BROADBAND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REPORT

JUNE 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As is the case with governments across the country, Riverside County is actively working to connect its residents to high-speed, affordable internet to facilitate an equitable and seamless transition into the 21st century way of life. From remote work and learning to telehealth and social connectivity, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that a digital future is here to stay and that fast and reliable internet connections are a critical component of that future.

As part of a nationwide initiative to improve the nation's infrastructure through the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA), broadband planning and improvements have become a key priority for the county. The county's recent work in this area builds off the momentum of its 2016 Broadband Master Plan, which it developed following a Board of Supervisors resolution enacted years prior. Leveraging lessons learned from the pandemic, using a new standard for "high-speed internet," and backed by a $64.4 billion federal investment in broadband nationwide, the county is building off and improving on its prior broadband efforts with execution in mind.

Since September 2022, the county conducted a Gaps and Opportunities Assessment to identify the areas of greatest need and solutions tailored to the most unserved and underserved communities. Using the findings from that assessment, the county has since engaged in extensive community and stakeholder engagement. This has enabled the county to collect information about its broadband assets, promote the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), and secure agreements with private partners for shovel-ready broadband expansion projects.

Since this engagement, the county engaged over 26 stakeholders and has deployed a multi-media outreach campaign, making over 32 million impressions county-wide. Many of the county's stakeholders have partnered with Riverside County to deploy ACP awareness to residents. Cumulatively, this has helped the county increase its ACP enrollment numbers by 15% from October 2022 to March 2023. With 147,858 households enrolled in the program, roughly $4.4 million in federal subsidies flow into the county each month through federal subsidy assistance, further demonstrating the significant financial benefit of ACP.

While the county has made successful strides towards expanding broadband access by addressing affordability barriers, it has adopted a holistic approach to closing the digital divide. Firstly, the county's engagement of Internet Service Providers has paved way for open discussions about the feasibility of broadband infrastructure expansion within unserved and underserved communities. This has set up the county to ensure broadband grant dollars are pursued to fund last-mile to-the-home connections.

> **"With 141,654 households enrolled in the ACP program, roughly $4.2 million in federal subsidies flow into the county each month through federal subsidy assistance"**

Secondly, the county's efforts to engage CBOs to assist with grassroots ACP outreach has established a process for future engagement with community partners to promote and facilitate digital inclusion initiatives. Through ongoing efforts, the county noticed gaps within the CBO network in Riverside County that it plans to address to ensure that CBOs are adequately prepared to apply and administer upcoming grant opportunities to execute on broadband digital equity initiatives.

Ensuring all Riverside County residents have broadband access is not an easy endeavor the county can do alone. In the coming months, and years, the county will continue to engage its stakeholders to ramp up capacity to execute strategic broadband initiatives as will be detailed in the county's updated Broadband Master Plan.

On May 10, 2022, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution to promote broadband expansion efforts across the county and bridge the digital divide. Expanding on the county's previous broadband expansion efforts, the Resolution issued an order that:

- Requires the county to receive and file the status update from the Executive Office and RCIT to the Riverside County Broadband Master Plan,
- Directs the Executive Office to establish a broadband committee consisting of county departments and outside organizations to address the digital divide,
- Directs the Executive Office to work with each District on identifying projects and funding that best service their community with internet services, and
- Directs the Executive Office to release a Request for Proposal for a consultant to assist the County of Riverside in identifying and applying for Broadband grant opportunities.

Since September 2022, the county has taken significant strides towards executing this broadband effort. The county, led by Tom Mullen, Chief Data Officer at the Riverside County Information Technology (RCIT), onboarded a consultant team to assist the county with the planning, implementation, and funding of broadband initiatives. The county also established a partnership with the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) to launch a rigorous outreach campaign for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a $14.2 billion federal program that provides $30 subsidies to eligible low-income residents to purchase broadband subscription plans. These outreach efforts are part of the county's contribution to the state's goal of connecting 98% of Californians to the internet[1].

To support these two efforts, the county and its Broadband Team has conducted extensive stakeholder engagement to ensure this outreach represents the input of relevant stakeholders, meaningfully engages the community, and incorporates all initiatives for bridging the digital divide in Riverside County. Stakeholder engagement activities that have taken place since October 2022 and onwards were conducted with the following goals in mind:
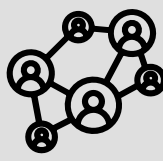
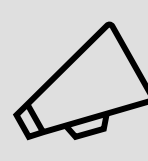| Identify	Catalogue	Coordinate	Promote	Partner
broadband and broadband adjacent activities across the County. This includes broadband activities for infrastructure deployment as well as digital literacy measures.	broadband efforts between County departments, agencies, partners, and stakeholders, and identify partnerships where possible.	activities across the County so they can be further expanded and scaled upon through the pursuit of broadband related grant opportunities.	the Affordable Connectivity Program and increase enrollment of ACP eligible households in Riverside.	with stakeholders for ACP outreach by working alongside other trusted County departments and agencies that frequently work with and serve qualifying populations.

1   AB-1665 Telecommunications: California Advanced Services Fund, 2017-2018 California Legislative Session

METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE:

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, the county thought deeply about which groups to engage and from whom to solicit input into the broadband planning exercise. The county called upon its membership in numerous organizations, including other government departments and agencies for feedback.

In October 2022 the county's Broadband Team kicked off its stakeholder engagement initiative by convening the RivCo Broadband Committee, a group comprised of county departments and agencies, as advised by the Board of Supervisors. The RivCo Broadband Committee's mission is to provide a platform which the Broadband Team is to use to inform the county about any key broadband initiatives, particularly those that necessitate support and involvement from other local governing bodies. The RivCo Broadband Committee also provides a forum for county departments and agencies to share the priorities they would like the team to consider in its broadband planning efforts as well as to explore potential partnerships for this broadband effort. The county intends for its broadband initiatives to be impactful and far-reaching, and to function as a collaborative effort involving all county stakeholders.

Following this kick-off, the county evaluated all stakeholders in its ecosystem, including incorporated cities within Riverside County, regional bodies in which the county is a member, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and community organizations. This assessment was performed with a focus on engagements that were likely to lead to partnerships that can bring broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved residents, maximize reach of ACP outreach campaign, and help the county identify which parties are in possession of data the county needs to catalogue its broadband assets. To accomplish this, the county selected a group of cities, departments and agencies, regional bodies, ISPs, and community organizations to engage based on the following considerations:

1. **Engagement with Riverside County residents, particularly ACP qualifying target populations:**

An important goal of the county's stakeholder engagement was to promote ACP and increase enrollment of eligible households in the program. To that end, the county worked to engage departments and organizations that regularly connect with and serve residents, particularly those receiving low-income qualifying benefits. Using this strategy, the county was able to build off of existing tools and resources to conduct this outreach. The county focused its efforts on engaging organizations that work with groups that are eligible for benefits under ACP. ACP-eligible households are those with household income at or below 200% of the federal poverty line, and/or those receiving the following benefits:

- CalFresh
- LifeLine
- Pell Grant
- NSLP (Free or Reduced Lunch Program)
- Medi-Cal or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Public housing
- Veteran's pensions

2. **Existing broadband providers with established networks and infrastructure in Riverside County:** One of the county's ultimate goals is to expand broadband infrastructure through infrastructure deployment projects. This would be a large endeavor, both technically and financially, and the county is not equipped to accomplish this alone. Engaging ISPs is critical for launching broadband infrastructure projects that can expand and improve internet service in Riverside County. Working alongside existing ISPs that already have a footprint in the county helps both the county and ISPs maximize the use of existing infrastructure and incorporate a customer base that can incentivize investment in additional infrastructure alongside broadband grant dollars.

3. **Possession of broadband infrastructure and digital assets:** The first step of the county's effort to expand broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved communities was to understand the state of broadband in the county and the region through its Gaps and Opportunities Assessment. To conduct this analysis, the county evaluated publicly available survey and census data from the Federal Communications Commission and the American Community Survey. As part of this exercise, the county identified its broadband resources by speaking to stakeholders that actively provided broadband or broadband-adject services. The county accomplished this by engaging stakeholders that were likely to possess any data relating to broadband infrastructure, digital equity assets, utility subsidies, future plans for infrastructure expansion, and any other information that could be useful in the broadband planning process.

GOALS FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

Each stakeholder played a key role in our multi-faceted initiative to expand broadband access. We engaged seven types of stakeholders: internal county departments, supervisorial districts, incorporated cities across Riverside County, regional bodies, Internet Service Providers, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and community members. These stakeholders ultimately helped the county accomplish the following:

- Identify broadband gaps and needs
- Share information on broadband services
- Secure broadband partnerships
- Conduct ACP outreach
- Execute digital inclusion programming in partnership with the county

The figure below indicates the goals supported by our engagement with stakeholder.

	Identify broadband gaps and needs	Share information on broadband services	Secure broadband partnerships	Conduct ACP outreach	Execute digital inclusion
Internal County Departments	●	●	●	●	●
Board of Supervisors	●			●	
Incorporated Cities		●	●	●	
Regional Bodies	●	●	●	●	
Internet Service Providers		●	●	●	
Community Based Organizations			●	●	●
Community Members	●			●	

ROLE PLAYED BY EACH TYPE OF STAKEHOLDER:

Internal County Departments

County departments helped identify and catalogue broadband activities around the county, facilitated outreach to their ACP-eligible customers, and partnered with the county's Broadband Team to host in-person ACP enrollment events.

Board of Supervisors

The County's Broadband Team reported all updates on broadband efforts approved by Board Resolution 3.45 to the Board of Supervisors . Additionally, the District Supervisors were informed about the ACP program and received meaningful metrics and insights about the reach of the ACP Outreach Campaign in each district and across the county.

Incorporated Cities

Riverside County's incorporated cities worked with the county to identify existing and/or potential broadband infrastructure projects that could result in partnerships. The county also partnered with incorporated cities to maximize the reach of ACP outreach activities to their respective residents.

Regional Bodies

The county's Broadband Team worked with regional bodies to coordinate ACP outreach and to facilitate broadband infrastructure partnerships among regional body members.

Internet Service Providers

The Riverside County Broadband Team engaged ISPs serving the county service area to gauge their interest in expanding and/or upgrading their broadband network. The county's engagement encouraged infrastructure deployment and partnerships to expand the network by pursuing grants in partnership with ISPs.

Community Based Organizations

The county worked with CBOs to spread awareness about the Affordable Connectivity Program and to help residents enroll at County organized in-person enrollment events. The county leveraged the trust and recognition that CBOs have within their communities to increase turnout and enrollment.

Community Members

The county engaged community members, with a focus on targeting ACP-eligible communities through social media platforms, community anchor institutions, and community events. Much of the county's engagement was focused on increasing ACP enrollment for eligible households in Riverside County.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, the county established several methods of outreach to most effectively reach stakeholders in a manner most natural to them. For government-facing partners, the county convened in a formal setting to allow for data sharing and collaborative discussions. When engaging the community, the county utilized multiple forms of media communication to maximize the reach of our messaging. This resulted in a nine-pronged approach for the stakeholder and community engagement process, which is illustrated below.

Radio Advertising

Television Advertising

Out of Home Advertising

1-on-1 Stakeholder Interviews

Social Media Advertising

Community Engagement

Stakeholder Engagement

Direct Mail

Group Stakeholder Meetings

ACP Enrollment Call Center

In-Person ACP Outreach Events

TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS:

Riverside County ran television advertisements in both English and Spanish to increase awareness about ACP and inform residents of available county resources to help them enroll. Advertisements were broadcast on the following channels:

- KPSP Channel 2 CBS (Palm Springs)
- KDFX 11 FOX (Palm Springs)
- KESQ Channel 3 ABC (Palm Springs)
- KCWQ Channel 5 (Palm Springs)
- KTLA Channel 5 (Los Angeles)
- KVEA Channel 52 Telemundo (Los Angeles)

The ACP television advertisement strategy targeted the Palm Springs designated market area (DMA), which covers all of Riverside County, instead of the broader coverage of the Los Angeles DMA. This strategy allowed for more focused and effective advertising within Riverside County.

PLATFORM

Television ads were run in both English and Spanish on CBS Channel 2, ACB Channel 3, KESQ Channel 5, KTLA Channel 5, Fox Channel 11, and Telemundo Channel 52.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

RADIO ADVERTISEMENTS:

The County broadcasted ACP awareness advertisements in both English and Spanish on KOLA FM 99.9 and KRQB FM 96.1. In using radio advertisements, the county sought to capture low-income and/or Spanish speaking viewers. As a result, the county chose to air ACP advertising on KRQB GM 96.1 due to its majority Hispanic viewership. The radio also draws many viewers that may be eligible for ACP given that 47% have a household income of below $50,000. While KOLA FM 99.9 broadcasts in English, 43% of its viewers have a household income below $50,000.

Ultimately, these two radio stations were the most opportune stations for the county given that they are both the top Spanish and English-speaking radio stations in the Inland Empire. Furthermore, both stations provided the county the opportunity to conduct on-air interviews hosted by station talents. This further enabled the ACP outreach campaign to increase brand awareness and reach the target audience at no additional cost.

PLATFORM

Radio ads were run on KOLA FM 99.9 and KRQB FM 96.1 in both English and Spanish, respectively.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

OUT OF HOME (OOH) ADVERTISEMENTS:

From September 2022 to March 2023, the County deployed advertisements on 16 billboards and six bus shelters to increase awareness about ACP. This marketing approach was intended to reach residents that may not regularly have exposure to digital mediums such as television and social media. Billboards and bus shelters were intentionally placed in locations that had a high density of ACP-eligible households that were not yet enrolled in the program. Billboards were also placed in areas regularly frequented by residents such as highways and freeways. As was the case with the county's other forms of advertising, billboards were deployed in both English and Spanish. Billboards and bus shelters were placed in the following locations:

BILLBOARDS	BUS SHELTERS
Etiwanda Es 290ft S/O 54th F/S - 2	Riverside Fwy Es 105.6ft S/O Polk F/S-1
Van Buren Sl .2m E/O Mockingbird	6th Ns 1000ft E/O Grand F/W – 2
I-215 Wl .4m S/O Us 60, Riverside	Mckinley Ws 100ft N/O Griffen F/N – 1
Limonite & Cucalyptus Se (Tp) F/W	Smith Ws 100ft S/O De Luna F/N – 1
Mission Boulevard And Wallace Nw (Tp) F/W	Magnolia Ss 100ft E/O Kellogg F/W – 1
Mission Ns 332ft W/O Avalon	6th Ns 100ft W/O Buena Vista F/E – 1
Grapefruit Bl Wl 300'S/O Ave48 Sf	
I-10 S/L .6mi W/O Gene Autry Tr Ef	
Hwy 86s El 1.4m S/O Dillon Rd Sf	
Gene Autry Wl .9 Mi N/O Vista Chino Sf	
Date Palm Dr Wl .11 Mi N/O Vista Chino Nf	
Mesquite Nl .6m E/O Gene Autry Wf	
Van Buren Sl .3m E/O Mockingbird Lane	
Van Buren Ws 150ft N/O 56th F/N – 1	
Van Buren Sl .3m W/O Mockingbird Lane	
Limonite & Eucalyptus Se (Tp) F/W	
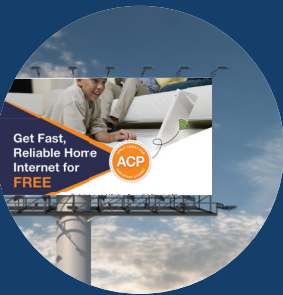
PLATFORM

Seventeen billboards and five bus shelters were posted with ACP marketing across Riverside County targeting regions with the highest count of eligible households. Out of Home advertisements were posted in English and Spanish.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS:

One of the biggest forums for ACP marketing occurred on social media. This campaign was intended to reach residents that were already online but may struggle with the high cost of their internet subscription plan and digital devices. The county leveraged its existing online presence, including the RivCo website and the county's Facebook page. Through the partnerships established with other departments and regional bodies, the county was able to boost the campaign's impact by sharing the message on each organization's social media page. When appropriate, the county created a social press kit to craft a message to specific populations that each organization served. The social press kit targeted messaging to key populations eligible for ACP, including:

- K-12 students
- College students
- CalFresh, Medi-Cal, Lifeline, and SSI benefit recipients
- Veterans' Services
- Medi-Cal and WIC recipients
- Seniors

PLATFORM

ACP information posts were shared on Facebook and YouTube across RivCo platforms as well as social sites of partner cities, regional bodies, and County departments to educate and inform.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

DIRECT MAIL:

In addition to reaching residents through digital channels, Riverside County also made an effort to reach residents where they are: home. The county targeted direct mail to ACP-eligible households that have yet to sign up for the program. The county began deploying direct mail in February 2023, sending out 20,000 pieces to as many households from February to March. The county plans to follow up with a second round of direct mail outreach in the latter half of the year with another 75,158 scheduled between May to June 2023. This approach will send out direct mail containing information about the Affordable Connectivity Program once, and in some cases, twice to eligible residents.

PLATFORM

Riverside County deployed direct mail to residence of ACP-eligible households that have yet to enroll in the program. Mail contained information about ACP and instructions on how to enroll.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

RIVERSIDE ACP CALL CENTER HOTLINE:

The county established a call center hotline (866-922-1016) specifically to assist Riverside County residents in ACP enrollment. The call center, operated by the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF), is staffed by trained agents that enroll eligible callers over the phone. All related advertising, including television, radio, and social media, included the call center hotline number in order to direct eligible residents to a resource that can assist them with enrollment.

PLATFORM

Riverside County established a call center hotline, 866-922-1016, to help callers enroll in ACP in real time.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

IN-PERSON COMMUNITY EVENTS:

The county's community and stakeholder engagement strategy aimed not only to increase awareness about ACP, but also to deploy effective marketing that measurably increased successful program enrollment. To do this, the county supplemented its ACP marketing campaign with other outlets through which residents could enroll. In addition to establishing the ACP call center hotline, the county also held a number of in-person enrollment events. ACP events were staffed by partnering CBOs that had received training on ACP. These events were often held at community fairs and events organized by partnering county organizations and nonprofits. This integrated approach helped to build trust and engagement within the community and ensure effective communication about ACP. As of March 2023, the county has hosted four such in-person events, but plans to host many more as it ramps up its in-person outreach beginning in April.

PLATFORM

Riverside County deployed CBOs to community events across the County to promote ACP and in some cases, helped enroll eligible residents with required documents on the spot.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

ONE-ON-ONE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS:

The bulk of the stakeholder engagement was conducted through intimate one-on-one interviews and subsequent follow-up discussions, particularly with stakeholders identified as having a strong connection to ACP-eligible target populations. These interviews allowed the county to cultivate strong relationships to support the ACP outreach campaign as well as its overall broadband expansion efforts. The findings from these discussions assisted the Broadband Team in cataloguing existing broadband resources across the county and identifying challenges to be addressed. The county cross-referenced identified needs with grant opportunities, which the Broadband Team is currently tracking to identify appropriate funding to address gaps. The county also shared relevant grant opportunities with stakeholders to connect them to funding.

PLATFORM

Riverside County set up one-on-one meetings with identified stakeholders to discuss broadband efforts across the region, establish partnerships where possible, and promote ACP.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

GROUP STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS:

In addition to engaging stakeholders in one-on-one discussions, the county also convened large group stakeholder meetings, most notably with the RivCo Broadband Committee. Group stakeholder meetings were intended to provide regular updates to county organizations and stakeholders on broadband-related activities.

Furthermore, the county regularly attended meetings across the state to participate in regional and statewide broadband planning discussions. For instance, the county was a participating member of Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) SoCal Transformation Group, where it discussed how the regional body planned to initiate its broadband initiatives across the region, which includes Riverside County.

Additionally, the county attended many of the State's Digital Equity statewide planning sessions and outcome area working groups. These meetings proved to be important forums for collaboration and opportunities to advocate for broadband policies that considered the County's unique circumstances.

PLATFORM

Group stakeholder meetings informed county departments and agencies about planned broadband planning efforts and provided a platform to share thoughts and potential collaboration with the Broadband Team.

TARGET AUDIENCE

ACP-eligible households

CONDUCTING ACP OUTREACH

To measure the success of our outreach, the county closely monitored metrics, particularly those that tracked the success of the ACP outreach campaign's media strategy. Ultimately, success for the county meant increasing enrollment of ACP-eligible households in the program.

Since the launch of the ACP media campaign in October 2022, Riverside County has seen a remarkable increase in program enrollment each month, as shown in the figure below. In total, ACP enrollment has increased by 18,388 households between October 2022 and March 2023, with enrollment driven by three platforms advertised by the county: the Riverside County specific ACP call center hotline (866-922-1016), in-person enrollment events, and the online web application portal.

ACP ENROLLMENT

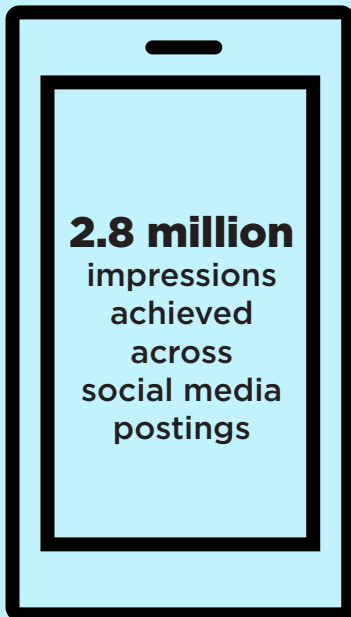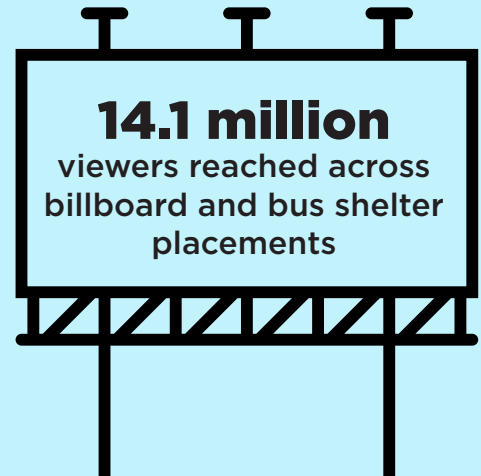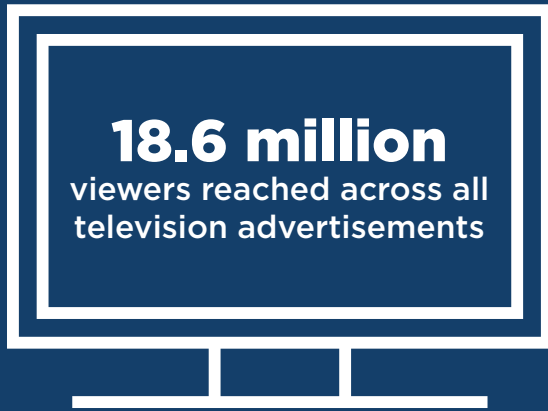|	October 2022	November 2022	December 2022	January 2023	February 2023	March 2023
Call Center	62	38	109	107	106	134
In-Person Events	32	-	-	-	-	21
Online Web Application	76	638	862	153	1013	1282
Total	170	676	971	260	1119	1437

Furthermore, the county attempted to track the various mechanisms of advertising used across television, radio, billboards, and social media to determine where call center traffic was coming from. Television advertisements, conducted in English and Spanish, drove the most traffic at 898 calls throughout the October 2022- March 2023 reporting period.

ORIGIN OF TRAFFIC TO RIVERSIDE COUNTY ACP CALL CENTER

Television	Radio	Digital	Flyers	Billboards	Unattributable
898	35	206	54	235	557

Finally, the county tracked the reach of its billboard, social media, television, and in-person advertising. One of the biggest challenges to ACP enrollment is awareness by eligible households, particularly those that may not speak English well or do not have a digital footprint. The county's multi-pronged approach to ACP outreach ensures that it is using a mixed method of digital and "physical" advertising to reach residents through the means most accessible to them. The county will continue to monitor the success of its ACP outreach and media strategy to ensure that it is strategically allocating funding to successful methods of outreach. The figure below demonstrates the results of the ACP Outreach Campaign.

Overall, the total number of enrolled households in Riverside County stands at 147,858 households as of March 2023. This represents a 20% increase from the number of households enrolled in ACP in October 2022 when this outreach initially kicked off. In total, ACP currently brings in $4.4 million per month into the county through federal subsidies from the number of households enrolled. This further demonstrates ACP's economic value, which has the potential to grow as the county ramps up its ACP outreach efforts to enroll the remainder of ACP-eligible households.

18.6 million
viewers reached across all television advertisements

14.1 million
viewers reached across billboard and bus shelter placements

2.8 million
impressions achieved across social media postings

4 in-person
enrollment events that enrolled
53 households
in ACP

2.7 million
impressions across YouTube advertisements
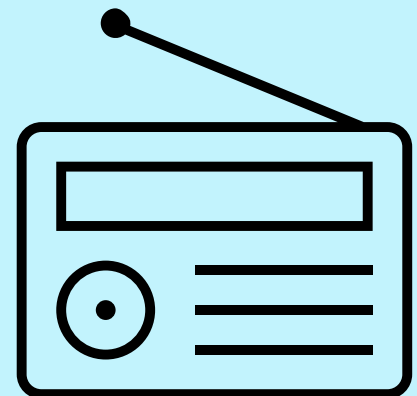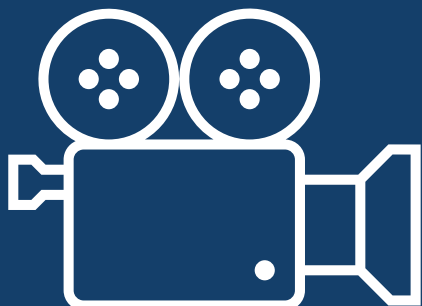
1.9 million
impressions through radio advertising

IDENTIFYING BROADBAND GAPS AND NEEDS:

The county's stakeholder outreach strategy proven to be a supplementary factor to our Gaps and Opportunities Assessment that captures the current state of broadband in Riverside, while specifically identifying the areas of need and opportunities to address them. Furthermore, outreach efforts have helped the county catalogue its assets for future use and established relationships with libraries, economic development, social services, and workforce solutions agencies, among other entities. These partnerships will ultimately assist the county in its greater broadband adoption strategy, part of which includes ACP outreach and enrollment. In addition to helping low-income residents enroll in an affordable internet subscription plan, established partnerships will eventually evolve to broader digital adoption and digital literacy programming such as trainings and resources to upskill residents.

SHARING INFORMATION ON BROADBAND PROJECTS:

By engaging stakeholders, the county has been able to share out and in turn, receive other sources of data that speak to the presence of broadband infrastructure across the county as well as the level of services experienced by communities. Additionally, through these conversations, the county has also been informed about upcoming or planned broadband infrastructure projects across the county such as the Coachella Valley Association of Governments' (CVAG) planned CV-Synchronization (CV-Sync) project across the Coachella Valley, as well as Jurupa Valley's upcoming Traffic Lights Synchronization project which will lay out a fiber backbone once completed. These insights have helped the county identify priority areas and understand these projects' progress in addressing the needs of these aforementioned communities.

Additionally, by engaging ISPs the county has been able to obtain additional information about the status of major providers' networks throughout Riverside County. This engagement has facilitated discussions about the areas of greatest need in the county, and about activities the county can undertake to support and assist in planning shovel-ready broadband deployment projects that take advantage of existing infrastructure.

FORGING BROADBAND PARTNERSHIPS:

As a result of this stakeholder engagement, the county established relationships with 26 organizations across the stakeholders engaged. This is especially important as it helps the county maximize its outreach by using each partner's respective platforms and reach different communities. Furthermore, the county has worked with two CBOs to hold in-person enrollment events, a number that is expected to grow as we ramp up our in-person activities in April 2023.

SECURING BROADBAND FUNDING:

In December 2022, the CPUC awarded the county a $500,000 Local Agency Technical Assistance grant to support its broadband planning work. This funding will cover the following activities:

- Gaps & Opportunities Assessment
- Stakeholder engagement
- Updated Broadband Master Plan
- Tracking of funding opportunities and grant writing

As part of this initiative, the county plans to pursue additional grant opportunities as they arise. The county is currently tracking broadband-related state and federal funding opportunities and will pursue them individually or in partnership with other stakeholders to maximize funding for broadband initiatives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

After engaging 26 organizations, and counting, the county identified several key takeaways that were not evident through research or data analysis alone. The stakeholder engagement process has yielded valuable insights for the Broadband Team to consider as it continues to embark on the long-term effort to expand broadband availability and adoption. The county's main discoveries through the stakeholder engagement conducted so far include the following:

1 | Internet Service Providers are interested in broadband infrastructure projects that provide a Return on Investment (ROI) and leverage existing and upcoming funding programs.

While ISPs demonstrate interest in expanding their networks in Riverside County, it is also important to recognize that there is growing demand for their involvement in expansion efforts across the nation. Maximizing available state and federal funding opportunities is the county's best mechanism to attract existing ISPs to upgrade and expand their networks. The county plans to closely monitor the status of funding programs and will coordinate with ISPs with the goal of submitting grant applications that will fund shovel-ready projects in Riverside County.

2 | Some Internet Service Providers face funding limitations due to their technology foundations as a result of policy preference towards fiber.

Much of the state and federal funding programs that currently fund broadband infrastructure promote high-speed internet speed delivery requirements at 100/20 Mbps or 100/100Mbps. Due to this, funding programs specify that funding will prioritize middle-mile and last-mile fiber deployment projects. While there are some ISPs that can benefit from this, there are a number of other ISPs that solely deliver service with alternative technologies such as fixed wireless. These ISPs often face a difficult time receiving funding due to the aforementioned preference for fiber.

While the county promotes fiber-first solutions when possible, there are unserved and underserved areas throughout the county, and the country, where this is not financially feasible. The county hopes to strategize and establish partnerships to serve these communities through alternative technology means, some of which could be fixed wireless. The county recognizes that this technology bias can hinder some Riverside County communities from being served and plans to encourage the state to allow for a mechanism in which non-fiber projects can be funded and deployed in an area in which fiber is not proposed or financially feasible.

3   Riverside County has a disjointed CBO network, which can lead to challenges in scaling ACP outreach and digital literacy programming in the future.

In engaging the Riverside community to promote ACP, the county relied on Community Based Organizations to staff in-person events intended to encourage residents to enroll in the program. Utilizing CBOs allows the county to call upon a trusted source for many residents, especially those that may not speak English. This strategy also allows the county to utilize the resources of CBOs in order to communicate with eligible populations that it otherwise may have challenges in reaching. While the county was able to partner with CBOs, one thing is clear: there are opportunities for the county to grow its CBO network. This is especially important as state and federal funding for digital equity initiatives become available, as many of these opportunities will be available for CBOs. Riverside County CBOs will need to grow their capacity to apply for grants and administer digital literacy and other adoption programming in Riverside. On the other hand, the county can also use this as an opportunity to centralize resources around CBOs operating within the county to truly understand who is operating in the region, where the network needs to grow, and how to best work alongside CBOs on a collective journey to close the digital divide.

4   Riverside County has conducted some digital literacy programming in the past but does not currently have enough to reflect the need based on broadband adoption data.

An understanding of how to use the internet and operate advanced digital devices is critical for digital adoption. This is especially true for certain populations that may find digital adoption an especially challenging barrier, including older populations and individuals with limited English proficiency. Digital literacy programming is an important resource to help bridge these challenges and promote digital adoption. This is in turn opens other opportunities from digital learning to remote work and social connectivity. While the county has conducted some digital literacy programming in the past, these efforts became more difficult to administer during the pandemic, and consequently, some of these resources are no longer available. As the county promotes digital adoption, it will need to provide a mix of in-person and virtual programming for residents who wish to embrace a digital future and make the most of their broadband access.

NEXT STEPS

The county is currently wrapping up its broadband current state assessment which will be packaged into a public-facing Gaps and Opportunities Report. Following this, the county will use the assessment to inform the updates it makes to the new Broadband Master Plan which will detail the county's strategies for addressing the identified opportunities. While the county will complete its initial findings by Summer 2023, it will still continue to engage its stakeholders particularly as it begins executing on strategic initiatives and ramping up ACP outreach.

From May 2023 onwards, the county will especially be focusing its efforts on coordinating and holding in-person enrollment events in addition to ongoing ACP outreach efforts. As the summer approaches, it will engage public school districts to ensure that students remain connected while school is not in session. The county will also look for opportunities to partner with other regional stakeholders to coordinate a targeted regional approach to spread awareness about ACP.

While ACP will continue to be a target activity for the months and years to come, stakeholder engagement will expand to include a host of other strategic priorities as the county builds up capacity to address broadband expansion. Future engagement will include public-private partnerships to deploy infrastructure, coordination with CBOs and public agencies to implement digital inclusion initiatives, and grant submissions with qualifying partners for relevant broadband opportunities, to name a few.

	1-on-1 Stakeholder Interviews	ACP Outreach and Advertising
County Departments		
Riverside County Office of Education	•	•
Riverside County Office on Aging	•	•
Riverside County Veteran's Services	•	•
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	•	•
Riverside County Economic Development Agency	•	•
Riverside County Library System	•	•
Riverside County Housing and Workforce Solutions	•	•
Riverside County Department of Public Social Services	•	•
Riverside County Department of Child Support	•	•
Incorporated Cities		
City of Indio	•	•
City of Jurupa Valley	•	•
Board of Supervisors		
County Board of Supervisors	•	•
Regional Bodies		
Coachella Association of Governments	•	•
Western Riverside Council of Governments	•	•
Inland Empire Regional Broadband Consortium	•	
Southern California Association of Governments	•	•
Internet Service Providers		
Internet Service Providers – Provider 1	•	
Internet Service Providers – Provider 2	•	
Internet Service Providers – Provider 3	•	
Internet Service Providers – Provider 4	•	
Internet Service Providers – Provider 5	•	
Community Based Organizations		
Sigma Beta Xi (SBX)		•
Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP)		•
California Farmworker Association		•
First5 Riverside		•
AGIF/Nube Educational Foundation		•
Riverside County Residents		