

Broadband

December 2024

Team Members

- Kate Fosburgh, Digital Access Analyst
- Katherine DiPasqua, Director

On December 3, 2024, the EDC brought a program update to the County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors. The item included updates on infrastructure deployment projects and digital equity/adoption efforts. Our presentation to the Board is attached, and the item summary along with all attachments can be found at the following link:

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7036319&GUID=753E31BA-D7C0-4FCC-8BD3-96191485FE8B>

Highlights from the Broadband Program Update:

Digital Needs Assessment:

- In September 2024, EDC retained Los Cien to conduct a Digital Needs Assessment throughout Sonoma County to determine what barriers communities are facing to fully access and participate in the digital world. The Digital Needs Assessment focused on communities who scored low on the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a measure for a community's health, wealth, and wellbeing, as described in the Portrait of Sonoma and Health Action Together reports, along with other low-income areas. To ensure adequate representation of the populations most in need of these services, Los Cien partnered with several community organizations and attended in-person events to distribute the surveys.
- In total, 579 responses were received. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino and 30% white. The average reported household income was \$36,000 and average size of household was 3.2 people. Interestingly, 80% of respondents reported having access to internet in their homes, either through home computers or cell phones. However, when asked about internet speeds, costs, and devices used, there is a clear divide in the respondents' ability to fully access the internet. The full Digital Needs Assessment report is attached. Data highlights include:
 - 80% of Low-Income HH are paying more than \$30/month on internet, despite being eligible for low-income internet plans.
 - 60% are receiving service speeds below State/Federal standards (100/20 MBPS) and yet majority (66%) are paying at least \$50/month.
 - 44% reported having no devices or only a smartphone. That figure increases to 53% when isolating for households with school-aged children.

Time Limited Internet Subsidy Program using ARPA:

- Based on the results of the Digital Needs Assessment, EDC is proposing a Time-Limited Internet Subsidy Program using ARPA funding. This program will provide free home internet subscriptions, at a minimum speed of 100 MBPS download and 20 MBPS upload, to residents of certain affordable housing units throughout the County. To meet ARPA guidelines, the subscriptions shall be for one year and will be distributed and utilized by December 31, 2026.
- Our recommendation to the Board included the award and one-time purchase of approximately 556 internet subscriptions through Comcast, good for one year of free internet service for \$359.40 per annual subscription. The total not-to-exceed amount is \$200,000.
- EDC will be coordinating with affordable housing managers and community partners, including Burbank Housing, MidPen, Pep Housing, and West County Community Services, to distribute the subscriptions to eligible residents.



Broadband Update

December 3, 2024

Katherine DiPasqua, Director of Special Projects & Partnerships
Kate Fosburgh, Digital Access Project Analyst

Summary of Recommended Actions

- A. Receive an update on the County's Broadband Program.
- B. Approve use of \$2,350,000 in previously allocated ARPA funding, dependent on the outcome of County's Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) Grant application, as follows:
 - a. Delegate authority to EDC Director to execute a funding agreement with GSCA for construction of the Walsh Landing and/or Jenner project areas, in an amount not-to-exceed \$2,350,000, to the extent that the FFA grant is not awarded for Walsh Landing or Jenner; and
 - b. Approve a funding agreement with GSCA for additional low-level design services, for the balance of said ARPA funds not needed for broadband construction in the Walsh Landing and/or Jenner areas, up to \$2,350,000.
- C. Delegate authority to the EDC Director to execute an agreement with Comcast for a one-time bulk purchase of internet subscriptions to be used by underserved persons, in an amount not-to-exceed \$200,000 using previously allocated ARPA funding

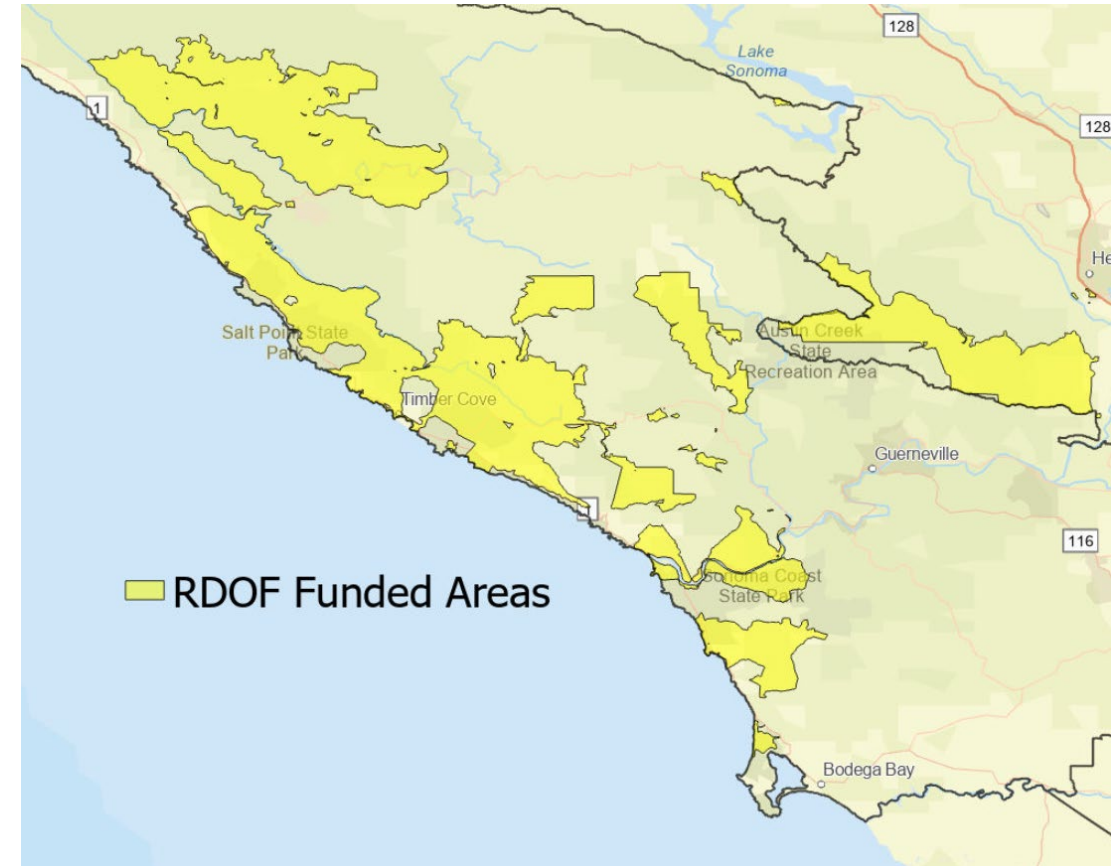
Infrastructure Deployment

- Golden State Connect Authority, on behalf of Sonoma County, applied for Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) funding for the four project areas below in September 2023
- Staff are expecting announcement from the CPUC on County's application in mid/late December
- Low-level design for the FFA project areas is being completed now, funded by a Local Agency Technical Assistance (LATA) Grant

FFA Project Areas	Network Mileage	No. Unserved Households	District	Middle Mile Connection
Jenner	4.87	86	5	Hwy 1
Walsh Landing	12.18	183	5	Hwy 1
Southeast Santa Rosa	24.96	278	3	Hwy 101
East Cloverdale	44.42	298	4	Hwy 101

Complications Due to RDOF Funding

- Federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) grant awarded to Frontier Communications in 2022 is blocking new grant funding to most of West County.
- Under RDOF, Frontier has 6 years to construct the network and is obligated to complete 40% of it by Dec 2025.
- CPUC has indicated that the County's FFA application in Walsh Landing and Jenner overlap with RDOF, and those areas are not likely to be approved for funding



ARPA Recommendation for Infrastructure

- In December 2021, the Board approved the use of **\$3 million** in ARPA towards Broadband initiatives
- Since then:
 - \$1,500,000 set aside for low-level design on 8/1/23
 - \$450,000 allocated for EDC Staffing on 5/9/23 & 3/5/24
 - \$1,075,000 remains unassigned
- **Infrastructure Recommendation:**
 - Increase allocation of ARPA for infrastructure uses to \$2,350,000 to fund construction of the Walsh Landing and/or Jenner project areas, and depending on the FFA award in said areas, use any remaining balance for additional low-level design.

Digital Needs Assessment

Countywide Findings



- 80% of Low-Income HH are paying more than \$30/month on internet, despite being eligible for low-income internet plans.



- 60% are receiving service speeds below State/Federal standards (100/20 MBPS) and yet majority (66%) are paying at least \$50/month.



- 44% reported having no devices or only a smartphone. That figure increases to 53% when isolating for households with school-aged children.

District Specific Findings



- Reported reliability of internet service varied across the County, with 71% reporting reliable service in Santa Rosa, compared to 54% in Guerneville area.



- The need for devices also varied, with 68% in Cloverdale reporting having no device or only a smartphone, compared to 28% in the Guerneville area

ARPA Recommendation for Digital Equity

Time-Limited Internet Subsidy Program

- Allocate \$200,000 of ARPA for underserved residents living in affordable housing complexes throughout the County.
- Award a contract with Comcast for the purchase of approximately 556 subscriptions, at the rate of \$359.40 per subscription, good for one year of free internet service at a minimum speed of 100/20 MBPS.
- The subscriptions will be distributed in approx. ten affordable housing complexes throughout the County, with roughly two sites in each supervisorial district.



Rendering of Casa Roseland in Santa Rosa

Current & Upcoming Grant Opportunities

1. Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Grant
2. Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Digital Equity Competitive Grant
3. Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Digital Equity Capacity Grant

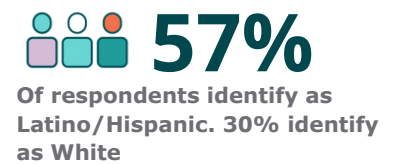
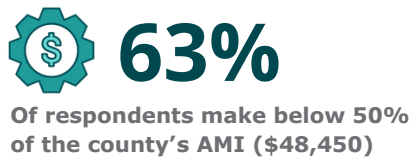


Questions?

Digital Needs Assessment

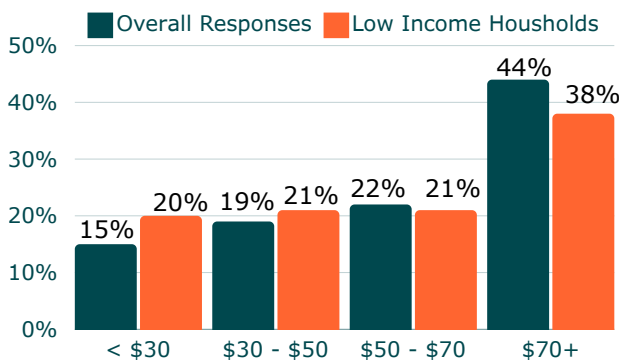


County-Wide Findings



Internet Cost

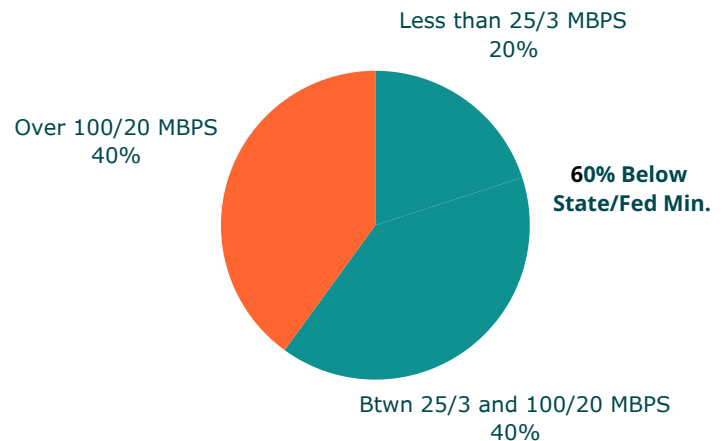
Percent of Responses by Cost (USD)



67% of all survey respondents reported their internet bill being too high. However, **80%** of Low Income Households are paying more than \$30 per month on internet, despite being eligible for low income internet plans.

Internet Speed

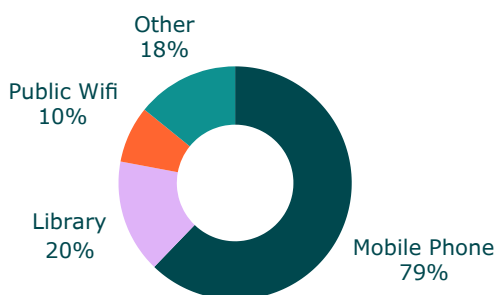
Measured in Megabits Per Second (MBPS)



The State and Federal minimum standard for internet speeds to be considered Broadband is **100/20 MBPS**, and yet **60%** of respondents reported speeds below that threshold.

Alternative Connectivity Methods

Ways people are connecting if not through home internet connections



Devices



44% of respondents reported having no devices or only a smartphone to access the internet. Although, that number jumps up to **53%** when isolating for households with school-aged children.

Digital Needs



The most reported uses for the internet was for **Work 63%** and **School 49%**



Seniors reported needing Digital Skills Trainings in **Cyber Security 60%** and **Telehealth 55%**



Parents of school-aged children reported needing Trainings in **Email 64%** and **Cyber Security 50%**

Data By Survey Area

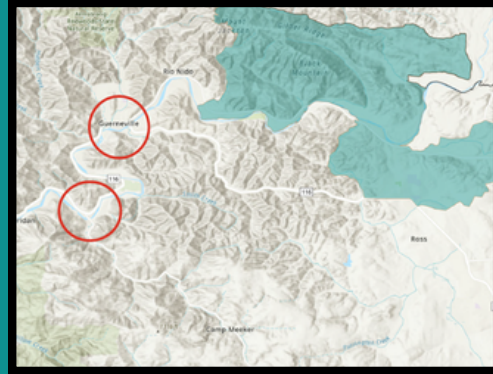
Cloverdale Area

Total Respondents: **116**
 Avg. Household: **3.5**
 Median Income: **\$30K**
 Households with School-Aged Children: **41%**
 Respondents Over 60 Years Old: **15%**
 Consider Current Service Reliable: **65%**
 Reported Internet Cost is too High: **64%**
 No Device or Phone Only: **68%**



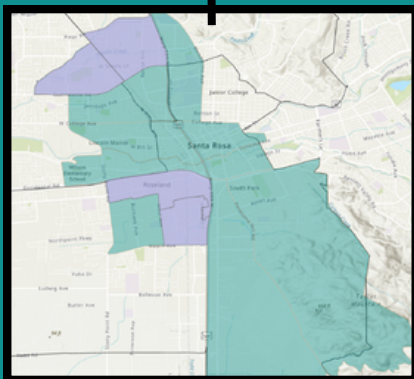
Guerneville, Monte Rio and Forestville

Total Respondents: **125**
 Avg. Household: **1.9**
 Median Income: **\$25K**
 Households with School-Aged Children: **6%**
 Respondents Over 60 Years Old: **82%**
 Consider Current Service Reliable: **54%**
 Reported Internet Cost is too High: **74%**
 No Device or Phone Only: **28%**



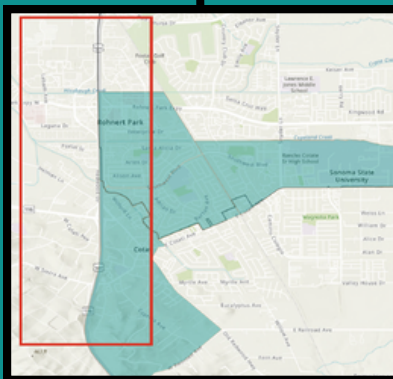
Santa Rosa Area

Total Respondents: **143**
 Avg. Household: **3.9**
 Median Income: **\$40.8K**
 Households with School-Aged Children: **52%**
 Respondents Over 60 Years Old: **7%**
 Consider Current Service Reliable: **71%**
 Reported Internet Cost is too High: **64%**
 No Device or Phone Only: **42%**



Rohnert Park and Cotati

Total Respondents: **88**
 Avg. Household: **2.7**
 Median Income: **\$37K**
 Households with School-Aged Children: **28%**
 Respondents Over 60 Years Old: **20%**
 Consider Current Service Reliable: **63%**
 Reported Internet Cost is too High: **72%**
 No Device or Phone Only: **32%**






Sonoma Valley

Total Respondents: **100**
 Avg. Household: **4**
 Median Income: **\$36K**
 Households with School-Aged Children: **57%**
 Respondents Over 60 Years Old: **11%**
 Consider Current Service Reliable: **63%**
 Reported Internet Cost is too High: **62%**
 No Device or Phone Only: **52%**



Legend

-  Portrait of Sonoma County - Disadvantaged Communities
-  Health Action Together - Call to Action Areas
-  Other Low-Income Areas