

MONTEREY COUNTY

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT

ERIC A. CHATHAM, DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

1590 MOFFETT STREET, SALINAS, CA 93905-3342

TELEPHONE: (831) 759-6900 | FACSIMILE: (831) 759-6910



Malinda Matson, Economic Development Representative
U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration
915 Second Avenue, Room 1890
Seattle, WA 98174

Dear Ms. Matson,

On behalf of the Monterey County, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the development of a broadband strategic plan. It represents an outstanding opportunity to ensure that equity is achieved in the ability of all California residents to have access to broadband connectivity. County of Monterey wishes to express our support for the Golden State Finance Authority's Rural California Broadband Strategic Planning application to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration under funding made possible by the American Rescue Plan Act. The application outlines an important program of work that would establish "foundational readiness" for broadband investment and deployment across rural California.

The proposed work would include the development of comprehensive broadband strategic plans for many of the rural counties in the state. Though Monterey County does not have an official broadband strategic plan in place, a local consortium, there is an existing local broadband task force headed by Central Coast Broadband Consortium (CCBC) and Monterey Bay Economic Partnership who already did a significant amount of work and published a whitepaper on "Achieving Ubiquitous Broadband Coverage in the Monterey Bay Region" (https://www.tellusventure.com/downloads/mbep/mbep_ccbc_whitepaper_ubiquitous_broadband_30nov2018.pdf) in year 2018. Goals, desired outcomes, strategies, and challenges are clearly laid out and most of them still apply today. Monterey County can benefit by developing its own broadband strategic plan based on the whitepaper. County has been actively engaged in the regional broadband development by working with CCBC and vendors. A list of short-term and long-term projects have been identified and can be integrated into the plan. Further, if we receive broadband strategic plan development grant, we could use the grant to focus on developing a refined and focused plan that can lead to quick wins and benefit Monterey County citizens right away. The development of broadband strategic plans will provide important benefits for rural economies. The broadband strategic plan creates the foundation upon which investment and deployment of broadband infrastructure can and will occur. It will allow communities to strategically invite and direct broadband investment into unserved and under-served areas. It will provide the information needed for local elected officials to develop policies that encourage that investment; and lastly, it will open the door for rural communities to take advantage of federal funding opportunities that require (or strongly encourage) broadband strategic plans to be in place.

A lack of internet access disproportionately affects some Monterey County residents because internet access is not available in their area or is unaffordable. In August 2020, a photo of two girls sitting on the sidewalk with their laptops outside a Taco Bell restaurant in the City of Salinas to use the restaurant's Wi-Fi went viral, shining

the national spotlight on the digital divide which exists in Monterey County and many other communities in the state and nation. Schools are facing significant challenges which disparately impact students of color. According to the Monterey County Office of Education nearly 7,000 students/families do not have access to the tools they need for distance learning (e.g., laptops or tablets), and over 10,000 students do not have internet access in their home because it is not available in their community or is unaffordable to their families.

The pandemic has underscored the critical utility of broadband infrastructure. From the homework gap and workforce adaptation to essential healthcare services and e-commerce, broadband is now the keystone to our nation's response to the global pandemic and imperative to building resilient and future-ready communities. The lack of reliable broadband is a major economic barrier and a leading driver of socioeconomic inequality.

Our goal is to ensure that every resident in Monterey County, regardless of their circumstances, could access broadband. The ability to do so will pay dividends far beyond the current crisis we find ourselves in. Monterey County will benefit from the work proposed in Golden State Finance Authority's grant application. As such, we strongly support this application and request that you give it your highest level of consideration.

Sincerely,

Eric A. Chatham
Director of Information Technology
Monterey County