



# Closing Broadband Gaps Remains Critical, With Or Without A Pandemic

With the COVID pandemic surging into 2022 and complicating recovery and a return to normalcy, the conversation about closing the digital divide remains a critical component of closing equity gaps in California. Luckily, the conversation is resulting in more than just words thanks to efforts across the state, both in urban and rural areas.

At the most recent California Economic Summit in Monterey, a network of leaders continued a fruitful collaboration that drove legislative wins and other work forward. During the Summit and in the video above, we talked about expanding broadband access with **Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry**, who authored broadband bills signed into law last year; **Glenda Humiston**, vice president at University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources; and **Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula**, representing southern and western Fresno County.

**California in Good Position for Funding**

Building on last year's broadband wins — like the \$6 billion investment into creating a robust state middle-mile network — the Summit's Expanding Broadband for All Work Group will pivot this year to supporting implementation efforts in tandem with new federal funding streams.

On a recent webinar, elected officials and broadband experts said California is actually well positioned to benefit from the federal funds included in last year's bipartisan infrastructure deal.

“California is a little bit ahead of the game because of how long we've been at this,” said U.S. Senator Alex Padilla, during the “[Federal Infrastructure Funds for California: Broadband and Beyond](https://cafwd.org/news/california-in-good-position-to-secure-federal-infrastructure-funds-for-broadband/)” event presented by CA FWD and the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF [\[https://www.cetfund.org/\]](https://www.cetfund.org/)).

## **Building the Middle-Mile**

Additionally, the state has [pinpointed 18 initial projects](https://cafwd.org/news/california-moves-swiftly-to-advance-broadband-solutions/) in diverse regions of the state where the early work on the middle-mile network will commence, with many more routes to be identified in 2022. The 18 projects were chosen by the state to jumpstart the \$6 billion investment in middle-mile infrastructure, which was signed by Governor Newsom in 2021 and supported by the California Forward Action Fund and the California Stewardship Network, working in coalition with partners through the California Economic Summit.

## **Closing Community Gaps**

The Summit's Broadband for All Work Group also this year will support the work of the Regional Broadband Consortia to tailor broadband access solutions to community needs.

And finally, CA FWD's Young Leaders Advisory Council [will be working on a broadband access project \[https://cafwd.org/news/young-leaders-collaborate-to-envision-broadband-for-all-in-california/\]](https://cafwd.org/news/young-leaders-collaborate-to-envision-broadband-for-all-in-california/) for Tuolumne County, developing outreach strategies to target and survey students, ages 13-18, and senior adults ages 65 and above, two groups facing distinct challenges in having adequate internet access.

The Council is working in partnership with lead contractor NEO Connect to provide necessary data and recommendations to inform the County's Broadband Roadmap strategy.

Helping to close the digital divide has been a big priority of the Council. This project allows young leaders to lend their voices and experiences to help inform community outreach strategies in a region where our [California Dream Index indicator on broadband access shows \[https://www.cadreamindex.org/geography/sierra-nevada/\]](https://www.cadreamindex.org/geography/sierra-nevada/) that 17% of the population in the Sierra Nevada lack broadband internet, higher than the state's average of 13%.

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