

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2021**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 4

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."

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.

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

ACTION:

This item was continued to the Board of Supervisors session on September 15, 2021.

State of California)
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter