



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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First District

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**DATE:** September 14, 2021

**04**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**RATIFY THE APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION'S EMERGENCY CONNECTIVITY FUND TO PROVIDE LAPTOPS AND MOBILE INTERNET HOTSPOTS TO HOUSEHOLDS IN NEED IN THE COUNTY LIBRARY'S SERVICE AREA (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### **OVERVIEW**

The San Diego County Library (County Library) plays a critical role in providing free access to the internet services and resources in the communities we serve. Part of County Library's effort to provide resources is through a partnership with the San Diego Supercomputer Center on the campus of the University of California, San Diego. This connection is the local node of the California Research and Education Network, a very high-speed, high-quality internet node that connects all our library branches. In addition to providing free Wi-Fi, with approximately 500,000 Wi-Fi connections annually, computers and laptops are also available at all our library branches.

County Library has considered expanding its internet service program for customers to be able to access the internet in their own homes or dwelling places without having to be at a library branch, use modems, or internet utility services. Using data from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NITA) from the United States Department of Commerce, which maps the extent of the digital divide to the census tract level, County Library has estimated that there are 7,400 households in our service area that do not have internet access nor a smartphone or computer to access the internet. The estimated cost for such a program to be implemented to meet this need is up to \$5 million.

The San Diego County Library has identified an opportunity to respond to this digital divide through an emergency funding source called the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) initiated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). The ECF initiative is a \$7.17 billion program with a purpose to "provide funding to schools and libraries for the costs of \$400 per laptop and \$250 per Wi-Fi Hotspot, of eligible equipment and services that can be provided to students, teachers, and library patrons who lack connected devices, such as laptop or tablet computers, and/or lack broadband access during the pandemic."

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This grant opportunity would respond to the community's need by funding 7,400 laptops and mobile internet hotspots for households that lack computers and internet access. The grant also includes a one-year data access plan for the mobile hotspot services to be covered. Once the year access plan ends, the E-Rate funding program, which funds 85% to 90% of County Library internet service costs, will fund continued costs for internet access along with the Library Fund operational budget. The County Library will make these devices available for a one-year loan, which includes one laptop and hotspot per household, to mitigate the digital divide. After the one-year loan, County Library will review how the program has addressed the need in its service area and will have the opportunity to extend loan periods for service equipment and data access plans.

The ratification and application period for the ECF grant did not provide time for the County Library to receive Board of Supervisors approval prior to applying due to the tight program deadlines. Today’s action is a request to ratify the County Library’s grant application to ECF requesting approximately \$5 million to acquire and distribute laptops and mobile internet hotspots. This equipment will be used to provide resources to households impacted by the digital divide in the County Library service areas of the unincorporated communities and eleven incorporated cities within the County Library service area. In addition, this request will authorize the Director, County Library to conduct all negotiations and to execute and submit all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant funds if awarded. If these grants are awarded, the County Library will return to the Board to request the appropriations of grant funds. If today’s request is not approved, County Library will withdraw the application request.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**  
**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Waive Board Policy B-29, Fees, Grants, and revenue Contracts – Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery, which requires the Board of Supervisors to act upon the proposed actions at least 15 days before a grant application is submitted.
2. Ratify the grant application for approximately \$5,000,000 of the FCC’s Emergency Connectivity Fund to provide laptops and mobile internet hotspots to households impacted by the digital divide in the County Library’s service areas and authorize the County Library to accept the grant funds if awarded.
3. Authorize the Director, County Library, or designee, as agent of the County of San Diego, to conduct all negotiations and submit all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant funds including, but not limited to, applications, grant contracts, payment requests, and, if funds are awarded, to execute the grant agreements, including any extensions or amendments thereof that do not materially impact or alter the grant program or funding levels.

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**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The County Library provides equitable access to educational classes, opportunities to develop literacy, study materials, and recreational reading at no cost to the communities and customers we serve. The County Library also provides access to broadband internet and computers so that customers can access the digital services they need to meet their goals of learning, connecting, job seeking, and acquiring safety-net services. This grant from the FCC will enable the County Library to extend free digital infrastructure from library branches into the households of residents in need of this digital access. This program is an opportunity to provide resources for the over 7,400 households impacted by the digital divide in the County Library service area.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s recommendations. If approved, this request will ratify the County Library’s grant application for the Federal Communications Commission’s Emergency Connectivity Fund grant funds and authorize the County Library to accept grant funds of approximately \$5,000,000 for providing laptops and internet-connected devices to households lacking computer and internet access.

If these grants are awarded, the County Library will return to the Board to request the appropriations of grant funds. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

San Diego County Library (County Library) has considered expanding its internet service program for customers to be able to access the internet in their own homes or dwelling places without having to be at a library branch or use modems and internet utility services. Using data from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NITA) from the United States Department of Commerce, which maps the extent of the digital divide to the census tract level, the County Library has estimated that there are 7,400 households in our service area that do not have internet access nor a smartphone or computer to access the internet. Implementing a program that responds to this need is estimated to cost up to \$5 million.

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**Digital Divide within the County Library Service Area**

<b>City or Unincorporated Area Name</b>	<b>Households <i>NITA Census Tract Data</i></b>
El Cajon	1,408
La Mesa	891
Vista	851
Fallbrook	523
Lemon Grove	446
Spring Valley	439
San Marcos	435
Poway	395
Santee	355
Encinitas	341
Imperial Beach	321
Lakeside	194
Boulevard	153
Warner Springs	152
Valley Center	94
Julian	92
Ramona	74
Bonita	54
Alpine	53
Bonsall	51
Pauma Valley	39
San Luis Rey	38
Descanso	18
Guatay	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,431</b>

County Library has identified an opportunity to implement a program to address the digital divide through an emergency funding source called the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, which includes \$7.17 billion for the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program. The ECF will provide funding to help schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need for remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency period. ECF will help provide relief to millions of students, school staff, and library patrons and will help close the Homework Gap for students who currently lack necessary Internet access or the devices they need to connect to classrooms.

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The ECF funding is available to eligible schools and libraries. Eligibility is automatically established for schools and libraries that participate in the FCC’s E-Rate program, and since the County Library participates in E-Rate, it is considered an eligible library jurisdiction. County Library has participated in the FCC’s E-Rate program since 2018. Through the California State Library, the County Library was eligible to join the California Research and Education Network which allows us to bring highspeed, broadband access to each library branch. The costs of these public access internet circuits are eligible for discounts through the E-Rate Program, which subsidizes the cost of telecommunications and internet access for the nation’s schools (K-12) and libraries. The E-Rate program currently funds 85% to 90% of costs for this internet access, with the difference covered by the Library Fund operational budget.

The ECF Program will cover reasonable costs of laptop and tablet computers; Wi-Fi hotspots; modems; routers; and broadband connectivity purchases for off-campus use by students, school staff, and library patrons. The ECF guidelines define ‘reasonable costs’ as \$400 per laptop and \$250 per Wi-Fi Hotspot. Eligible equipment includes Wi-Fi hotspots, modems (including air cards), routers, devices that combine a modem and router, and connected devices (laptop and tablet computers). Schools and libraries can also receive funding for commercially available broadband service that provides a fixed or mobile broadband connection for off-campus use by students, school staff, or library patrons. The grant also includes a one-year data access plan for the mobile hotspot services to be covered. After the one-year access plan ends, the E-Rate program and the Library Fund operational budget will fund continued costs for internet access.

If the grant is awarded, County Library will be able to acquire laptops and mobile hot spots to respond to the need of the more than 7,400 households impacted by the digital divide. County Library plans to make these devices available for a one-year loan, which includes one laptop and hotspot per household. After the one-year loan, County Library will review how the program has addressed the need in its service area and will have the opportunity to extend loan periods, service equipment, and data access plans.

The ratification and application period for the ECF grant did not provide time for County Library to receive Board of Supervisors approval prior to applying due to the tight program deadlines. Today’s action is a request to ratify the County Library’s grant application to ECF requesting approximately \$5 million to acquire and distribute laptops and mobile internet hotspots. This equipment will be used to provide resources to households impacted by the digital divide in the County Library service areas of the unincorporated communities and eleven incorporated cities within the County Library service area. In addition, this request will authorize the Director, County Library to conduct all negotiations and to execute and submit all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant funds if awarded. If these grants are awarded, the County Library will return to the Board to request the appropriations of grant funds. If today’s request is not approved, County Library will withdraw the application request.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT**

N/A

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today’s proposed actions to ratify grant applications and adopt a resolution to apply for and accept grant funds, if awarded, supports the Sustainable Environments and Operational Excellence Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego’s 2017-2022 Strategic Plan by promoting an environment where residents can enjoy parks, open spaces, and outdoor experiences, and aligning services to available resources to maintain fiscal stability, which contributes to building a region that is thriving.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah E. Aghassi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a distinct "Aghassi" at the end.

**SARAH E. AGHASSI**  
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A

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### AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: ☐ Yes ☒ No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**

☐ Yes ☒ No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**

BOS March 27, 2018 (6) – Single Source Procurement of High-Speed Broadband

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**

Board Policy B-29, Fees, Grants, and revenue Contracts – Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**

Board Policy B-29, Fees, Grants, and revenue Contracts – Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery. Recover full cost, to the extent legally possible for services provided to agencies or individuals outside the County of San Diego organization under grants, contracts, or for which fees may be charged. Exceptions require specific Board approval for the non-reimbursed costs.

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION  
NUMBER(S):**

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** San Diego County Library

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):**

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

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