

DIGITAL EQUITY COALITION CHARTER

Santa Barbara County

Purpose

The Santa Barbara County Digital Equity Coalition strategically aligns resources, work efforts, and tools to close the digital divide across all county communities. The Coalition seeks to establish partnerships between organizations invested in creating equitable and sustainable living conditions for all. As part of a larger statewide and national conversation, the Coalition assesses and analyzes local actions and initiatives addressing the digital divide to coordinate with regional and statewide digital equity efforts.

Shared Commitments

Connectivity

Access and availability of affordable broadband is the first step in meeting community needs.

Adoption

Adoption occurs as residents sign up for service. Engage community bridge builders and trusted agents as digital navigators to assist neighbors to overcome resistance and concerns with the use of new technologies.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is a spectrum of learning that encompasses basic digital navigation, task-specific digital skills, digital health and safety practices, and access to education and professional development tools.

Ubiquity

Ubiquity is described as the availability of internet to all, everywhere, assuring no one is left unplugged in a time of need.

Affiliations



Santa Barbara County partners committed to achieving digital equity in their service areas are invited to participate in the work of the Digital Equity Coalition, to share initiatives, activities, best practices, and data to improve regional work efforts.



Santa Barbara Foundation (SBF) provides an administrative backbone for the DEC, committing funding for a consultant, staff time, and support for digital equity initiatives led by community organizations.



Broadband Consortium Pacific Coast (BCPC) provides expert insight into the links between equitable and just digital infrastructure investments and equitable digital inclusion efforts. BCPC developed the Santa Barbara Broadband Strategic Plan to implement Broadband for All initiatives in Santa Barbara County and has developed partnerships with public officials and staff, internet service providers, and statewide and federal organizations that fund Broadband Initiatives.



Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) adopted the SB County Broadband Strategic Plan to inform infrastructure plans and broadband deployment across the county, which is inextricably linked to digital equity outcomes.

Problem/Opportunity Statement

Despite the high number of connections that currently exist across Santa Barbara County, there are pockets of the population in each community where broadband adoption is limited by barriers including affordability, access to technology, and low digital literacy. The digital divide disproportionately impacts marginalized communities that require specialized outreach and training to empower community members to utilize digital tools to improve their access to economic, educational, social, and health opportunities. The Digital Equity Coalition provides a venue for practitioners to coalesce strategies to reach under-connected and unconnected community members, to share best practices, to collaborate, and to coordinate efforts to apply for funding opportunities and develop effective programs.



SBF American GI Forum, 2024

Access to Technology:

Households excluded by the digital divide require access to in-home technology to fully participate in the digital economy, learning opportunities, and public services. Low-income households, advanced-age adults, and students often rely on a mobile device rather than large device technology, yet research repeatedly links success outcomes to in-home devices rather than mobile devices, finding that computer use significantly increases user engagement, digital literacy, and improved range and functionality (A. Gonzales 2021; T. Correa, I. Pavez & J. Contreras 2020; P. Napoli & J. Obar 2014; E. Tsetsi & S. Rains 2017). County-wide programs such as Partners in Education deliver free technology devices and support services to families with students enrolled in public schools, and federal, state, and philanthropic funding opportunities exist to expand these programs and to create specialized programs targeting other vulnerable populations.

Digital Literacy:

Santa Barbara County is home to rural, urban, and suburban communities that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, languages, generational distribution and shared histories. Many of these communities require different approaches to outreach and education about broadband, access, and digital literacy; there is no one-size-fits-all approach to equitable connectivity. The fabric of the community-based organization network in the county is woven from organizations embedded in the communities they serve that have established reputations of trust with community members. Some already work with their communities to improve access to high-speed internet and offer digital literacy and educational content tailored to their needs, including libraries, senior services organizations, higher education institutions, and non-profits. Opportunities to increase adoption and build capacity through multilingual programs would narrow the digital divide and empower users to participate in the digital landscape.

Health Outcomes:

Health disparities in the existing healthcare system disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including those living in rural areas, people of color, adults with disabilities, and aging adults in our communities. In Santa Barbara County, telehealth should be used to bridge these gaps and address disparate health equity, providing underserved communities with much-needed care. Many rural populations throughout the county lack access to health care in proximity, affordability, and quality. Moreover, the geographical inconveniences of seeking health care mean that many in rural communities often opt to substitute local primary care providers for subspecialists resulting in poorer health outcomes. In addition to alleviating barriers to geographic access, telehealth has been able to mitigate some patient costs associated with a doctor's visit, including travel time, travel costs, and lost income due to time away from the workplace.

Education and Job Training:

Formerly analog vocations such as auto mechanics, construction, landscape and agriculture are increasingly digitized, as are the training programs preparing the labor force. On-campus access and in-home access to technology and internet is imperative for success in the workforce, and research shows that smartphone and small device access is insufficient (A. Gonzales 2021: The Importance of Large-Screen Device Ownership). Elementary schools and high schools are increasingly tasked to begin technology familiarization and training at younger ages. While some schools in the county thrive in providing students this area of education, there are pockets in the county[GM1] that need more speed and capacity at their schools to enable children to learn using technology. These children are the job creators of the future and deserve high-capacity infrastructure and strong digital literacy training to carry them through their education.

Economic Development:

Job growth and economic growth are directly tied to economic development, and the broadband initiative is central to attracting and retaining businesses in each municipality and across Santa Barbara County. Without the infrastructure to provide reliable, affordable, high-speed internet, businesses are tied to local customers. They cannot utilize modern technologies for promoting and running their businesses through point-of-sale software, customer relationship management systems, permitting processes, and global supply chain management. As these online systems improve and grow, businesses will rely on updated infrastructure to keep up with the pace of development and innovation. Business owners will require continual digital upskilling opportunities to compete in the market.



SBF Digital Equity Collaborative in Solvang 02.06.2024


Focus and Scope

The focus and scope of the Digital Equity Coalition are defined through an equity lens for digital inclusion and aligned with California's Broadband for All goals. DEC Partners coalesce joint efforts in the following focus areas through Advocacy, Partnership, and Resourcing:

- **Digital Inclusion:** Support and promote multilingual, culturally responsive, and dynamic programs that can grow as community needs transform.
- **Access and Adoption:** Provide input to public and private entities about broadband infrastructure improvements and affordability metrics, focusing on data-backed community recommendations leading to ubiquity in their neighborhoods.
- **Digital Literacy:** Identify and bolster investment in digital literacy through education, workforce development, and vital services.
- **Ubiquity:** Work collaboratively toward informed and dynamic digital participation in all communities.

Objectives and Outcomes: Digital Participation

OBJECTIVE

 **Affordable Broadband**

OUTCOME

Support efforts to reach CA Broadband Council's goals to increase connectivity across Santa Barbara County to 95% by 2027


OBJECTIVE

 **Internet-enabled devices**

OUTCOME

Increase access and adoption of technology in Santa Barbara County, especially disadvantaged communities through established partner programs

OBJECTIVE

 **Digital literacy training**

OUTCOME

Increase technology skills and competence across Santa Barbara County centering on disadvantaged communities through multilingual and culturally responsive digital literacy training

OBJECTIVE

 **Technical support**

OUTCOME

Remove barriers and decrease user challenges by elevating support resources on an ongoing basis

Guiding Principles and Strategies

Equity and community-based leadership form the guiding principles of the Digital Equity Coalition, which connects public, private, and non-profit entities to existing networks of community-based organizations that represent the needs of underserved and under-connected communities. To be successful in cultivating sustainable inclusion, the DEC coordinates within the frameworks of organizations that already have access and inclusion goals and strategies to create a broad, connected, effective network.

Guiding Principles

- Affordable internet access and high-speed broadband is a basic necessity.
- The Internet is nonpartisan – equitable access to digital opportunities improves regional vitality.
- Affordable, high-speed internet access requires shared community commitments.
- Meaningful competition for internet services drives regional economic gains.
- Define minimum download, upload standards for broadband and internet access; CA Broadband for All sets 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds as accepted minimum.
- Quality data is required to map coverage and performance; data may be shared within larger mapping efforts as long as proprietary information remains private.
- Map partners' existing and planned infrastructure and assets, as well as communities' needs.
- Target and tailor support services to respective constituents while also building local capacity.
- Improve digital literacy, the know-why, and know-how, so people can access digital services.

Challenges and Concerns

Economic Development

Education and Job Training

Health outcomes

Digital Literacy

Access to Technology

- Ability to change common notion of broadband as a discretionary choice to internet access as a necessity.
- Advocating for local, state and regional policies to better support equitable internet access.
- Incumbent internet providers' desire to protect investments limit competitive pricing; yet profit-driven business models are often subsidized.
- As technology evolves and increases the demand for higher speeds with greater capacity to connect multiple users simultaneously, access to affordable plans with sufficient speed does not pace with changes in demand.

Governance

Santa Barbara County is home to many committed organizations that are embedded in the communities they serve and that can provide accurate assessments of the needs, barriers, and opportunities of their constituents, and also have cultivated trust-based relationships through which they can share information and appropriate resources. While the Digital Equity Coalition has a convening partner, a steering committee, and a broader partnership community, governance is shared amongst all participating partners.

Partners and Structures



STEERING COMMITTEE

Steering Committee

Collaborate to establish baseline understanding of the digital divide in Santa Barbara County and establish a working plan or roadmap for partner organizations to improve and align digital inclusion efforts. Through leadership of Subcommittees, monitor and prioritize legislation, initiatives and projects providing support in alignment with DEC Principles, Focus Areas and Objectives; analyze data and provide updates and recommendations for improved digital inclusion; identify and facilitate community access to resources through DEC website; engage private industry and philanthropic interest in resourcing community needs for improved digital inclusion.



Advocacy Subcommittee

[DEC Advocacy Priorities and Positions](#)
DEC Advocacy Guide

- Stay up to date on digital equity legislation
- Identify opportunities for your organization to represent your community's digital needs



Partnerships and Projects Subcommittee

- Identify data and gaps on local digital inclusion
- Review opportunities to align research efforts with local gaps in data
- Track DEC Partner Impact!



Data Evaluation and Reporting Subcommittee

- Align DEC website with needs for digital inclusion resources
- Provide recommendations for DEC website accessibility and updates



Community and Website Resources Subcommittee

- Stay up to date on DEC Partner projects serving digital equity – share your work and impact!
- Identify partnership opportunities and guide engagement with private industry



Partners' Table

Contribute data and provide insight into communities across the county; facilitate outreach efforts; share successes, challenges, best practices; partner in funding applications as appropriate. Contribute to Subcommittee efforts as available and interested.



Supporters' Circle

Listen and learn about community needs and opportunities to support the work of community organizations with the intention of alignment with DEC Principles and contribution to DEC Focus Areas and Outcomes.

Cooperative Agreements

- DEC Charter Endorsement by Steering Committee members and Partners as agreement to define commitments for advocacy and partnering as relevant on funding applications and projects to advance DEC Objectives in each Focus Area.
- Data-sharing agreement between organizations with permission to include in project design and funding applications (as appropriate and anonymized) using open access GIS mapping tool

Decision Making Principles

Consensus-building with Steering Committee Expertise and Community Representation toward macro-level decisions impacting the DEC Charter.

Decision-making delegated to Committee Leadership toward discussions and decisions aligned with their committees' defined Areas of Expertise and Annual Agenda; enables Committee Leadership make decisions in alignment with DEC Priorities and Objectives in each Focus Area. Decisions are shared between Steering Committee members to align efforts and reported to the general DEC Partnership.

Community Consultation in decision-making as a commitment made by all Committee Leadership and DEC Steering Committee Partners to ensure Community Representation is accurate and adequately centered in identifying the challenges and in consideration of alternatives and opportunities.