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Financial grants help San Diego group expand broadband deployment

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The San Diego Imperial Regional Broadband Consortium (SDIRBC) can continue its efforts to develop a three-year plan to expand its broadband deployment to rural and unserved areas in San Diego and Imperial Counties thanks to \$450,000 in grant money from the California Public Utilities Commission.

The latest funds come on top of \$150,000 already allotted to the SDIRBC for use identifying key regions of low and access and, logically, adoption of broadband services.

The study has found a need for broadband—specifically targeted for education, health and safety and economic development—in Warner Springs, Julian and a strip of tribal land in east San Diego County, according to a story in *Government Technology*.

"It's important to make sure scarce dollars are used effectively," said SDIRBC project leader Christina Luhn in the story. "You have pockets of people that are beyond anything other than dial-up."

The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) which is a group lending technical assistance and resources to regional consortia such as SDIRBC, said that 72 percent of California has adopted broadband which, again according to CETF, is about 10 percent higher than the rest of the U.S. CETF has a goal of 80 percent penetration by 2015.

The SDIRBC has been busily gathering funds to do something about the lack of broadband in its territory. In February, it received money through a California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Rural and Urban Broadband grant and it's now building awareness about CASF's broadband infrastructure and revolving loan accounts to help broadband service providers work on their deployment plans.

So far, SDIRBC said, a DSL provider from Yuma and satellite provider ViaSat have expressed interest in seeking the money—meaning two plays that sit on the fringes of the broadband definition might be the first to provide broadband to these areas.

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

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