



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA LETTER

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Agenda Number:**Submitted on:**
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: County Executive Office
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: August 29, 2023
Placement: Administrative
Estimated Time: N/A
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: 4/5

TO: Board of Supervisors**FROM:** Department Director(s) Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer

Contact Info: Nancy Anderson, Chief Assistant County Executive Officer
Brittany Odermann, Deputy County Executive Officer

DocuSigned by:

41846F5C725B460...

SUBJECT: Last Mile Federal Funding Account Grant Opportunity for Broadband Initiatives and Reallocation of American Rescue Plan Act Funds for Broadband Consulting and Grant Writing Services

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

CEO Budget: Yes

Recommended Actions:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Approve and ratify County support and partnership with Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) on an application for the Last Mile Federal Funding Account for up to four of the County's identified priority areas; Guadalupe, Cuyama, Los Alamos and/or Casmalia;
- b) Approve and authorize the Chairman of the Board to sign letters of support upon request of a local Internet Service Provider applying for Last Mile Federal Funding Account monies in Santa Barbara County;
- c) Approve and authorize the County Executive Officer, or designee, to submit a grant application on behalf of the County for Last Mile Federal Funding Account monies as needed;
- d) Approve the reallocation of available American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding in an amount up to \$115,000 for consulting services with the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) (\$100,000) and grant writing services, as needed (\$15,000);
- e) Approve the budget revision BJE #0009221 for \$115,000 for consulting services (Attachment A); and
- f) Determine that the above actions are not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), because pursuant to section 15378(b)(5) of the CEQA Guidelines the actions consist of organizational or administrative activities of government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary:

Many initiatives are underway at the local, state and federal levels to increase broadband or high-speed internet access to all. This agenda item requests the Board's approval to expand partnerships with Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) to pursue state and federal funding.

Federal grant funding was recently made available from the Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA). The grant program identified 6,627 under/unserved residents in Santa Barbara County which resulted in an allocation of \$15,870,746.44 to the Santa Barbara area. Eligible applicants for these funds include broadband providers, network administrators, local government agencies, non-profits, and California tribes. The Last Mile FFA grant program applications are due by September 29, 2023.

Staff is working with RCRC to support an application for Last Mile FFA monies to complete last mile infrastructure development for up to four of the priority areas identified in the Countywide Broadband Strategic Plan: Guadalupe, Cuyama, Casmalia, and Los Alamos. Simultaneously, staff is also pursuing other options for FFA funding applications, including supporting Internet Service Providers that may apply for the funding independently and applying directly for the funds with the assistance of a grant writer.

To assist with the County's broadband efforts, staff is requesting to directly contract with the BCPC to assist with implementation of the Countywide Broadband Strategic Plan recommendations, and provide guidance and technical expertise related to long-term planning and funding opportunities. The source of funding for the grant writing and consulting services totaling \$115,000 is available from unspent American Rescue Plan Act funds. Staff plans to return to the Board in September with a comprehensive update on all broadband efforts related to recommendations from the Countywide Broadband Strategic Plan.

Background:

In October 2021, your Board approved \$200,000 to the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) for a countywide broadband strategic plan conducted by the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC). The plan, funded by contributions from the County and all city jurisdictions, identifies areas with gaps in high-speed internet access with the goal of providing affordable and reliable access to all residents in the County. Work on the plan completed in November 2022 and was adopted by the Santa Barbara Association of Governments (SBCAG) Board in December 2022. The final plan was presented to the Board on January 24, 2023, and since then, County staff along with SBCAG have been working on plan implementation, including grant identification and application, such as the Local Agency Technical Assistance Grant (LATA), and the Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA).

The [Countywide Broadband Strategic Plan](#) follows the lead of the statewide Broadband for All initiative and serves as a guide for stakeholders to identify broadband needs, accelerate and improve planning efforts across the County and within communities, and provide data that will support applications for funding allocated to broadband initiatives. Priority next steps that came from the strategic plan include:

1. Identifying grant opportunities and support grant work efforts;
2. Participate in State middle mile conversations;
3. Engage with telecoms and providers to discuss public/ private partnerships; and
4. Participate in a countywide Joint Powers Authority (JPA)

Discussion:

Access to broadband internet has wide reaching effects. It improves economic stability, provides opportunities for education, increases social supports, provides more civic agency, and is associated with improved overall health in areas where it's widely available. For these reasons, state and federal funding opportunities are beginning to quickly emerge requiring prompt action from local agencies interested in enhancing the availability of these services to underserved areas in their communities.

So far, County staff in coordination with SBCAG were successful in securing \$1 million in Local Agency Technical Assistance (LATA) grant funding for three main deliverables needed to apply for more funding: conduct high-level design for the four priority areas identified in the table below; develop the environmental impact report; and form a Broadband Joint Powers Authority (JPA). Through recent conversations with the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), the County was made aware of an opportunity to leverage RCRC's existing efforts to complete the high-level network design (covered by the LATA funds) quickly and cost-effectively. Additionally, RCRC offered to partner with the County to pursue newly available Last Mile FFA grant funding for the four priority areas using the high-level network design being produced.

High-level network design. SBCAG has entered into an agreement with Golden State Connect Authority (GSCA) - the RCRC's broadband focused association - to subcontract this work to contractors Tilson and Utopia, which are conducting network design for 30-member counties and 8 cities using LATA funds. This work will produce the information needed to support applications to the Last Mile FFA grant program for broadband discussed in more detail below. The areas that were selected for the design work derived as priority areas from the Strategic Plan:

Area	FFA Mass Market Unserved and Underserved locations
Los Alamos	648
Cuyama and New Cuyama	266
Casmalia	65
City of Guadalupe	28

The County and SBCAG are now working with RCRC on high-level network design to be included in RCRC's consideration of priority project areas for their FFA application. The financial and technical information resulting from the LATA High Level Designs will be used to complete applications for the Last Mile FFA grant program. Timing was critical to complete all network design in early August so that the network design and financial feasibility can be appropriately and effectively used for FFA applications. It was critical the County and SBCAG complete their network design on an expedited basis for inclusion in RCRC's FFA application consideration.

Options for Applying for Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) Grant

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) administers the Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA), a \$2 billion grant program for last-mile broadband infrastructure projects to connect unserved Californians across the state. (Last mile is the final leg of a network that provides service to the home, business or community institution). These areas are delineated on the Federal Funding Account Map. FFA identified 6,627 under/unserved residents in Santa Barbara County and allocated \$15,870,746.44 to the area. Eligible applicants for these funds include broadband providers, network administrators, local government agencies, non-profits, and California tribes. The Last Mile FFA grant program applications are due by September 29, 2023.

FFA favors collaboration between entities, especially public agencies, and will be evaluating projects through an equity lens. FFA will evaluate projects using several criteria including matching fund percentages, fiber optic infrastructure, partnerships with local government, non-profit organizations, and tribal agencies, commitment to low-cost pricing, serving an entire priority area, applicant capacity, project plan, budget, and leveraging of statewide open access middle mile network.

Staff have identified three options to pursue the FFA funding shown in the following recommended priority order:

1) Partner with RCRC to apply for the County's four project areas

The County in coordination with SBCAG identified four priority areas in the Strategic Plan as listed above that were studied during the network design phase of the LATA program. These areas, with the exception of Los Alamos, are included as Phase I of the California Golden State Network Maps and are identified as priority areas in the FFA maps. From that design work, all of these projects are input into the FFA application tool, showcasing their eligibility for the FFA program. These four priority project areas will be reviewed by RCRC to determine feasibility for a RCRC FFA application. If awarded FFA funding, Golden State Connect Authority will own, operate, and maintain broadband infrastructure developed in the priority project areas. The County will be notified of RCRC's decision in the coming weeks.

As mentioned above, RCRC is already underway leading a multi-county, multi-stage broadband deployment project. Phase 3 of its initiative includes applying for FFA grant funding for key project areas.

- Phase 1: Broadband Strategic Plans (funded by Economic Development Administration)
- Phase 2: High-level design (funded by LATA) in partnership with Utopia and Tilson
- Phase 3: Deployment and support implementing 40 miles of priority projects (FFA applications)

If RCRC selects any or all four projects, staff recommends the County support RCRC submitting an FFA application on our behalf. This option is the most ideal for the County as it leverages existing RCRC efforts throughout the State providing the most time and cost-effective approach.

2) Support Internet Service Providers (ISPs) application for the funding

Internet Service Providers throughout the County supply broadband internet services to businesses and residents. Some of the various providers include Astound, Cox Communications, Comcast, and Frontier. Staff have had several discussions with local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to learn if they plan to apply for Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) monies, and if so, to explore potential collaborations. An ISP could use FFA funding to assist in the buildout of broadband infrastructure in underserved and unserved areas and would own, operate and maintain that last mile infrastructure.

At the time of writing this board letter, ISP's have stated they are researching the opportunity but have not yet formally committed to applying for FFA funding. If they do, County staff recommend supporting local ISP applications through letters of support on a case-by-case basis, that are consistent with implementation of the Broadband Strategic Plan. Supporting existing ISPs that are in the business of providing these services would be another cost effective and timely approach to reaching the underserved and unserved communities. It is possible that the County provide support to an ISP application in addition to moving forward with Option 1.

3) County apply directly and release a Request for Proposals (RFP) to contract with ISPs

Due to the short timeframe, with FFA grant applications due September 29, 2023, if a Santa Barbara County project is not selected by RCRC and no ISPs are planning to apply, staff are requesting your Board approve a reallocation of ARPA funding in the amount of \$15,000 to work with a grant writer to assist with a FFA application for a last mile project consistent with County priorities. This would require releasing an RFP for an ISP partnership after submission of the application, which may impact the application score. Upon initial review of the FFA Application tool, staff determined this option

would not score as competitively as Options 1 and 2 and therefore is prioritized as Option 3. However, in order to ensure a direct grant application can be submitted by the deadline, staff recommends simultaneously pursuing this Option in addition to Options 1 and 2 to ensure the funds are secured for the benefit of Santa Barbara communities.

Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) Partnership

Throughout the Broadband Strategic Planning process and implementation phases, County staff have been working closely with the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) through regular coordination and participation in the BCPC Advisory Group. The BCPC Advisory group is part of a tri-county regional effort covering San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties through the Economic Development Collaborative (EDC). This group meets on a monthly basis to share resources and learn about the latest happenings in broadband deployment. County staff from the County Executive Office and the Information Technology Department participate in these advisory group meetings.

To assist County staff with the implementation of the Broadband Strategic Plan, the County Executive Office seeks to contract with BCPC for consulting services to provide technical expertise and guidance related to implementing the strategic plan and broadband deployment countywide. Under general direction from the CEO and in consultation with the County Chief Information Officer BCPC proposes to provide consultant support for a one-year term, at a cost not to exceed \$100,000, committing 5-10 hours weekly to:

- Represent the County on broadband initiatives related to the implementation of the Santa Barbara County Broadband Strategic Plan that support the needs and priorities of the unincorporated areas of the County;
- Identify and develop public-private partnership “operational” organizational models for middle-mile and last-mile broadband deployment to support unincorporated areas of the County and coordinate agreements through established County processes;
- Provide technical assistance to departments and the CEO Project Coordinator at County’s monthly internal Broadband working group meetings for implementation of the Broadband Strategic Plan:
 - Present pertinent state and federal information and agenda items for discussion
 - Assist in responding to department questions and research related to action items
 - Assist with the development and presentation of updates to the Board of Supervisors on County Broadband efforts
- Continuously monitor state and federal funding opportunities and provide expertise and guidance to County on grant applications including the Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) and the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD);
- Continuously monitor and integrate countywide efforts across multiple concurrent initiatives within the County;
- Support Rural County Representative (RCRC) initiatives as a resource and planning partner in the multiple concurrent broadband enhancement efforts impacting the unincorporated areas of the County of Santa Barbara; and
- Provide weekly status updates to the County Executive Office and Information Technology Department staff on any broadband related efforts at state and federal levels.

Staff recommends your Board approve reallocation of \$100,000 of ARPA funding towards implementation of the Broadband Strategic Plan project with BCPC consultant services.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Not budgeted. The attached BJE allocates available American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds totaling \$115,000 towards ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds eligible consulting services with the

Page 6 of 6

Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast (BCPC) and grant writing services, if needed. The available ARPA funding is available from unspent funds of a previously approved ARPA project.

Attachments:

Attachment A – BJE 0009221

Authored by:

Jasmine McGinty, Principal Analyst, County Executive Office

CC:

Chris Chirgwin, Chief Information Officer, Information Technology Department
Shelby Arthur, Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast
Fred Luna, Santa Barbara County Association of Governments