

Candid Conversation On Broadband Highlights Need For Collaboration To Deliver On New Influx Of Funding



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The recent infusion of state and federal dollars aimed at expanding broadband networks and services has been massive and unprecedented. Taking full advantage of these funding streams now requires similarly unprecedented engagement and partnering across all sectors, according to stakeholders convened last week by California Forward (CA FWD) and the [California Emerging Technology Fund](https://www.cetfund.org/) (CETF). Without such collaboration, the state will be hard pressed to swiftly and efficiently deliver on the promise of these legacy investments.

The practical and forward-looking conversation focused on problem-solving and priorities for achieving new partnerships and effective outcomes. It included many of the more than 40 sponsor organizations of a widely attended [virtual briefing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxmHFoJ8rEk) by U.S. Senator Alex Padilla and other leaders on Nov. 30, 2021, called “Federal Infrastructure Funds for California: Broadband and Beyond.” During that webinar, participants learned about the \$65 billion in broadband funding contained within the federal [Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/06/fact-sheet-the-bipartisan-infrastructure-deal/) (IIJA), with a large share expected to go to California.

During last week's follow-up convening of sponsor organizations, participants included a diverse mix of representatives from local, regional, and state governing and planning agencies; private industry; California Regional Broadband Consortia; and civic and nonprofit organizations. The discussion was led by CETF President and CEO Sunne Wright McPeak and CA FWD CEO Micah Weinberg.

Weinberg called the two-hour conversation "diverse and candid" with valuable learnings and insights, including the need for projects to be expedited in the months ahead.

"This is a human imperative, a community imperative, and a climate imperative that cannot be delayed," Weinberg said when reflecting on the event. "We don't have years to wait."

McPeak said local governments and communities need assistance on both the deployment and adoption fronts, and that partnerships involving Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Broadband Consortia, and numerous other stakeholders will make a difference. Adequate funding, resources and staffing are needed for these efforts.

During the discussion, stakeholders shared their priorities in two key contexts: Deployment of infrastructure and ensuring customers have affordable access to broadband service.

Participants acknowledged the welcome resources now flowing to solve the digital crisis – including California's historic \$6 billion [investment](https://cafwd.org/news/statewide-coalition-applauds-historic-broadband-investment/) [https://cafwd.org/news/statewide-coalition-applauds-historic-broadband-investment/] for middle-mile and last-mile infrastructure development. But they described a number of challenges that must be overcome to ensure that the new dollars will result in swiftly and efficiently executed projects and

widespread adoption of broadband by all who lack adequate and affordable service.

Among the themes that emerged during the convening:

- **Partnerships across sectors** are critical to swift and cost-effective deployment. This cannot be achieved without a spirit of openness and development of more formalized processes to bring together all stakeholders, including independent service providers, local governments, community-based organizations, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and Regional Broadband Consortia.
- Accessing the new funding streams can be difficult. Local and regional communities need **technical assistance and information for accessing new resources** to ensure that deployment investments are coordinated when feasible with transportation planning and projects.
- **Streamlining project approvals** is essential. Unless unwieldy, bifurcated processes and requirements are addressed, deployment delays will remain the norm – an unacceptable outcome.
- On the adoption front, cross-sector partnerships are similarly needed in **helping residents access services**, including assisting income-qualified individuals to sign up for the federal government's [Affordable Connectivity Program](#).

Achieving adequate funding for expanding broadband and supporting the state's Regional Broadband Consortia have been key [priorities](#) [<https://cafwd.org/news/regional-broadband-consortia-local-activators-pave-the-way/>] for CA FWD and the California Economic Summit's Broadband For All Work Group. Now that funding streams are in place, the shared priorities that stakeholders have identified will help inform the Summit's ongoing coalition-building and advocacy to ensure "Broadband for All" becomes a reality in California.