Racial Equity Analysis for Significant Board Items

Board Item Date	12/3/2024
Board Item Name	Broadband Program Update
Department/Agency (Lead)	Economic Development Collaborative
If this is an inter-departmental initiative, please identify a lead above.	
Person(s) Completing Analysis	Katherine DiPasqua and Kate Fosburgh

1. **Overview: Describe your program or policy and the desired results and outcomes?**
   a. What is the program or policy decision under consideration?
   b. What are the desired results (in the **community**) and outcomes (within your own **organization**)?
   c. What does this proposal have an ability to impact?

☒ Children and youth
☒ Community engagement
☐ Contracting equity
☐ Criminal justice
☒ Economic development
☒ Education
☐ Environment
☐ Food access and affordability
☐ Government practices
☐ Other _____
☐ Health
☒ Housing
☐ Human services
☐ Jobs
☐ Parks and recreation
☐ Planning / development
☐ Transportation
☒ Utilities
☐ Workforce equity

This broadband item consists of updates related to both infrastructure deployment and digital equity initiatives. Infrastructure deployment projects are primarily based on grant funding and prioritize areas with an existing lack of internet coverage. Digital equity efforts focus on internet adoption and getting Sonoma County residents the tools they need to get online.

2. **Data: What's the data? What does the data tell us?**
   a. Will the proposal have impacts in specific geographic areas (neighborhoods, areas, or regions)? What are the racial demographics of those living in the area?
   b. What does population level data, including quantitative and qualitative data, tell you about existing racial inequities? What does it tell you about root causes or factors influencing racial inequities?
   c. What performance level data do you have available for your proposal? This should include data associated with existing programs or policies.

d. Are there data gaps? What additional data would be helpful in analyzing the proposal? If so, how can you obtain better data?

The geographies impacted by initiatives surrounding broadband infrastructure deployment are primarily tailored by grant funding scoring criteria for the Federal Funding Account (FFA). The priorities of the FFA include prioritization of unserved and underserved locations, low-income communities, and cost of construction. The map on Page 5 of this report shows our priority areas for the FFA application, which we applied for in September 2023 and are still awaiting award announcement.

Three of the four target project areas for FFA are predominantly white. However, Southeast Santa Rosa is predominantly Hispanic or Latino.

Although most of the racially diverse areas in Sonoma County are in denser population centers, where internet service is already available, there are still barriers including cost, accessibility, and support with building skills to fully utilize the technology. To understand these digital needs across geographic and socioeconomic groups in Sonoma County, EDC partnered with Los Cien to conduct a Digital Needs Assessment (see Attachment 3 of the board item). The data from this report highlights digital needs aside from infrastructure expansion and provides data to inform future digital equity programs.

The survey focused on communities who scored low on the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a measure for a community's health, wealth, and wellbeing, as described in the Portrait of Sonoma and Health Action Together reports. The majority of respondents (67%) reported their race/ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino. Some key comparisons between Hispanic/Latino and White respondents include the following:

Race/Ethnicity	**Households with school-aged children**	**Reported access to home internet**	**Percent of households below 50% AMI**	**Percent of households with no device or phone only**	**Top reported digital skills training need**
Hispanic/Latino	50%	78%	68%	59%	Using email
White	14%	84%	55%	22%	Cybersecurity

This data shows slightly lower rates of access to home internet in the Hispanic/Latino community compared to the White community. Additionally, the responses from Hispanic/Latino residents reported a higher need for devices, with 59% of respondents having no device or only a smart phone to access the internet. This data highlights the need for programs to be tailored to reach the Hispanic/Latino community. We intend to do this by working with trusted community partners.

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3. Community Engagement: How have communities been engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement?

a. Who are the most affected community members who are concerned with or have experience related to this proposal? How have you involved these community members in the development of this proposal?
b. What has your engagement process told you about the burdens or benefits for different groups?
c. What has your engagement process told you about the factors that produce or perpetuate racial inequity related to this proposal?

The Digital Needs Assessment was conducted in partnership with Los Cien and consisted primarily of in-person data collection at community events. Details about data collection and events attended are included in Attachment 3 of the board item. By collecting data through community events and trusted partners in low-HDI communities, we can hear directly from the residents we aim for our programs to serve. This data allows us to understand the overall digital needs of Sonoma County, of specific geographies and underserved communities within the County, including communities of color, seniors, households with school-aged children, and low-income households.

Despite the insights this data provides, it still lacks some detail that would be helpful to inform policy. For example, reported addresses are at the zip code level, which does not capture the different experiences of communities on a smaller scale.

Additionally, we only have a statistically significant sample size for White and Hispanic/Latino residents. Response rates for other races, such as Black, Asian, and others, were too low to gather insight from. More intentional outreach to these communities of color to understand their digital gaps and needs would help inform our program further.

4. Analysis and Strategies: What are your strategies for advancing racial equity?

a. Given what you have learned from research and stakeholder involvement, how will the proposal increase or decrease racial equity? Who would benefit from or be burdened by your proposal?
b. What are potential unintended consequences? What are the ways in which your proposal could be modified to enhance positive impacts or reduce negative impacts?
c. Are there complementary strategies that you can implement? What are ways in which existing partnerships could be strengthened to maximize impact in the community? How will you partner with stakeholders for long-term positive change?
d. Are the impacts aligned with your community outcomes defined in Step #1?

The goal of this proposal is to increase internet equity and work towards closing the digital divide. Those who will benefit most from this proposal include residents in priority areas who do not currently have internet available at their location and low-income households living in affordable housing sites in low HDI communities. Additionally, if we are awarded funding through the Digital Equity Competitive Grant or Digital Equity Capacity Grant, that will allow for an expansion of digital equity initiatives, including digital skills training and device

distribution, which will benefit covered populations, including communities of color and individuals with limited English proficiency.

Throughout this work, we will need to be focused on how resources are being distributed. If solutions to address digital needs are not distributed equitably, there could be the unintended consequence of leaving communities behind and furthering the digital divide. This is why we are gathering data and working with community partners to reach the most in need populations in Sonoma County.

5. Implementation: What is your plan for implementation?

Describe your plan for implementation:
Our plan for implementation is a combination of infrastructure deployment and digital equity initiatives. We plan to use a combination of ARPA funding and State and Federal grant funding to plan for and build open access broadband networks in communities that currently do not have adequate internet access. We plan to use the remaining ARPA and digital equity grant funding to address the issues of adoption and affordability. Additionally, the Digital Equity Capacity Grant allows for a portion of the funding to be used to create a digital equity plan for the County, which will further inform our approach to addressing digital equity issues. Reaching unserved and underserved communities of color in Sonoma County would be an integral part of this plan. Through prior funding allocations and delegations of authority from the Board of Supervisors, existing and new grant opportunities, and time limited staffing allocated to support these efforts, this program is adequately funded and resourced.

Is this implementation plan:	**Yes**	**No**	**I'm Not Sure**
Realistic?	☒	☐	☐
Adequately funded?	☒	☐	☐
Adequately resourced with personnel?	☒	☐	☐
Adequately resources with mechanisms to ensure successful implementation and enforcement?	☒	☐	☐
Adequately resourced to ensure on-going data collection, public reporting, and community engagement?	☒	☐	☐

If the answer to any of these questions is no, what resources or actions are needed?
Click or tap here to enter text.

6. Accountability and Communication: How will you ensure accountability, communicate, and evaluate results?

a. How will impacts be documented and evaluated? Are you achieving the anticipated outcomes? Are you having impact in the community?
b. What are your messages and communication strategies that will help advance racial equity?

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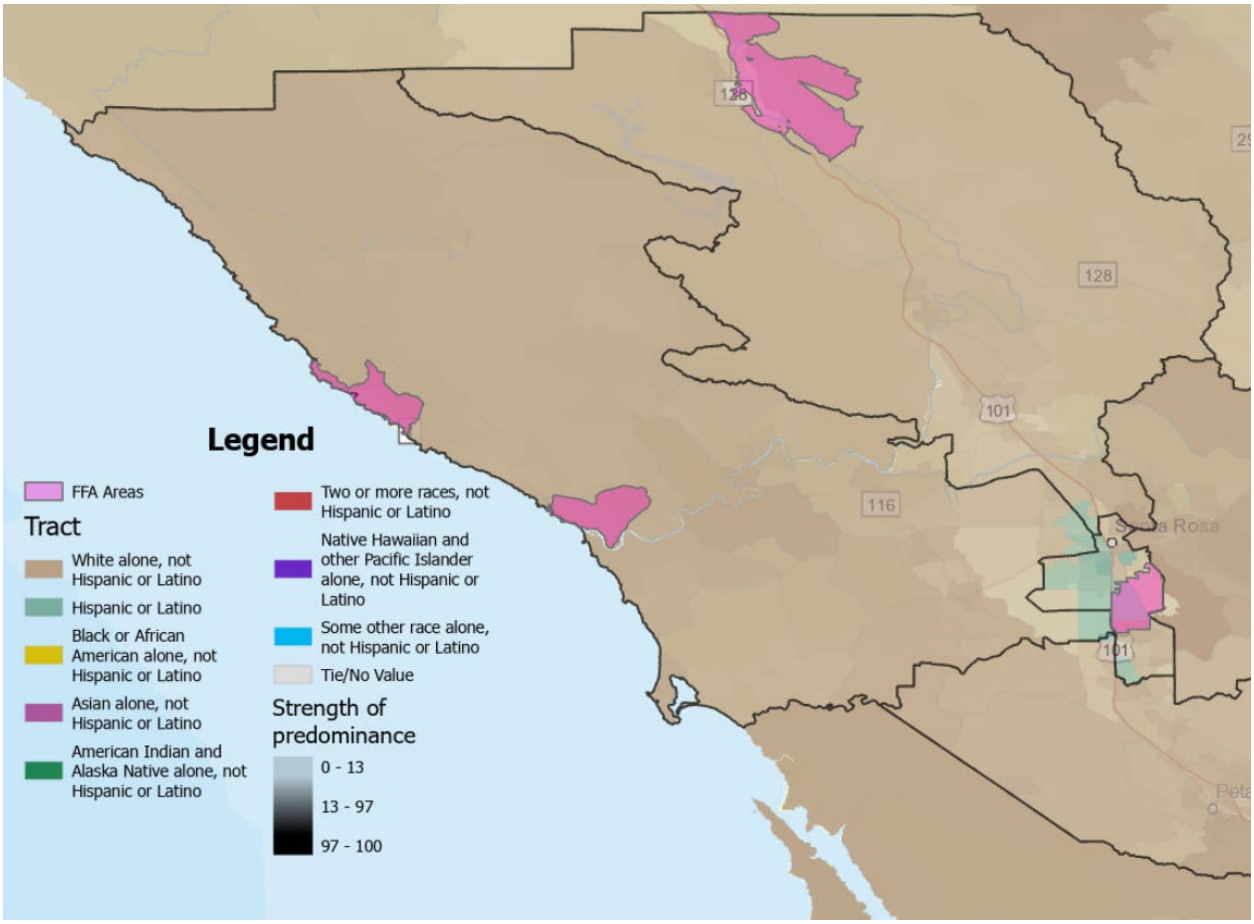
c. How will you continue to partner and deepen relationships with communities to make sure your work to advance racial equity is working and sustainable for the long-haul?

All activities included in this broadband program update are funded by grants which require strict reporting and accountability. We will be tracking our efforts and the outcomes of each initiative. Additionally, the development of our Broadband GIS Hub will allow us to provide updates to the public on infrastructure deployment and digital equity initiatives across the County.

FFA Priority Areas Map