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Broadband Deployment Getting a Boost in San Diego



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July 12, 2012 By *Melanie Glover*

Supported by a \$450,000 grant from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), the San Diego Imperial Regional Broadband Consortium (SDIRBC) is

embarking on a three-year plan to [expand deployment and adoption of broadband](#) specifically for education, health and safety, and economic development within San Diego and Imperial counties.

The SDIRBC is currently using the \$150,000 allotted for the first year to study the unique challenges of rural San Diego, identifying key regions where adoption and access is low. So far, consortium leaders have identified Warner Springs, Julian and a strip of tribal land in east San Diego County as focus areas.

The group is continuing to map disconnected and low-adoption areas in Imperial County. In the fall, SDIRBC will work with the Imperial County Office of Education to distribute surveys regarding broadband access in back-to-school packages for new students, while conducting other measuring methods.

Bringing access to remote and isolated communities in these regions is a priority for the group, according to SDIRBC Project Leader Christina Luhn.

"It's important to make sure scarce dollars are used effectively," she said. "Once you get through El Centro you have pockets of people that are beyond anything other than dial-up."

The SDIRBC received funding for the project in Feb. 2012 through a California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Rural and Urban Broadband grant alongside six more consortia developing plans to advance broadband deployment, access and adoption throughout California. In December 2011, the CPUC approved year one budgets and three-year budget allowances for seven other regional consortia, totaling 14 groups in California approved for \$2.75 million collectively.

The San Diego consortia is also building awareness about CASF's Broadband Infrastructure and Revolving Loan Accounts, which supplies funding to providers for broadband deployment. The deadline for the first application window for unserved area projects was extended to Oct. 1, 2012, while underserved area and hybrid (both un- and underserved) areas have a new deadline of Feb. 13, 2013.

According to SDIRBC representatives, two providers have expressed interest in applying for the CASF funding for service within the consortium's jurisdiction: a DSL provider based in Yuma as well as satellite provider ViaSat.

This brings up another step in SDIRBC's action plan: creating a clear definition of broadband by determining a baseline or "lowest common denominator" for broadband speeds.

"While satellite might be a debatable 'broadband' technology, the provider has insured us that they can overcome any latency issues," said Jeff Hancock, executive director of San Diego Futures Foundation, the consortium's fiscal agent. "Defining broadband is going to be a moving target, as applications and uses evolve and the demand for faster speed goes up."

According to California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF)—the group lending technical assistance, support and resources to regional consortia in the state — 72 percent of California has adopted broadband — that's 10 percent above the rest of the U.S.

CETF's goal is 80 percent by 2015.

"That last 8 percent is the hardest," said CETF spokesperson Mary Anne Ostrom. "But with the efforts of CASF-funded regional consortia, we fully expect to meet and beat this goal."

This story was originally posted on [Techwire](#).

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