

SANDAG Regional Digital Divide Taskforce Charter

Access to the internet has become critical to our lives and livelihood. Fully participating in economic and educational opportunities, and accessing goods, services, health and safety information relies heavily on access to information and communications technology (ICT). The digital divide refers to the growing gap between the members of society who do not have reliable access to ICT, mainly low-income and rural populations, and those who do. Recent crises like the global pandemic and severe wildfires have exacerbated these disparities putting unconnected and under-connected residents at a disadvantage.

Closing the digital divide also has implications for mobility and sustainability. Working from home and other remote access options have the potential to reduce car travel and the associated greenhouse gas emissions. It also supports local jurisdictions with “Smart City” initiatives that can improve municipal operations, improve traffic flow, and reduce energy consumption. Broadband also is critical to the future of transportation and the ability to fully benefit from the technology advancements that can drastically improve transportation operations and safety.

To address the digital divide, SANDAG will form a Regional Digital Divide Task Force and develop a Regional Digital Equity Strategy and Action Plan that prepares the region to accelerate broadband access and adoption through partnerships.

By “digital equity,” we mean that the taskforce exists specifically to expand equitable access to affordable high-speed broadband and to increase adoption, digital literacy training, and technical support for the region’s underserved residents through the following activities:

- Develop a shared regional understanding of the digital divide and collaborate on activities to close the digital divide
- Conduct research and collect data that identifies broadband gaps
- Create a Regional Digital Equity Strategy and Action Plan (Action Plan)
- Define roles and responsibilities for implementing the Action Plan
- Seek and compete for funding opportunities to implement the Action Plan
- Build support for policies that expand broadband access and deployment
- Evaluate and monitor Action Plan implementation

By “taskforce” we mean a group of diverse organizations (e.g. government organizations, educational institutions, community based organizations, Internet Service Providers, community technology training

and network providers, and other social service and civic organizations) that come together with the purpose of:

- Presenting a unified community voice around digital equity and inclusion
- Raising awareness about digital inequities and the impact on communities
- Supporting digital inclusion through networking and information-sharing
- Strengthening the impact of digital equity initiatives through partnerships
- Identifying funding and building support for digital equity programs and projects
- Developing a collective understanding about the need for digital equity across disciplines (i.e. transportation, smart cities, health, education, workforce development, civic engagement, etc.)

Taskforce participants are asked to attend and participate in taskforce meetings to share information and give feedback on digital divide projects and activities. The level of commitment is expected to be 90- 120 minutes per month. The taskforce will meet for the duration of time needed to develop the Action Plan and make significant progress towards implementing early actions identified in the Action Plan.