

## **California Digital Equity Program Office Hour #1**

**April 16, 2025**

**2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

### **Meeting Minutes and Transcript**

The first California Digital Equity Program (CalDEP) Office hour took place virtually on Wednesday, April 16, 2025, at 2:00 pm. Engagement and Operations Manager Anh Nguyen welcomed attendees and instructed them to introduce themselves in the Zoom Chat box with their name, job title, and affiliated organization.

#### **Housekeeping**

Engagement and Operations Manager Anh Nguyen reviewed a few housekeeping items for attendees to participate in the conversation and have the best participation experience throughout the meeting. ASL interpreters were available for question and answers portion of the meeting. Closed captioning was available as an option for attendees throughout the meeting. Lastly, Mrs. Ngyuen also provided an overview of the CalDEP Office Hour Q&A agenda.

#### **Agenda Item 1 – Welcome & Office Hours Overview**

Mr. James Spencer, Broadband Administrative Manager at CDT's Office of Broadband and Digital Literacy, welcomed the attendees. Next, Mr. Spencer highlighted the key points of the format of Office Hours. This format allowed eligible applicants to ask questions related to the RFA including process and timeline guidelines, components, and requirements. Mr. Spencer also highlighted some key dates and application information for the CalDEP application period to help clarify any setbacks in this area before the deadline on May 30, 2025, at 11:59 pm PDT. Next, Mr. Spencer shared the focus of Office hours, and gave information about other Technical Assistance resources. Lastly, Mr. Spencer closed his presentation by providing information to other resources.

#### **Agenda Item 2 – Track 1 and Track 2 Summary**

Mr. Alex Banh, Principal of Broadband Equity Partnership, began his presentation by sharing key information and summary to both Track 1 and Track 2. For Track 1 summary, Mr. Banh shared the overview, requirements, and model application of Track 1 which is for regional/local Digital Equity Ecosystem planning and capacity with a total pool of \$43 million. Next, Mr. Banh shared the Track 2 summary. For the Track 2 summary, Mr. Banh shared the overview, requirements, and model application of Track 2 which is targeted statewide Digital Equity

Ecosystems (Covered Populations or Outcome Areas) with a total pool of \$7 million. Awards in the \$400,000 - \$ 1,000,000 range, and up to 14 awards are expected. Lastly, Mr. Banh went over the model application for those eligible Track 2 applicants.

### **Questions & Answers**

Access & Deployment Advisor Maria Kelly moderated the questions and answers session, starting with those with their hands raised on Zoom, and then those received via the Q&A and Chat box. The presenters James Spenser, Alex Bahn and Deputy Director Scott Adams, proceeded to address questions live.

While there were many questions that came in through the Q&A and Chat box, and 7 meeting attendees came off of mute to ask questions:

- Joel Block, CEO/Executive Director of a nonprofit organization called Workers Intelligence
- Robert Makhoul, Interim Telecom Director at Tule River Tribe Telecommunications Department
- Natalie Gonzalez, Deputy Director at Digital Equity Initiative in Los Angeles
- Stephan Jackson, Housing Development Program Manager II at the County of Santa Clara office of supportive housing
- Rebecca Kauma, Director of Digital Equity at the County of Los Angeles
- Alex Tone, President at Tone Consulting Group
- Gina Gates-Lopez, Managing Partner at People-Centric Ventures LLC

### **Agenda Item 3 – Closing**

Mrs. Anh Nguyen, Engagement and Operations Manager at CDT's Office of Broadband and Digital Literacy, provided the closing remarks. Next, Mrs. Anh Nguyen gave a reminder on the Q&A process which will be available online to review on Broadband for all portal under the CalDEP landing page/Q&A page. Mr. Scott added a comment regarding the Q&A process. Next, Mrs. Anh Nguyen provided links (and a QR code) to the resources mentioned in past meeting as well as today. Next, Mrs. Anh Nguyen encouraged attendees to review the grant guidelines of the RFA and to find references on CalDEP and TA portal pages as shared in the RFA Next Steps slide. Next, Mrs. Anh Nguyen shared the schedule of the next office hour on May 7th, at 2 pm PDT. Also Mrs. Nguyen gave a reminder to submit questions to [CalDEP@state.ca.gov](mailto:CalDEP@state.ca.gov) by May 9th, no later than 5 pm. And Mrs. Nguyen highlighted that submitted applications are due by the deadline May 30th, 2025, at 11:59 pm PDT. Mrs. Nguyen concluded her presentation by sharing links and a QR code to sign up for Broadband email updates which will be updated monthly. After that she

thanked attendees and presenters for joining the CalDEP Office Hour #1. The meeting adjourned at 3:05 pm.

(The recording and presentation slides from the meeting will be posted on Broadband for All portal.)

## **Transcript**

Coming in from the waiting room, please use the chat function to introduce yourselves, your title and affiliate organizations. Thank you. Alright recording now, and let's get started. Good afternoon and welcome to the first Office Hours for the California Digital Equity Program or CalDEP. On behalf of the State of California and the Department of Technology, we thank you for being here, and please use the chat to introduce yourselves. Before we begin a few housekeeping items, next slide, please. This meeting is being recorded. Along with the recording, the presentation slides and minutes will be posted on our portal. A member of our team will add that link in the chat very shortly. Office Hours are public meetings and will be open to any potential applicant that chooses to join. Please note that CDT cannot answer questions that are specific to an individual application. CDT team may also collect some questions not addressed live during the session and respond at a later date. A link will be provided in the chat where you can expect to see our Q&A posted. So select side by side, speaker mode for the best viewing experience. For Q&A, please use the Q&A box at the bottom of your toolbar to type in any questions. Please use the raise hand icon when we begin our Q&A session or star 9 if you're calling in by phone. Our team will elevate you and request that you come off mute or video. We're also aware that there has been Zoom system wide Zoom glitches, so if we do face that issue while this Office Hours is happening, we will let you know and communicate via email. And next slide, please. For our agenda, in a moment, our Broadband and Digital Literacy Broadband Administrative Manager, James Spencer, will provide welcome remarks, and our Office Hours overview. Mr. Alex Banh from Broadband Equity Partnership will provide a brief summary of Track 1 and Track 2. OBDL's Access and Deployment Advisor, Maria Kelly, will help facilitate the live Q&A. And lastly, you'll see me again to close out the session with a few reminders of where you can find resources and any next steps. So first, I would like to bring up Mr. James Spencer.

Thank you, Anh, and thank you everybody. As Anh said, my name is James Spencer. I am the Administrative Manager of the Office of Broadband and Digital Literacy. We are pleased to have you join us for the first California Digital Equity Program Office Hour session. We specifically appreciate your partnership and engagement and thank you for joining us today. Next slide, please. So

before we begin the discussion portion of Office Hours, there are a few key points I want to highlight to help manage facilitation.

The format of Office Hours allows for eligible applicants to ask questions related to the RFA process and timeline guidelines, components and requirements. Because we're in an open application period OBDL cannot give advice or answer questions that are specific to individual applications. OBDL will respond to questions referencing existing materials when possible, and as applicable. Applicable questions that cannot be answered live will be recorded and responded to via written Q&A accessible via the Q&A webpage. Next slide, please. So, I also want to highlight some key dates and application information to help clarify any confusion and minimize questions in this area. So the California Digital Equity Program Request for Application was launched on March 26th 2025, with a 66-day open application period. All CalDEP information can be found through the Broadband for All Portal, by following the Initiatives drop down tab. The CalDEP webpage includes the Grant guidelines and RFA and all associated materials. This is also where you can find the Grant Application Portal. As a reminder, we have a strict cutoff for applications which must be submitted by May 30th 2025, at 11:59 pm, Pacific Time, and we will only be accepting applications through the CalDEP Application Portal. Next slide, please.

So today's focus is CalDEP Office Hours, which will provide an opportunity for you to ask and receive responses to generalized questions. We also highly encourage all interested parties to review the additional resources OBDL has developed, which can help answer immediate questions as you navigate the application process. These critical resources can be accessed through the CalDEP Technical Assistance Resources webpage. There you can find written resources which are reference documents to assist in the application and development process. This includes application guidance and checklists, a 1 pager with key information and additional guidance on allowable costs and procurement requirements. You can also find past event presentation materials as well as pre-recorded videos on content, on specific topics regarding the RFA and the application process. To help facilitate the Q&A process, OBDL developed a dedicated inbox to submit questions about the RFA and application process. Q&A will be posted on a rolling basis with a final deadline to submit questions by May 9th at 5pm Pacific Time. I do want to note that we appreciate the time that entities have taken to submit questions. Many questions are similar or duplicative, so we are doing our best to summarize questions and provide general responses based on approved information given that this is in our open RFA period. Lastly, the Partnership Coordination Resource is a tool for lead entities to find potential partners and for smaller or partner organizations to be found by lead organizations. So if you're an eligible entity and looking to amplify partnership reach, participation is encouraged. I

will now pass the spotlight to Alex, who will provide additional clarity on Funding Tracks.

Alright thanks, James. So, as James mentioned before, we get into the Question and Answer period or the discussion portion of today's Office Hours just wanted to provide a quick summary of the two funding tracks. We know there's a lot of information in the RFA and information on each track may be spread out across different sections. So just have a couple of slides to summarize high level, you know, key information about each funding track and hopefully provide some more clarification on what Tracks 1 and 2 are all about.

Next slide. So Track 1 is the track that focuses on funding regional or local digital equity ecosystems in terms of planning and capacity. And there's a total funding pool in Track 1 of 43 million dollars for the entire State of California. So the purpose of Track 1 is to develop and refine regional and local Digital Equity Plans. And then, once those plans are in place, provide capacity for organizations to implement digital equity activities either directly themselves or through second-tier subgrants. So the funding for Track 1 is based on a formula allocation for every county as a geographic boundary. So if you look in the RFA, Section 7 has the allocation for every single county in California. It's important to note that CDT will only award one application per county funding allocation. So if we award one application for a county that has a total allocation of \$215,000, that application will receive the \$215,000 and be expected to work across the county.

So with that in mind, really want to encourage lead applicants to form partnerships with entities, interested entities, right, who serve cover populations, are interested in digital equity across the county boundary to partner up and submit one application together. And lead applicants may also partner with entities across multiple counties, to submit one application for multiple county funding allocations. So as far as requirements for Track 1, first off Track 1 applicants, if awarded, must either develop or refine regional or local Digital Equity Plans that will align with the SDEP and meet the minimum requirements as laid out in the in the RFA. And you can find more information about that in Section 5, under and local Digital Equity Planning section. So these plans must be completed and be approved by CDT before CalDEP awards may be used for implementation of digital equity activities. And these plans must outline strategies, key activities and measurable objectives to benefit members of all covered populations within the county, and also in alignment with the SDEP or the State Digital Equity Plan. Once those plans are in place and are approved Track 1 subgrantees may move on to implementation of local digital equity activities that would align with the SDEP measurable objectives and regional local Digital Equity Plan. Track 1 subgrantees are also expected to form coalitions or partnerships with key stakeholders for planning and implementation, and as part of the application process they must submit more than one letter of intent or letter of support from partners and stakeholders from

the county and region. And finally, second-tier sub granting to other eligible entities within the county or region to assist with implementation is optional, but highly encouraged, especially in the larger counties, with the larger funding allocations.

So as far as the Track 1 model or a competitive application, it first starts with having a lead applicant with the experience reach and partnerships across the entire county that they're applying for, or multi-county region. And this lead applicant should also have experience with managing large initiatives, managing Federal or State grants, and you know, if proposed, making grants or subgrants to other organizations. The model application should also include local partners representing covered populations and digital equity practitioners. It should reflect an understanding amongst the entire applicant team of the digital equity landscape in the county or region. The application should align with the SDEP goals, measurable objectives, targets, implementation strategy and key activities. And the model application would have second-tier sub grants to community partners and digital equity practitioners to implement activities and strengthen the local digital equity ecosystem. So that's Track 1, right focus on regional and local digital equity ecosystem planning capacity with allocations at the county level. Next slide, please. Next, I just want to quickly touch on Track 2. So Track 2 is we're targeted statewide digital equity ecosystems that focus on either a specific cover population or a specific outcome area. And this track has a total funding pool of 7 million. So within that total funding pool of 7 million, CDT plans to make awards in the range of \$400,000 to a million dollars, and up to 14 awards are expected. So as far as requirements for Track 2, this track is really for ecosystem development, capacity building or digital equity innovation at a statewide level that would benefit either a specific covered population or a specific outcome area. Track 2 applicants must also have a plan for coordinating, supporting, and sharing best practices with Track 1 subgrantees so that their work makes an impact at the regional and local levels. Track 2 subgrantees must also participate in the statewide implementation group or other communities of practice established by CDT and must show a plan for stakeholder engagement across the entire state. And as part of their application they must submit more than one letter of intent or support from partners or stakeholders from across California. So the model application for Track 2 is similar to Track 1, but, you know, really reflects the shift in focus from regional and local to the statewide level. So the lead applicant for Track 2 for a model application would have experience, reach and partnerships across the State's diverse regions that would specialize in working with the specific covered population or the specific outcome area. The Track 2 lead applicant should also have experience managing large initiatives and Federal or State grants. The Track 2 model application would have local partners representing covered populations and digital equity practitioners, and, you know, really reflect a plan for large scale statewide digital equity

implementation or ecosystem developments, or a very innovative idea for digital equity that could be applied statewide to benefit the covered population or outcome area. And finally, the model Track 2 application has to demonstrate why the specific covered population or outcome area that they're applying for, is better served at the statewide level instead of the regional or local level. So that's Track 2, right? Really focusing on statewide digital equity ecosystems benefiting a specific covered population or a specific outcome area. So with that I'll pass it to Maria, who will help us lead and moderate the Question and Answer period.

Thank you, Alex. We do have a few questions, and we'll just get started. I might ask for some of those for some of you that typed a question into the Q&A, I may ask you to raise your hand and ask your question live so that we can make sure we're understanding your questions. So 1st of all, we'll start with apologies, but we'll start with the question about the federal funding freeze, and we'll take that off, we always try to get that off the table first. So the question is, if the administration decides to freeze the Digital Equity Act, how will this impact the CalDEP grant?

Thank you for the question. And this is a federally funded program, so our ability to, The Department of Technology's ability to fulfill on the Grants is going to be dependent on our access to the funds that we're obligated by the Federal Government.

Thank you. There's a question. I think, probably, for Alex. The funding is specific for a school district, asking if the funding could be used for just a dual immersion program, or just a school district within a school, within a county?

Yeah, so with Track 1, I'm assuming they're thinking about Track 1. But again, you know, looking at the Track 1 summary right? The idea is to select a lead applicant who can work across the entire county or multi-county region that they're applying for. And you know, first, they must establish a regional or local Digital Equity Plan. That, you know, lays out, understands the needs of the covered populations within their county or region lays out key strategies and measurable objectives for addressing those needs, and is in alignment with the goals and measurable objectives and strategies of the State Digital Equity Plan. So we really want to encourage folks to take a look at the State Digital Equity Plan. Take a look at the goals and the objectives laid out. It's pretty specific, right? There's targets and baselines, things that areas where we want to move the needle when it comes to digital equity and the local plans, you know, should work in alignment with the State Digital Equity Plan while taking into context, like what the local needs are. And these plans from there should define right what types of digital equity activities they're going to invest in, and once that plan is approved, they can go ahead and start implementing the activities.

So yeah, I just wanted to clarify that. You know, Track 1 isn't, it has to be a holistic program for the county. It's not for like a more kind of standalone or one off type program.

Yeah and Alex, thanks for that. I would just want to add that you know the development of the Digital Equity Plan followed some pretty specific guidance from the NTIA, which was, you know, in the Digital Equity Plan that Alex referred to focusing on the common digital equity barriers experienced by Californians associated with either, you know, access or availability of infrastructure, the affordability of Internet services and devices and then, the constraints and barriers around broadband adoption. So really, the focus for Track 1 applications, like Alex said, is developing local plans that align with addressing those sort of 3 barrier categories. And there's some really specific allowable uses that are in the RFA. And on the Q&A page.

Thank you, Scott. And some of these questions, we want to let you know that some of the questions we'll be able to answer now, some of them, we may ask you to submit via the CalDEP email. So if we aren't able to provide an answer during these Office Hours, please follow up with us and submit via our CalDEP email. There's a question regarding matching funds. Can you please confirm that there's not a monetary in-kind match component to the CalDEP grant?

Yeah, I can confirm. There is no matching requirement for our program.

Yeah, the one thing that I would add to is, you know, the guidance from the NTIA on the Digital Equity Capacity grants, or that, you know, they focus on all covered populations that they focus on lasting and meaningful change, that they focus on sustainability and the stakeholder engagement. And what we would say about this funding is, we know that, you know it's relatively large amount of funding, but when you look at the need in the State of California, it's not probably as big as the need is there. So a large focus of the Digital Equity Plans is gonna be asking Track 1 and Track 1 or Track 2 awardees to identify other source of funding that they could leverage either state or federal funding, or local philanthropic or private sector funding to extend and sustain their programs.

Thank you, Scott, and again, please feel free to raise your hand if you'd like to ask your question live, we can take live questions, and we'll continue to go what was posted in chat or via the Q&A Box. But again, please feel free to raise your hands. There's a question regarding second-tier or subgrantees, and the question is specifically for a county, are different departments within the county considered a second-tier subgrantee? Is the distinction, if they have their own UEI number?



I think we're gonna have to take that back circle back on that. But we really appreciate the distinction. And I wanna make sure like, Maria said, this is an open Office Hours, and we would encourage people to you know, when you raise your hand we'll unmute you if you could provide greater context, because we admit we've gotten a lot of questions that are fairly similar, but kind of nuanced and different. So our understanding is like, say, a county government were to come in as a Track 1 and wanted to disperse funding out to a county department as a track tier sub grantee, would that be permissible? And I'm wondering if the person can come on and just say, did we understand the question as asked?

Yeah, it's anonymous, o I'm not sure who to call out on that one. But if you would like to raise your hand and unmute, then we can make sure we're understanding the question. In the meantime, Joel Block, if you would unmute and come on camera, and please answer your question.

Okay, I don't know if you can hear me. So I was about to ask, is there, are there any guidelines or regulations waiting for disabled individuals who operate nonprofits for serving disabled communities? I'm the Executive Director of a nonprofit that has been serving that seriously mental illness and also stroke survivors. I didn't know if there's I couldn't see anything so far in terms of digital outreach for that, those type of very vulnerable communities who have need to access the new digital opportunities. If I'm too vague, I just look trying to figure out where in the regs or the guidelines there may be something.

Well, I'll go ahead and answer that. I think absolutely, you know, nonprofits that focus on digital equity efforts focusing on the disabled population are encouraged to participate as partners, and either, you know, Track 1 grants or potentially Track 2 grants that are focusing specifically on, you know one of the covered populations and individuals with disabilities is a member of a covered population. I think the distinction here, sir, would be that we would recommend that if possible, you go to the Partner Coordination Resource, and enter your information and desire to participate in a as a partner in a Track 1 application, you know, and you know, just kind of clearly define what, you know, county or geographic region you're in, so that, you know, would, and further ask you to reach out to entities that are focusing or considering being leads on applications in that area.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you, Scott. Robert Makhoul, I'm sorry if I say your last name correct incorrectly, Makhoul. Love. if you would, you're yet to ask your question.

Okay. Good afternoon everyone. I have actually 2 questions the first, the question about the challenge process. The thing at the time that we looked at the map for the location that eligible for the BEAD Fund we found that this map is incorrect. At that time. I tried to submit the request through the portal, but unfortunately, it required some delegation from the console, and at the time that I get the delegation it became too late, so I don't know if there is still time to fix that. This is the 1st question. The second question..

Can we address? Let us address the 1st question, okay. So on the BEAD program or the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program. The CDT Works very closely with the Public Utilities Commission on all things broadband related, and the California Public Utilities Commission is administering the BEAD program. So Mr. Makhoul well make sure that you have the staff email contact for the BEAD program and they would be the entity to directly contact about any challenges to locations. But that's kind of separate of the Digital Equity Capacity grant, which, while it's a companion BEAD, is about deployment of infrastructure and the CalDEP program and the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant program, or for non-deployment purposes.

Okay, thank you so much.

You're welcome.

The other question is about the broadband that will be funded by this grant. Like, we have situation in Tully River, a tribe that the Council really pay for all the service. So we provide fiber to home, to all residents, to all the community for free of charge. Now, is there any requirement like if we get benefit from this grant to be like mandatory, to charge people for the service, or we still able to offer the service to them for free?

I think we're gonna need to take that one back. However, in general, what I would say is kind of related to the last question that you had the State Digital Equity Capacity grant of which the Department of Technology received in that California Digital Equity Program, which is in essence the subgrant program for that, there's a prohibition on construction and deployment of infrastructure. And so those programs are really the focus of either the Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative which the Department of Technology is doing, or many of the Public Utilities Commissions Last Mile programs, be it the California Advanced Services Fund, or the Federal Funding Account, or the BEAD program.

Thank you, Scott. We don't currently have any other hands raised. And some of these questions look familiar that we may be answering on the portal. I think we posted our 1st questions yesterday, we'll continue to post Q&A on the portal. There's a question about devices for staff, and I'm wondering if maybe we can direct somewhere within the RFA or within the grant the devices allowed for program activities.

Yeah. James or Alex, team.

James, do you want to take that.

Yeah, so more information on devices can be found in eligible, Section 5 of the RFA, Eligible Use of Funds and Program Requirements, as well as additional information in the Allowable versus Unallowable Costs document.

And a follow up to that is and so the person and I'm trying to scroll through here, someone asked about tablets and cell phones sort of lumped together as allowable devices and I believe that that can also be found in the RFA. Correct?

I, you know, I think we've got a couple of questions on that about. We're taking under consideration or under advisement some of the questions we've received about potentially further defining devices. And so we acknowledge that for many individuals impacted by the digital divide, that mobile phones are their primary use. However, the spirit of Broadband for All, and the Internet for All program and these, is really about computing devices. So would, recommend that when we're generally thinking about devices, that it's, you know, we're thinking about things beyond mobile phones that have greater ability to optimize web-based applications and all you know, and other functions that support the kind of the further out outcomes that we're required to work towards around education or workforce development, access to essential services, etc.

Thank you. Scott.

Yeah, encourage people to check out the RFA. Some of these questions are really great questions, they are outlined, and we can provide some direction to where to find them within the RFA. But, some of the specifics you should be able to find the questions are available, the answers are available within the RFA, on the portal, and I believe we're dropping that link in the chat. A question about planning materials, would CDT allow shared planning materials or assets like needs assessments or DEEM entries to be used across both tracks if we end up having a potential partners. And this is really, we're almost more specific to an ask about a project. But the question is, can we use both? If we have, sorry if we

have a potential partner with Track 1 planning and team Track 2 ecosystem building?

Yeah.

I'm not really clear on that.

We can always ask that question, and Natalie, yeah, can.

Natalie has a hand up now, but we'd love to better understand? Yeah. Your question.

Yeah, I actually had a different question. But to go over that first one, was just wondering around the resources and materials, knowing that Track 1 and Track 2 kind of are complement to each other, and they kind of work in a way where Track 1 is informing Track 2 of the Digital Equity Plan, and how that approach is supported statewide. Is that going to be relied on the partners to kind of do that connected and sharing of resources? Or will CDT kind of have, like a hub where that info can be accessible to Track 1 partners?

Thanks for the question. Natalie, if you don't mind me calling you by your first name. The way we design this program, and this really came out of the planning process was understanding that while the bulk of the work is gonna be done at the, you know the county and the local level that there are efficiencies that the State can do in terms of developing common tools and resources. And they would include the Digital Equity Public Survey that's available online and by mobile phone. And developing outreach materials, doing translation at a higher level, so that those could be both, you know, common but customizable for folks. And we will say that there will be a template, digital equity plan like either a checklist for folks that already have digital equity plans that just want to say like, do these align with the State plan, or a template that's really kind of based on the State Digital Equity Plan. And so yes, that is part of the role that the Department is taking on to provide those centralized resources while also acknowledging that there are some unique community needs. And that's why, you know, there's a cap on planning and really, the lion share needs to go to programmatic, and we'll allow flexibility for the Track 1 subgrantees to you know, develop or procure tools specific to their communities. And did you have another question? I think you did. Luke, can we unmute Natalie again.

Thank you. Yeah, just the last question, knowing that this grant goes until 2029 extent, timeline wise, given, I think, all of the uncertainty, my question is around the reimbursement process-should disruption or pause of this funding happen during that timeframe, and if partners have already done the work, knowing that is a reimbursement process, just wanted to know how CDT will be kind of

approaching that in the event of a pause of the funding? And will that reimbursement be grandfathered back for folks to get paid for the work that has already been completed? Just curious on how we can also navigate that to our own tier-2 subgrantees given the uncertainty.

So, a good question, let me circle back with you on that. I think, you know, we did clarify that based on the Federal and State requirements that we would do quarterly reimbursement, and we did stipulate that, you know we, our ability to fulfill on the grants is ability to us accessing Federal funds. But I think the nuance of your question is something that we've got to take back and we'll see if we can develop an answer for.

Yeah, Scott, can I also jump in? You know, based on Natalie's question about the 2029 timeline- I've also seen some questions in the chat about that. That is the maximum period of performance. So, all sub-award activities must end by August 31st, 2029. But you know, based on what we've heard in public comment, we are building in the flexibility for applicants to propose their own period of performance within that maximum. So, if they feel like this funding is suitable for a 2-and-a-half-year period performance or a 3-year period performance, they can include that in their timeline and just make that clear. So, we are including that flexibility, 2029 is the maximum.

Thank you, Alex, and that does answer a few of the questions that are in chat. Steven Jackson has his hand up. If you could, if he could come off and ask his question live, please.

Yeah, thanks, Maria. I had one of the questions around the kind of lead applicant versus second-tier subgrantee. And just to provide a little bit more context, it's over applying for Track 1 and it's the county's kind of IT department who's been leading most of the broadband expansion and digital equity work as the lead applicant. But planning to partner with other departments and agencies, to administer some of the activities within the same county, and just curious if those other agencies or departments would be considered second-tier subgrantees, or kind of more broadly, are different departments within the same county considered subgrant second-tier subgrantees.

I think I would say, let us circle back with you on that. Is this just a verbal articulation of the question that was submitted early? And if so, thank you very much. I think, yeah, the nuances we're thinking about is, if there's already like a like a hierarchical government entity, like a county administrative office, or like the IT department that if they were to apply and be awarded the grant, you know, you know based on the competitive process, how would funding shared with other accounting departments be perceived versus how would funds given to like nonprofits or other entities outside of the county apparatus. Those would

definitely be perceived as second-tier sub grantees. I think we're gonna have to circle back on you know, clarifying the distinction, for you know, sharing within other county departments.

Okay? Oh, good thanks. Appreciate the follow up here.

Yeah, thank, you.

Thank you for following up with your question. There's a couple of questions about Digital Equity Plans. One question was, do they have to have a Digital Equity Plan before applying for the grant? And then the follow up one, if they do have a Digital Equity Plan, does the CDT or OBDL have to approve it. Does the pre-existing plan meet all the minimum requirements before a CalDEP award can be used for implementation.

Alex, you want to take that one.

Yeah, yeah, so definitely for the first question, you know, applicants are not required to have an existing Digital Equity Plan for before applying right? This is a planning, and a capacity grant they could. There's an allowance for funding that they can use for the planning process to develop the Digital Equity Plan, or if they had one, but it's outdated, or it might not meet all the requirements, you know, that that is laid out in the RFA, they can use some planning dollars to update it. If they already have a plan that they think already meets the minimum requirements, you can see the minimum requirements in the RFA. You can take a look at the SDEP to check for alignment. That is something that they can, they can upload and submit as part of their application. If you look at Track 1, if you've been to the application select Track 1, go down to the funding track specific questions. There's an option to upload an existing plan. So, upload that plan. Describe your prior planning efforts, let CDT know that you're planning to use that to meet the minimum requirements and move on to digital equity implementation. If awarded CDT, will take a look at that plan, make sure that that meets requirements, and let you know if you can go ahead and proceed.

Yeah, I think one thing I wanted to, I would add on to that is that, both pre covid pandemic and during and post covid pandemic, there was a lot of Federal and State funding allocated for planning, and so wanted to just again make a distinction about the spirit of the Track 2 planning plus capacity. We're looking at kind of geographic specific Digital Equity Plans that that go beyond just infrastructure deployment programs that include the non-deployment activities, that kind of complete the continuum. And you know, when we're looking at the holistic nature of the of the Track 2 program itself. We're not necessarily encouraging, you know, individual organizations to apply for funding to develop a Digital Equity Plan for their organization. This is again a broader, you know,

perspective driving down the focus that was identified in this, you know, collaborative planning process on the State plan and then implementing, you know, at a regional or local level.

Thank you, Scott. Rebecca, please feel free to come off mute and come on camera and ask your question. Did we lose her?

Okay, there we go. Sorry.

There we go!

For some reason, I was like what's going on? Thank you very much for hosting this Office Hours. I'm Rebecca Kauma, a Director of Digital Equity with the county of Los Angeles. I do have a question going back to the Digital Equity Plan. Once the plan has been co-created, does CDT recommend that the plan gets adopted in any type of way? So, for example, typically a lot of Digital Equity Plans will get adopted. If you're within a city-by-city council or by some type of governing body, and I think that adds a lot of validity to the plan, and also it allows shared ownership that we're supporting the plan, we're supporting the recommendations. And also, it could perhaps maybe allow additional fundings outside of what we're looking at to maybe be supported. So, I'm just curious to see if you guys have any recommendations for that or if you guys are going to be encouraging any type of official adoption of the plan from some type of entity. If that makes sense.

Rebecca, it's not a requirement, but we acknowledge that it's a benefit and a value. I think that what we learned during the planning process. When we, you know, toured the State and did our 20 in-person, regional workshops, is that obviously, there's a lot of variety between the counties in terms of size, geography, capacity, in where they're at. And you know, we know there may be some areas where there's both a need to develop a plan and a desire to have it validated by, you know a government entity or government entities for specifically for those purposes. So, there's no prohibition against that and I think that it would be a smart move in terms of sustainability. And there's also not a requirement.

Okay, thank you so much, and one other quick question in terms of convening. So, I know NTIA initially was planning on having in person convenings. This year there was supposed to be one in San Diego in March, but because of obvious reasons, we haven't had any convenings, and I know in terms of the next nationwide convening where those that are in the digital equity space are going to be convening will be next month in Gila River, which is administered by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. So, my question to you guys is, once the grantees have been selected, do you guys anticipate having any type of in-

person convenings? I know that NTIA recently released guidelines, that grant funds that are related to DEI cannot be utilized in that way. So, I'm just curious to see like what ongoing engagement will look like. I think there's value in convening in person, especially for those of us that are going to be doing work across the State. So, I'm just curious to see what your guy's plan is for in person engagement across the different ecosystems.

I'm going to answer that in couple of the different segments and then call James into to back clean up on that. Generally, we can't speak for the NTIA or know what their plans are for in person engagement. We have received some initial guidance about restrictions on certain kinds of travel that are unclear about how that relates specifically to digital equity related travel. I think, generally what we would say is that, James, do you want to speak to how travels addressed in the RFA?

Yeah, Scott, I was getting a lot of feedback on that is there any way we could? I? I could not hear your response, and I cannot fully hear the question.

Got it. Well, I think I'll go ahead and answer it. I think, Rebecca, the RFA clearly states that there may be some allowability of in state travel, but CalDEP funds are not allowable to support out of state travel. And to your point about, you know, in person, we know that there is value in people getting together and are really trying to focus folks through the program design of the CalDEP that the funds be used, you know, specifically to like implement programmatic work at the regional and local level.

Okay. But you guys don't know, if so for example, if you were to include travel within the budget, it's my understanding that you cannot have it for any type of DEI, and I'm pretty sure, just from what I've heard, that digital equity does fall under it. So, do you guys know if we're allowed to include that in the budget? If it's like digital equity related convenings, you know what I'm saying, or is that not allowed.

Yeah, so, what I can say, there's a section in the maybe the RFA, but in the Allowable and Unallowable Uses that potentially some state travel is permissible, for CalDEP out of state travel is not. As it relates to any new guidance from NTIA, we are in receipt of some new guidance, but not enough to determine and answer the question for you. So, we're gonna circle back on that, and when we have more information as it pertains to CalDEP, we'll either let you folks know at the next Office Hours, or we'll update the QA page. You know sooner if we get an answer. But we don't have enough information to answer that question for you. Okay, sounds good. Thank you. Thank you.



Thank you, Rebecca. If one of the members of our team could drop the Partner Resource link into chat again, please. A couple of questions coming through regarding, how do organizations know who within their county is a partner, or how to partner, want to make sure that people have the link to that resource before we wrap up today. There is a general question about further definite, or where we might find more information about what is considered a workforce partner what is listed, they said specifically, an entity that carries out a workforce or development workforce development program. Is there a place we can help them find more information, or the definition on that?

I think, you know, the best guidance that we can give on the definition of a workforce development program is what's in the notice of funding opportunity and what's in the RFA. And it's and it's, you know, pretty broad that the thing that I would say is to go back to the State Digital Equity Plan and look at the context with which you know, workforce development is, you know, brought up. And that's as we all work to foster digital equity and accomplish the, you know, overcome the 3 common goals which are the, you know, the infrastructure and availability which, you know, the infrastructure program that we're focusing on affordability and adoption, that you know, what are those springboards so educational opportunities that can be empowered by people who are now connected and able to utilize technology and are trained and skilled to do that, what are you know, digital knowledge-based training programs that can help, you know, enhance people's career opportunities, and you know, empower communities. And then, you know, so that's what I would say to kind of focus on.

Just to add to that, from a verification standpoint, I would look at our Technical Assistance page. We have a document title, list of example documents, certifying eligible entity status. So, if you're interested in understanding, like what documentation we're looking for from an eligible entity, that's a workforce development organization. Take a look at that document because we have it for every single eligible entity category.

Thank you. My Zoom just blipped out completely, so I'm not sure how much I missed, or if you noticed I was gone. So were we able to answer the question about the county as a lead applicant or joint multiple counties, applying together where one county is the lead applicant. But the other counties are partners.

We did not answer that question yet. Can you rephrase the question for you?

Because I told I crashed out, so I don't know what last, we last heard.

And sorry folks Zoom is having a naturally was having some issues. Maria, I think it would be helpful if we could ask the individual that asked that question to potentially, come on,

Yep, it's not these, Alex Tone asked the question. So, Alex, if you're here and able to ask that question.

Think the here's what I would suggest, Maria, is that within Track 1 you know, each county geographic allocation is going to be allocated to that county geographic region, and it won't be split up or divided unless awarded to, you know, one grantee who could then, you know, subgrant it out. And that's been designed based on what we heard about, you know, during the planning process where people wanted flexibility to have the appropriate partners, you know, for their communities. We do allow for regional or multi-county applications to come in together, and I think you know the guidance we could give is that as long as a lead applicant is one of the eligible entities that you know, they, you know, one potential county could come in on behalf of other counties. They would just have to demonstrate and put together a competitive application, and demonstrate that there was you know, support.

Thank you. Thank you very much. I was not able to get off mute, so I appreciate that response. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. There's a question. And this might be one that we need to refer them back directly into the RFA. The question is, can a lead applicant utilize a 3rd party like a nonprofit to administer second-tier subgrantees? With this 3rd party be considered a contractor, a partner, or a second-tier subgrantee, and then we may want them to come off mute, to ask this question, if we need more clarity.

Yeah, I think we have to. We might have to take that one back. But.

So again, if we're unable to answer your questions today, please email us your questions to our CalDEP email address. And we're not going to be able to get through all our questions today. I am trying to find the questions that are programmatic, specific versus sort of more generalized programmatic specific. I'm recognizing that we have about 5 min left. If there's someone that would like to raise their hand and ask one last question, we can consider that, and the rest of these will probably have to work with and follow up. So, if anybody is brave enough or if Hilary Sayer, Hilary Sayer is here. Okay, Gina, please feel free to ask your question. We'll take your question.

Hi! Hi! Everybody nice to see you all and thank you for all your work. Okay. So, my question was for the unhoused multi-home residents and very poor people. Internet services are just not a possibility. So only a hotspot and a device, a tablet or laptop would be a solution. Would that be part or qualify under digital equity? And the second part is, communication is really critical. And so, I'm just wondering, oh, sorry, okay, I'm just wondering is utilizing, or have you all considered Lifeline phones for communication and affordability? Would that fit?

Ms. Gates-Lopez, thank you for that. I think now more than ever like we're very cognizant about following Federal guidance. And you know throughout the process of trying to focus on you know the 8 covered populations that are mentioned in statute during the planning process, we heard from many folks that there are potentially other population groups that are of key concern for communities and definitely key concern for the State, and that there's a lot of intersectionality within that focus. I think the response would be to applicants to focus on the 8 covered populations that are called out in the Digital Equity Plan, and we already answered the device question earlier in terms of you know, we understand that there are members of the of our population that our mobile only your mobile is, you know, you know, maybe a primary resources and, you know, we suggest that you folks focus on the devices that empower people beyond mobile phones.

So, if I'm hearing you correctly, is because the folks that are on the target in the target area many fall into the under this category. They're just very poor, they don't have \$5 to spare for internet at home. So, if we can't connect them to the internet, then would they be considered not, and that they can't sustain it, would we consider them not a viable participant?

You know, I think we're now getting into like a level of specificity that we weren't really you know, prepared to go on in terms of specific applications or specific. So, I think what we would do is refer you to the Digital Equity Plan, refer you to the RFA and the Allowable and Unallowable Costs. Just to acknowledge that there's a great need here in the State, and that we're happy with the funding we've received, and we acknowledge that it's not nearly enough to address the need and the state.

Okay. Thank you.

We will thank you everybody for your questions again, if we did not get to your question, please submit it to our CalDEP email address. Thank you, James, Alex and Scott, and I'm going to pass it back over to Ann Nguyen to close out our session today. Thank you.

Thanks so much, Maria, and thanks for the slide next slide, please. Thanks everyone for staying until now for our closing. We do have 3 more slides, and this will be posted online so that you can go back and refer to them. Just a quick reminder of our Q&A process, many that we mentioned earlier, that the Q&A process allows potential applicants to ask questions regarding the RFA process and timeline guidelines, application components and requirements. Do note that OBDL cannot give advice or answer questions that are specific to individual applications as our RFA period is being opened. OBDL will respond to your questions with reference to existing materials. If you've heard so to the RFA or our portal, and the answers will be posted on a rolling basis on our Q&A page no later than May 16, so that you have ample time to incorporate the answers in your application. So, the deadline to submit questions is May 9th So keep that in mind as well, and I'll have that on the next slide. I'll pause real quick, because I see Scott.

Yeah, thanks, Anh. And I just wanted to again, you know, as a just note to folks is that we endeavor to answer all of the questions to the, to the best of our ability, and given the volume of questions that we're receiving in the similarity, please understand that in many cases we're batching like questions together and generalizing them and providing answers that, you know, address the common theme there. So just wanted to make sure folks were aware that if they asked a specific question and they didn't see it, as phrased, that not to take it personally. But just look for the questions that most resemble the questions you asked, and we'll endeavor to answer those.

Thanks for the clarification, Scott. Next slide, please. So, here's a summary of resources. You've noticed that we copy and paste many links throughout our conversation today. All of that is hyperlinked here so definitely come back to the slide to access. But definitely, the QR code will send you to our landing page where you can access the rest of the bullet points. So just a heads up, next slide. And then here are some RFA next steps. We want you and encourage you to review the CalDEP web, pages the TA resources on the portal, read the Grant guidelines on RFA. For further clarifications, enter your information in the Partnership Coordination Resource, which is optional, but, as you've seen, could be very helpful to finding partners, attend our next CalDEP Office Hours, which is scheduled to be on Wednesday, May 7, same time at 2pm. And then in between, or even after, send all your CalDEP questions to [CalDEP@state.ca.gov](mailto:CalDEP@state.ca.gov), by May 9, no later than 5pm. And a big highlight, submit your application by the deadline, which is May 30th by midnight. So that wraps up all my slides. The last one is just a quick note for where to sign up for Broadband For All Update that we sent out to all stakeholders on a monthly basis, and of course, our CalDEP landing page. And with that, I conclude our first Office Hours for CalDEP and thank you all for being here. Thank you.