years.

¹ For a general introduction to municipal broadband and digital inclusion issues, see [Municipal Broadband: A Background Briefing Paper](#) (available at http://broadbandforall.org/app/briefing_paper.doc).

² See [Broadband for All? Final Report and Recommendations of a Consensus Conference on Municipal Broadband and Digital Inclusion](#) (available at <http://broadbandforall.org/MBCCFFinalReport.doc>).

- The Community Redevelopment Agency of LA has been working on wireless, especially for serving public safety with LAPD.
- Chinatown and Downtown organizations have been active on bringing broadband to their neighborhoods.
- But more participation by community-based organizations is needed.

Sacramento Update

- The City of Sacramento and the larger Sacramento region are planning wireless networks that would cover the city and surrounding areas in nine counties, many of them largely rural. The Wireless Sacramento Regional Project Coalition (comprising representatives from regional city and county governments, education, transportation and non-profits) plans to issue an RFP for the regional network for release in June. The winner of the city RFP should be announced shortly. The SCV Network, a non-profit science and technology association, will be responsible for the overall management of the project. The main goals of the network are government efficiency, public safety, and economic development.
- There is an existing project led by community-based organizations to connect low-income housing developments.
- Sacramento has a task force actively promoting community involvement. CSU Sacramento, Great Valley Center, and CENIC are working on mapping existing networks, especially in rural areas that lack widespread access.
- The Governor’s Task Force on Broadband, also known as CALink Broadband Initiative (<http://www.calink.ca.gov>) is bringing together public and private stakeholders to “remove barriers to broadband access, identify opportunities for increased broadband adoption and enable the creation and deployment of new advanced communication technologies.” The Task Force has developed a first report on how to increase broadband usage and access, which the Governor is reviewing. The Task Force is developing another report (due in early October) on what California as a whole can do to increase broadband access, addressing areas such as infrastructure, costs of service and hardware, education, etc. Attention is also focusing on legislation on rights of way at the local level to ease new broadband providers’ entry into markets. And there is an internal state government effort to promote webcasting and wireless usage, led by the Department of General Services.

San Francisco Bay Area Update

San Francisco

- San Francisco has been planning a municipal broadband network for two years. Google/Earthlink won the RFP to provide the system. The agreement with these two companies to do so must be approved by the local SF Public Utilities Commission, the Mayor, the Planning Department, and Board of Supervisors. The city created a Digital Inclusion Task Force to identify community needs and resources. The Task Force published a comprehensive digital inclusion strategy that was adopted by the mayor’s

office as official city policy in January.³

Silicon Valley

- Wireless Silicon Valley – a project of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley – has overseen efforts to develop a multi-county wireless mesh network to cover Silicon Valley. Last year, they announced that Silicon Valley Metro Connect - a consortium of IBM, Cisco Systems, Azulstar, and SeaKay – won the RFP to build and operate the network. Negotiations are ongoing over the master agreement, but they have begun implementing a pilot version in Palo Alto and one other city, focusing on serving first responders. BBIC worked with SV Metro Connect on the development of a model privacy agreement, which Metro Connect has taken under advisement.

East Bay

- Oakland is moving slowly on the issue of municipal broadband. They plan to hire a consultant, but are still looking for the money for that. Digital inclusion is in their plan, but it is not the main item on the agenda, so there will need to be advocacy for it to happen there. Community-based organizations are taking the lead on behalf of digital inclusion, including Oakland Technology Exchange (OTX West), which provides refurbished computers and training.
- In San Pablo, the City Council convened a task force 15 months ago to do feasibility studies. The task force includes several community organizations and educational institutions, such as StreetTech, Contra Costa College, and West County High School District. They did preliminary studies of business models and submitted them to the City Council, which is concerned with cost, ownership, and legal issues posed by having entities such as schools and the public sharing access to the same network. They are working on a proposal for a consultant to do a wireless feasibility study.

Items for Agenda

Participants then suggested a number of items to keep in mind as the groups at each site prepared to meet offline to discuss elements of digital inclusion policies and community involvement strategies. These items are incorporated into the list of suggestions below.

10:30 – 1:00 Defining digital inclusion policies and community involvement strategies (participants met offline at each site during this time)

³ See [San Francisco Digital Inclusion Strategy](http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/dtis/tech_connect/DigitalInclusionStrategy.doc) (available at http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/dtis/tech_connect/DigitalInclusionStrategy.doc)

1:00-2:00 Sharing insights, strategies, next steps (by videoconference, moderated by Chad Raphael)

Each site reported back on what their group had outlined as elements of a digital inclusion policy for municipal broadband projects and strategies for community involvement in each stage of planning, implementing, and operating these projects. The following lists of recommendations aim to include brief mentions of all the ideas suggested. Once again, neither list is a consensus statement of all participants, some of whom may differ in their support for or thinking about elements of digital inclusion and community engagement.

Recommendations for Digital Inclusion Policies

Participants were asked to define the basic elements that should be included in digital inclusion policies for municipal broadband projects. This list also includes insights from Media Alliance’s draft Digital Inclusion Toolkit⁴, which was circulated at the meeting, and the recommendations of a Consensus Conference on Municipal Broadband and Digital Inclusion.⁵ For more detail, see also the digital inclusion strategy developed for the City of San Francisco and Chicago Digital Access Alliance’s proposed principles for digital inclusion for the City of Chicago.⁶

Ownership, Control, Funding

1. A clear model of ownership and control over the system that ensures public accountability and digital inclusion will remain central over time.
2. A sustainable funding stream to support digital inclusion efforts over the long run, especially from one or more of the following sources:
 - Money upfront plus a percentage of annual revenues from service providers
 - Digital Inclusion fees for users of the system
 - Discounts from hardware and software providers
 - Philanthropic contributions and federal or state grants
 - Taxes and public financing
 - Low-interest loans for computer purchasing

⁴ The final version will be available at <http://www.media-alliance.org>.

⁵ Available at <http://broadbandforall.org/MBCCFinalReport.doc>.

⁶ [San Francisco Digital Inclusion Strategy](http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/dtis/tech_connect/DigitalInclusionStrategy.doc) (available at http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/dtis/tech_connect/DigitalInclusionStrategy.doc) and [Chicago Digital Access Alliance: Digital Excellence—Trust In Chicago's Future](http://www.digitalaccessalliance.org/principles-for-digital-excellence) (available at <http://www.digitalaccessalliance.org/principles-for-digital-excellence>).

Technology

1. Hardware

- Provision of free or low-cost computers with basic software and modems or bridges (to bring wireless signals into the home) for underserved groups
- Hardware and software should be compatible with widely used assistive technologies for people with disabilities
- Hardware and software upgrades should be anticipated and addressed

2. Broadband Service

- A free or low-cost tier of service for underserved groups that reaches into their homes
- Adequate speed to take advantage of important applications (including voice and video) on all tiers of service
- Adequate privacy and security protections for all tiers of service, including robust privacy policies that protect users' personal data
- Universal coverage, including to rural areas and low-income neighborhoods

Training

1. Provision of free or low-cost training in computer and Internet literacy and ongoing technical support for underserved groups that:

- Is offered in multiple languages used in the community
- Is offered through schools, libraries, community technology centers, and other trusted organizations
- Includes training in issues of privacy, security, copyright, and protecting children from inappropriate content

Content

1. Content that addresses local needs in multiple languages used in the community, especially through community-based portal sites (such as One Economy's Beehive site), including information about:

- Local politics and civic life
- Education and lifelong learning
- Jobs and community economic development opportunities
- Health care
- Public services
- Local businesses
- Local news

2. Resources for community members to produce and contribute their own content for:

- Civic Engagement
- Economic development (starting a small business online, etc.)
- Self-Expression and Creativity
- Telecommuting

Recommendations for Community Involvement Strategies

Education, Outreach, and Organizing: Consult with and educate the community about the relevance of broadband to people's lives.

1. Community needs should drive technology deployment, not vice-versa. Reach out by consulting communities through existing grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) about local needs and considering applications that are most likely to address them, rather than leading with the issue of broadband infrastructure, which is not immediately relevant to many people.

- Map social and organizational networks in communities
- Gain greater understanding of underserved communities' attitudes toward technology
- Community Service Planning Councils can be used to bring together advisory groups
- Consider organizing into user groups who can advocate with network providers and/or elected officials to state the case for different elements of digital inclusion (SeaKay is creating users groups in Silicon Valley)

2. Reach out to CBOs not already focused on technology, such as organizations interested in education, workforce development, and so on; otherwise, public debate may be dominated by a small group of people with narrow technical or political interests.

- Educate CBOs and communities about how broadband can help address the issues of greatest concern to them, which often include public safety, jobs, education, health care, access to government services, community empowerment, maintaining one's culture and relationships with distant family members, etc.
- Consider a consensus conference (or conferences) as a way of deeply educating and activating CBOs and groups of community members through public hearings plus small-group deliberation oriented toward making policy recommendations
- Education is especially key in rural areas, where costs to deploy broadband are higher and there is sometimes less understanding of potential community benefits

3. Demonstrate the value of broadband for:

- Accessing public content (websites)
- One-to-one communication (email and Internet telephony)
- Community building/organizing (message boards, Wikis, designing one's own websites, community calendars, etc.)

4. Conduct education and outreach in non-digital formats (print, face-to-face, telephone) for those who are not online yet

- E.g., as a condition of permitting, require vendors to go to health fairs and public events to introduce the technology and applications that are specific and relevant to the audience

Task Forces and Policies: Engage the community in each stage of municipal broadband project planning and implementation through broad-based task forces that create comprehensive policies.

1. Enable formal community involvement in a Digital Inclusion Task Force from the first phase of each project to participate in the full range of decisions.

2. Facilitate official adoption of a comprehensive Digital Inclusion Policy in each city.

3. Instead of restricting public input to a handful of questions, involve the community in all key decisions that will shape broadband access, including:

- How to pay for access over the long run – taxes, advertising, subscription fees, etc.
- Setting priorities among likely trade-offs between cost and quality of service –e.g., free service may involve less speed, privacy, security, local content, and breadth of coverage
- Technology – tradeoffs between cost, reach, and speed of WiFi, WiMax, fiber optic, and other emerging technologies; how the system can be open to new technological developments over time (not just reliant on WiFi)
- Content – priorities for locally-directed or locally-generated content, in what languages, etc.
- Access to Public Resources - service providers’ access to utility poles to mount their equipment is a key bargaining chip; digital inclusion benefits should be expected in exchange for access to public resources such as utility poles.

4. Prioritize the needs of underserved groups, but form broad coalitions for digital inclusion that can advocate most effectively. Key constituencies to consider involving:

- CBOs
 - That represent underserved groups who are least likely to be served by commercial broadband – immigrants, low-income, disabled, non-English speakers, senior citizens, rural, working poor, Latinos and African-Americans
 - With a technology mission (such as community technology centers)
 - That share a broad range of concerns, including housing, public safety, economic development, quality of life, infrastructure (parks, roads)
 - That are thought leaders (such as think tanks)
 - That already have the community’s trust (churches, community centers)
- Educators – at public and private institutions
- Businesses – the telecommunications providers, IT hardware and software providers, and large and small businesses that can take advantage of the network are important for broader buy-in to support digital inclusion
 - Approach IT businesses as network vendors and users, small businesses as users who can benefit enormously from municipal broadband
- Governments – including hyper-local (residence associations), local, regional, state
- Media – nonprofit community-based and commercial
- Foundations – especially to fund digital inclusion programs

Local, State, and National Levels: Coordinate local community involvement efforts with statewide and national developments.

1. Share information among communities regularly about strategies for digital inclusion, negotiating with system providers, what benefits are being won from system providers in other communities, etc.
2. Stay attuned to national and state legislation that can enable or disable local broadband efforts and community involvement.
 - State could be an important player in developing resources, extending existing networks
 - E.g., could mandate laying fiber in conduits along highways
 - California Broadband Task Force will play a key role in setting statewide policy
 - Work with the Governor’s Office and the Broadband Task Force to convene an “Executive Forum” for local government policy makers to increase their understanding of the policy and community engagement issues, the needs of providers and related issues.
3. Overcome thinking about projects within existing political boundaries of cities to provide appropriate services to different neighborhoods and rural areas, or broadly across large regions
 - Working city by city is fraught with potential redundancy, leaves holes in coverage (such as in unincorporated areas), and doesn’t serve rural areas. Might also consider focusing on the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) as the basis for regional definition. Rural areas, which have significant populations, do not fit the same solutions and models as municipal systems.
 - Negotiating community benefits in exchange for system providers’ access to mount equipment on utility poles is not an option in unincorporated or private areas where the city may not own the utility poles.

Leverage Existing Resources

1. Map existing community networks to find gaps and avoid duplication of efforts (people in Sacramento are doing this); tap into existing networks where possible to extend service to some areas.
2. Expand existing programs that provide hardware and training
 - Invest more in computer refurbishing and distribution (which also has environmental benefits), training, and ongoing technical support for underserved people (OTX West is a good example)

NEXT STEPS

Participants suggested a number of actions that could be taken in the short term to engage communities in working for digital inclusion.

1. Develop guidelines for a model process for public engagement in municipal broadband decision-making, from the start of the project.
2. Share strategy and information about what digital inclusion benefits are being sought by communities and agreed to by system providers, especially those that are involved in multiple cities (e.g., Earthlink).
 - Form a group that reviews service providers' offers of community benefits and reports back to municipalities to let them know what is possible to negotiate
 - Information sharing could be done via a website, Wiki, email listserv, and/or regular conference calls
 - The California Community Technology Policy Group, the Community Technology Organizing Consortium, Digital Natives, and Media Alliance are especially appropriate groups to coordinate statewide conversation
3. Connect local or regional efforts to the California Public Utilities Commission, state legislature, and Governor's Broadband Task Force.
 - Send these notes to Governor's Broadband Task Force
4. Create good working relationships between CBOs and local governments to envision and advocate for digital inclusion.
 - Address the "311" concerns of local government in order to gain their confidence and participation
5. Continue to define relevant applications for communities and goals for reaching specific stakeholders in each community.
6. Develop a state-wide policy for hardware provision that would focus on re-use and refurbishing so that each locality doesn't have to reinvent the wheel.
7. Encourage the state to engage in a large-scale public education campaign on Internet safety to allay fears, educate users.
8. Create a simple graphic or mnemonic to remind people of everything that is required for real digital inclusion.