

Digital Equity Community of Practice Meeting

May 28, 2026

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes and Transcript

The Digital Equity Community of Practice Meeting met virtually on Thursday, May 28, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. Deputy Director Adams welcomed attendees and introduced Engagement and Operations Manager Anh Nguyen, who then instructed attendees to introduce themselves in the Zoom Chat box with their name, job title, and affiliated organization.

Housekeeping & Agenda

Ms. Nguyen reviewed a few housekeeping. ASL interpreters were available throughout the meeting. Closed captioning was provided as an option for attendees throughout the meeting. Ms. Nguyen also mentioned that the meeting's recording, minutes, and transcript will be posted on the Broadband for All (BB4All) portal. She shared the overview of meeting agenda.

Agenda items:

- Welcome & Community Feedback
- CPUC California Lifeline Home Broadband Pilot Program Update
- Tech Access for Individuals with Disabilities Panel
- USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant
- CDT/OBDL Team Updates

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome & Community Feedback

Ms. Nguyen welcomed participants and briefly reviewed community feedback including topics, future speakers, improvements, other additional comments. She encouraged continued feedback from participants. She also outlined the purpose of the Digital Equity Community of Practice, focusing on Goals 2 and 3 from the Broadband for All Action Plan, and reviewed meeting norms. After that, she introduced Ms. Loi Nguyen from CPUC.

Agenda Item 2 – CA Lifeline Home Broadband Pilot Program

Ms. Loi Nguyen shared an update on the number of approved participating internet service providers (ISPs) in the CA Lifeline Home Broadband Pilot Program. There were 2 local agencies in city of Ontario and San Francisco

(including county) registration forms received. There were 16 companies that completed onboarding and systems interface testing. As of May 25, the CA Lifeline Home Broadband Pilot Program has 10,632 new subscribers and 2,806 transfers, which equals a total of 13,438 subscribers. After her presentation, Ms. Nguyen invited folks to ask questions, and the Provider Search function on California Lifeline website was shared as a resource in the chat.

Questions

Ms. Aracely Hernandez moderated the Q&A session. Ms. Loi Nguyen proceeded to address questions from the audience. The following meeting attendees asked questions:

- Bert Chancellor, [Loma Linda University Health](#) (LLUH)
- Renuka Agarwal, Broadband Institute Foundation
- Paulina Chavez, Everyone On
- Ana Mendoz, OTAN
- Alex Franco, [South Bay Cities Council of Governments](#) (SBCCOG)
- Licia Viallatta, City of Antioch

Agenda Item 3 – Tech Access for Individuals with Disabilities

Mr. Andrew Broderick, Co-Director, SF Tech Council member, introduced a guest panel that represents tech access for individuals with disabilities. CDT's guest speakers included Chief Information Officer, Jacob Johnson from CA Department of Rehabilitation, Public Regulatory Utilities Analyst, Mark Bella from CPUC CA Connect/Deaf & Disabled Communication, Executive Director, Ryan Easterly from Working for Inclusive & Transformative Healthcare (WITH) Foundation, Assistive Tech Educator, Marisol Ferrante from Independent living Resource Center San Francisco. Mr. Broderick asked the panel questions surrounding the different types of assistive training available on accessible hardware or software technologies as well as the importance of enabling individuals with disabilities to access information such as online content, government programs and other essential services, and wrapped up with panelists sharing their thoughts on the role artificial intelligence can play in making technology more accessible and personalized for users with disabilities. The panel wrapped up with promoting each panelist webpage with QR code per panelist that presented and contact information for further offline discussions.

Questions

Mr. Andrew Broderick moderated the panel by raising questions from the Q&A and from participants. The following participants asked questions:

- Regina Hanna, SiskiyouWorks
- Darren Blackburn, Public Advocates Office

Agenda Item 4 – USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant

Mr. Robert Machado, Telecom General Field Representative with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, provided an overview of the USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant. He noted that applications are due by June 30, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. EST. Grant awards range from \$50,000 to \$750,000 and require a minimum 15% non-federal match. He reviewed eligibility requirements, qualifying service areas, application resources, and submission guidelines. Mr. Machado concluded by sharing his contact information and details about an upcoming USDA webinar scheduled for June 3 from 1:00–2:00 p.m. EST.

Ms. Anh Nguyen moderated the Questions session. These participants asked questions verbally and in the chat:

- Michael Magana, Calaveras Health and Human Services Agency
- Wally Siembab, South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG)
- Jeremy Stern, Stern Digital LLC
- Regina Hanna, SiskiyouWorks

Agenda Item 5 – CDT/OBDL Updates

Digital Equity Resource Survey/Finder Update

Ms. Anh Nguyen provided an update on the Digital Equity Resource Finder (DERF). She concluded her presentation by asking participants to share and connect their communities with the tool. She shared that the Outreach Toolkit will be available in the near future to support outreach efforts.

Upcoming Grant Opportunities

Ms. Aracely Hernandez reminded attendees of upcoming deadlines for several California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) programs, including the Tribal Technical Assistance Account, Broadband Adoption Account, and Broadband Public Housing Account. She highlighted the Broadband Adoption Account webinar and Q&A scheduled for June 4, 2026, from 1:30–3:30 p.m., which will provide an overview of program updates,

application changes, and new application forms. Links and a QR code were shared for registration. Ms. Hernandez also provided updates on the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP), noting that a Notice of Funding Opportunity is anticipated in Spring 2026, with approximately \$500 million available for broadband infrastructure projects. She shared resources, including the TBCP Get Ready Primer and information on the Native Entities Grant Program, to help eligible applicants prepare for future funding opportunities.

Request for Innovative Ideas Update

Mr. Scott Adams reminded attendees of the Request for Innovative Ideas (RFI²), which was launched in January and included seven distinct challenges, to reiterate the RFI²'s purpose. Also, he concluded that Mr. James Spencer will provide an update for the next meeting on the status of the RFIs.

Future Meeting Dates & Engagement Highlight

Ms. Anh Nguyen announced that the next Community of Practice meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 25, 2026. She noted that the meeting will maintain its usual timeframe but may be subject to change due to holidays or urgent needs. She concluded the meeting with ways to stay connected with CDT Office of Broadband and Digital Literacy by sharing a QR code for subscribing to Broadband for All email updates, the link to the Broadband for All portal, and contact information.

CDT Office of Broadband and Digital Literacy stayed to check for any last questions and then thanked participants and presenters for their engagement and partnership. The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

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

Transcript

Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the May Digital Equity Community of Practice. We're very grateful for your ongoing partnership and collaboration. This Digital Equity Community of Practice is where folks across the state that are focused on closing the digital divide come together to share best and smart practices and align our efforts. I'm Scott Adams, the Deputy Director of Broadband and Digital Literacy at the California Department of Technology, and I'm now going to hand it over to my colleague, Anh Nguyen.

Thank you, Scott, and thank you, everyone, for being here. Good morning, and please use the chat box to share your name, job title, and affiliated organization as more folks are coming in. Before we begin, a few housekeeping items. Next slide, please. Presenters, please cue Ricki to advance your slides. Select side-by-side speaker mode for the best viewing experience when slides are shared. Note that closed captioning is available by selecting "CC Closed Caption" on your toolbar, and select "Show Subtitle". If you cannot find it, please click the icon with the three dots for more options. And please note there's time allocated for questions. Please use the Q&A box in order to add your questions while the presenters are speaking. We're helping to keep every questions organized, so chat will be off while the presenters are speaking and will be turned back on. You'll see the prompt indicating when chat is available. Please use the raise hand icon on Zoom, or star 9 if you're calling in by phone. Our team will request that you come off mute and video. Feel free to turn on your mic and camera at that time. The meeting is being recorded. We will be posting the recording, slides, and transcripts of this meeting to the Broadband for All portal. Please use the QR code listed on your screen, or click on the link in the chat to access post-meeting materials from past events. And because of this, AI note-taking bots are not permitted and will be removed from the meeting. Next slide, please. Great. Here's a quick agenda of our Community of Practice today. You've just heard from Scott with the Welcome. I will briefly review the feedback that you all generously provided during registration. Next, we will have the California Lifeline Home Broadband Pilot Program updates. Afterwards, we will hear from a panel regarding Tech Access for Individuals with Disabilities. Next, we will hear an update from the USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant. And lastly, we'll wrap up the Community of Practice with CDT and OBDL Updates. Next slide, please. Alright, so just a few highlights. On the left, you see here are some topics that we have covered in previous meetings, and, as many of you requested tech accessibility for individuals with disabilities came up. Many times, either for elder populations or folks with various disabilities so we're hoping to cover that a little bit today. We understand that folks are still asking for other topics, so listed them to the right including digital skills training, donations of laptop, you know, new technology, and even information about WCHE, so the accessibility standards. Next slide, please. And then some of the speakers that you requested from, we hope we're able to, you know, fulfill those requests. We're having Andrew today as one of our facilitators of the panel, and we've had librarians in the past, and they continue to join us. Sunne was, you know, a guest previously with other members of CETF, and in the future, we're looking at your request to have folks from the Benton Institute, from the Department of General Services, Education Superhighway, Women in Tech, as well as Workforce Development and Job Training Organization. So, keeping all of those in mind. Next slide, please. And then, how can we improve our meetings? So, thank you again for providing these options. We want to make, to be responsive to your request, and have ensured, you know, to remind folks about closed

captioning, and that, you know like I mentioned before, this meeting is being recorded and available after the meeting. We are sharing the agenda in the Zoom registration as well, so if you take a look at those, that would outline a brief overview of the agenda. So, just something to keep in mind. Next slide, please. And then, just a few comments, general comments, and questions that we're noting. You know, I'm so glad that you found the large device update interesting, and it shows, you know, that we are bringing contents relevant to you all. There are a few other questions, but I also want to look at the very last one. Apologies to this individual who can't join us on Thursday. We hope that the recording that we have for you is at your access when you need it, and whenever you need it. Definitely time for your grandchildren is important. So, next slide, please. Okay, and so with that, we wanted to remind folks that the Digital Equity Community of Practice focuses on Goal 2 and Goal 3 of the Broadband for All Action Plan. I know folks ask about infrastructure, but because there are other spaces that discuss in-depth and details about infrastructure, we are, the content of our Community of Practice focused on Goal 2, for all Californians to have access to affordable broadband and necessary devices, and Goal 3, all Californians can access training and support to enable digital inclusion. Next slide. And so, a few meeting norms, as we go through the meeting, only questions and comments on the agenda items will be addressed. Chat will be monitored. Any disruptive behaviors will not be tolerated, and individuals will be removed from meeting. So, with that, I would like to go to the next slide and bring up our next speaker, Loi Nguyen from the CPUC, California Lifeline Home Broadband Pilot Program. Over to you, Loi.

Good morning. Hello, everyone. Thank you for having us back. Today, I will provide updates on the Home Broadband Pilot Program. Next slide, please. Okay, so registration has been approved for both the City and County of San Francisco and the City of Ontario. The City of Ontario has submitted its advice letter, which is currently being under review. Of the 16 service providers that submitted their advice letter, 8 providers indicated in bold black are actively enrolling subscribers. Two additional providers, Calaveras and Cisco Telephone Companies bolded in red, have completed onboarding, submitted their marketing materials, and finalized system interface testing. They will be... they are on schedule to begin enrolling subscribers, Friday, tomorrow, May 29th. Three additional providers, highlighted, bold in blue, Cal.Net, Sierra Telephone Company, and Volcano Telephone Company, are scheduled to begin enrollment next Friday, June 5th. Next slide, please. We're happy to announce, as of May 25th, a total of 13,438 subscribers have enrolled in the pilot program. Of these, 9,027 are enrolled in standalone broadband services, representing 67% of the total. The remaining 4,411 subscribers are enrolled in the bundle broadband services, accounting for 33%. Of the total subscribers, 10,632, which is... represent 79%, are new to the Pilot Program, so we're happy about that,

while 2,806 have transferred from the core Lifeline Program into the Pilot Program. Next slide, please. And that is the latest update to the Pilot Program.

Thank you so much, Loi. Always appreciate having you here, joining us. Just to kick us off, just a clarifying question. Can you provide us with more information as to what the City of Ontario, and was it the City of San Francisco are doing with the Lifeline? Just what does that mean exactly?

So, they both initiated to join the Pilot Program. So, they each offer internet services in their areas, and so they, so similar to the regular service providers, they have their own internet service within their territory, their city limits of offering services. Did that answer your question?

Yeah, yeah, I think, I mean, it's helpful. So cities, like San Francisco are offering free Wi-Fi to residents through the Lifeline Program. Is that, is that correct?

Yeah, so, and they want to participate in the pilot to offer the subsidy. So, they currently, I think the City and City and County of San Francisco offer internet access to housing units. And the City of Ontario offer internet services to within their territory for a fee. So, with the Pilot Program, they would offer the subsidy to those household, eligible households.

Hi, Loi, hi, Aracely. I'm gonna jump in here. I think that that's really exciting. So, essentially, not just private sector internet providers, but where there are municipalities and other entities providing internet service, there's a potential for them to partner with the Pilot to leverage the subsidy for their residents, correct? That's really neat.

Yes, and that is the reason why we issued the resolution, and it was approved by the Commission for local agencies to participate in the Pilot.

Fantastic.

Great. Well, we do want to open up the floor to see if any folks in the audience have any questions. Please, you know, feel free to raise your hand, unmute yourself, you know, and go off camera, or go on camera. We look forward to seeing if there's any additional questions.

Alright, just to make sure I'm not missing anything. Looks like there's no questions at the moment.

Aracely, actually, you have Kami Griffiths, has her hand raised, and then there's also another gentleman.

Thank you.

Okay.

Yes, please go ahead and Kami, go ahead.

Hey there! So, we provide services in San Francisco, and I'd like to understand how we tell San Franciscans about the Lifeline Program. Who would I reach out for more information?

You can reach out to me, and I can, we can talk offline and provide what you need.

Great, thank you.

Thank you for that, Kami. And sorry, it looks like there was somebody else that had their hand raised. Go ahead. Yes.

Yeah. So, I put a link in the chat. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, I helped a 200-unit complex connect to a middle-mile provider. They get 10 gigabits per second symmetrical for \$15 per month. And I currently live in Alameda, and we have line of sight to an IXP... to an ex... Yeah, an IXP internet exchange point in San Francisco, and I'd like to know if anyone can give me any advice on approaching them. I'd like to get the 200 units in our building together and just put an antenna on our roof. And in New York City, I was a member of NYC Mesh, and that's where I learned that bandwidth is free if you pay for your antennas.

I'll take that one. I dropped my email in the chat there. Why don't you send me an email, and we'll see if we can direct you to the appropriate person.

Alright, and I'm curious as to why other people aren't talking about this. It seems that we just talk about, like, subsidies for poor people to then give their money to the big corporations that have caused the problem, and I'll stop there.

I'll go ahead. Well, you know, I think that that's a great point, and that's one of the, the, you know, purposes of Broadband for All here in California, and the collaborative effort between, state agencies like the Public Utilities Commission, the Department of Technology, the State Libraries, Department of Education, and this Community of Practice is that our shared goal is to help elevate and uplift the availability of this Pilot in the areas that it's available. So, Loi, I don't know if you want to add that. It's something that's really just, you know, kicked into gear over the last couple months. Loi?

Yeah, I agree. I really don't have anything else to add, but yeah.

It seems like people just aren't aware. They think the only choice is the big ISPs. And that, you know, that awareness needs to be raised by groups like this. Thank you.

Thank you so much, Loi. And I do see that we have another question that came in. It states, has CPUC staff heard of anyone having any trouble signing up for the Broadband Pilot Program?

I haven't seen any issue, like, with signing up?

Thank you. Another question, are there barriers to further expansion of the program?

Not that I am aware of at this point.

Got it, thank you. And we do know that the program just rolled out this year, and it's... there's been several ISPs that have just been approved recently, so thank you for those updates. Another question, is a PUC making available any general outreach materials to promote the Pilot Program?

So, I think we have talked about this in the past. We don't have an outreach program within the Lifeline Program. However, we're working on a one-pager to provide to organizations that have outreach to certain groups to help them, kind of like a one-pager about the Pilot Program. So we're working on that, and of course, we have our website that offer information about the program, too. And then when it's available, I will share with the group.

I was just about to say thank you. We look forward to, you know, promoting that once it becomes available. And then I do see some folks have their hands raised. Ana Mendoza-Santiago, would you like to unmute yourself and ask your question?

Of course, hello, everyone. So my name is Ana Mendoza, and I am the Technology Coordinator for OTAN, which focuses on adult education across the state, and I wanted to see if there's any, of course, we're going to be promoting this, you know, across the state, but when it comes to adult institutions, but is there any attachment also to maybe having or supporting students so that they can have access to a computer at home?

I'm... I'm not sure if I under... understand, about the pilot, if there is...I'm sorry, could you ask that question again? I'm sorry.

Ana, are you still there?

Okay, now I can. Yes, I'm sorry, just for a minute there, I lost access to unmuting myself. Yes, I'm just wondering, like, yes, if there's any, maybe in the future, or any initiative to, aside from connecting students and, you know, and Californians to the internet, if there's anything also related to providing them with, hardware or software, so they can use this Wi-Fi for, you know, to take classes online, and, you know, any other resources that they may have that the state also provides, such as free education.

Right, so our, the Lifeline Program, we are not, we don't offer devices, so, at this time, we don't have any plan to. Because we offer...

And Loi, if I could just jump in, too. Ana, in regards to your question, there's, you know, a lot of different needs and dimensionality to the barriers that folks face to getting connected, and there's a lot of folks that are working on the device piece here in California. Particularly, some of those folks are funded by grants from the Public Utilities Commission's Adoption Grant Account, and additionally, there's entities like the California Emerging Technology and participating Broadband Council members that are working on a California Green Tech Initiative, and others. We're happy, if you have specific questions, to send them to Aracely or other folks on our staff, and we can share any information we have about device programs.

Thank you.

Thanks, Loi. We do have another hand raised. Alicia Villalta, would you like to unmute yourself?

Yes, good morning, everyone. My name's Licia Villalta, and I'm here in the Contra Costa County area, and I'm just wondering if there are any resources or any programs in this area that I could potentially promote to my residents. I'm currently a housing manager for the City of Antioch. But would love to, to bring some of these programs to our city, and of course, to our county as well.

I'm gonna take that, but I'm not sure if it's directly to, to about the Pilot Program. But on our website, of course, you know, this is a voluntary program, so service providers that voluntarily participate in the program, if they offer service in certain service areas, then it would be available in your specific area. As to resources or additional... Scott, did you... do you have anything you want?

Absolutely. One of the things that we've worked on, over the last 3 years when developing the Digital Equity Plan, and then with stakeholders, many, stakeholders and partners here, Licia, is we've developed a Digital Equity

Resource Finder that is on the Broadband for All portal website, and the team will drop a link here in the chat and talk a little bit more about it later, but you can search by area for available programs and other entities that provide services in your area.

Excellent, thank you so much.

No, you're welcome.

Great, let's see here. I think there's still another question that's, in the chat. Alex Franco, looks like the question, is the Pilot Program going to be translated into other languages? Sorry, you're referring to the... the Lifeline Program online? Alex Franco, feel free to unmute yourself if you'd like to clarify.

While we wait for him, I can just say that our website, there are multiple languages that it translates to on our website, and on the one-pager, we will have translate into different languages, too.

Great, thank you so much, Loi. Just making sure we're not missing any additional questions here. Looks like there was some clarification, referring to the collateral materials is what he was referring to. So, perhaps the one-pager that you mentioned earlier, Loi, if that's going to be available in other languages as well.

Yes, we're working on that.

Sounds good. Alright, just making sure I'm not missing any additional questions in the chat, or any folks that are raising their hands? All right. Well, thank you again, Loi, for joining us. We look forward to regular updates during our monthly Communities of Practice, and yeah, looking forward to those outreach materials, that one pager. Great. So, moving on to the next portion of our presentation, as Anh mentioned earlier, during the Community Feedback portion, we've seen diverse responses in terms of what folks want to see during these meetings. Tech access for individuals with disabilities is a topic that was requested, and as we evolve the Communities of Practice, we're excited to work with our ecosystem to bring content that folks are excited to hear about. So today, I'm pleased to share that we have an exciting panel of several subject matter experts in the field. And our panel today will be facilitated by Andrew Broderick, who is the Co-Director from the SF Tech Council. If we could move on to the next slide. And I will go ahead and pass it over to Andrew. Thank you so much for being here today, and especially to everyone also that's joining us as a panelist today. We look forward to a really great discussion, and we encourage folks in the audience to start thinking of some questions that you may have as, you know, the panel is speaking. We will be opening up the floor, towards the

end for an engagement, on... for Q&A. So go ahead and take it away, Andrew. Thank you so much.

Yeah, thank you. Good morning, everybody. Thank you, Aracely, for that warm introduction, and welcome to today's Community of Practice call. So, my name is Andrew Broderick. I'm with the SF Tech Council, which is a multi-sector collaborative in San Francisco, bringing government and non-government organizations serving older adults and adults with disabilities with the shared mission of closing the digital divide. And so we have a large representation of organizations that participate in the Tech Council. We engage in a lot of activities from device distribution to digital skill training, doing pop-ups in the community. And then also convening these organizations on a monthly basis, and kind of hosting kind of advocacy campaigns for more supportive policy, more supportive funding for the programming that needs to take place. And for today's session on tech access for individuals with disabilities as Aracely had said, we have a fantastic panel that we've brought together who bring unique organizational insights to the issue of tech access for individuals with disabilities, and we will shortly kind of go into some introductions of the panelists but I just want to just take a minute, maybe set some context for today's meeting.

Individuals with disabilities were one of the eight covered populations in the Federal Digital Equity Act. These populations historically experienced lower rates of computer and internet access. And when we talk about disability, we're typically referring to a physical or mental impairment that may substantially limit one or more major life activities. And, today in the US, 1 in 4 adults have some form of a disability. In California, that's 10% of the population, so about 4 million people. And it's important to recognize disabilities come in various forms and in different phases of life. And there's no single definition of accessibility or method of digital inclusion that can address all needs. So, we've brought together this panel to really kind of delve into some of the issues that concern digital accessibility for this particular population. And just highlighting from California's State Digital Equity Plan, some of the barriers that were identified for individuals with disability were a lack of access to accessible hardware and software. And so, only about half of the survey respondents in the state survey reported using assistive technology. And the most important or urgent needs that were identified were for low-cost assistive technology, training, information about options, and low-cost repairs.

Other barriers that were identified were the need for additional training on hardware and software, and the inaccessibility of many online services for individuals with disabilities. So that provides a little context and background for today's discussion, and what I would like to do is introduce our panelists. And to start off for today, we have our first panelist I'd like to introduce is Jacob Johnson. And Jacob represents, I would say, the systemic and vocational side of access at the Department of Rehabilitation, leading the state ADA

implementation, and how they integrate assistive technology into vocational training. So, Jacob, please introduce yourself.

Hey, thanks, Andrew. So, as I'm getting started here, I'm gonna drop some links into the chat for y'all to, to peruse at your leisure. It's kind of further information on what I'm going to talk about. And, so yeah, as Andrew said, I'm Jake Johnson, I'm the Deputy Director for Information Technology Services and the Chief Information Officer for the Department of Rehabilitation. So, speaking about our services, the California Department of Rehabilitation works in partnership with consumers and other stakeholders to provide services and advocacy resulting in employment, independent living, and equality for individuals with disabilities. We administer the largest vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs in the country, and so I want to talk about some of the programs. I'm gonna start by talking about a couple programs that we administer on behalf of, other, other entities, so where we mostly just administer the program, and maybe we provide some oversight. So the first of those is our Assistive Technology Act Program. So, we administer this federally funded assistive technology program. The intent is to help Californians with disabilities access assistive technology devices and services that support independence, employment, education, communication, and digital access. And this is, we administer this program, that actually... so we administer the funding, and then we provide oversight, and so, the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, or CFILC, administers this program currently, and so, what it does is it's a lending program, so it, the program provides a statewide network of lending libraries.

So, this.

Nope.

Program participants are able to. Pardon me, I keep hearing noises. Are you all able to hear me okay?

We can hear you perfectly, Jacob.

Okay, perfect. Okay. So, so yeah, so this, it's a statewide program. Folks can borrow, program participants, that is, can borrow assistive technology devices of various types. This is really good for individuals that want to try out a technology. I mean, this equipment and the software and everything can be somewhat pricey and costly, so, so it's good to have a chance to try it out. Maybe there's funding that's coming, but it's not there yet, so if someone wants to borrow a device potentially to hold them over until funding is available to buy equipment, that, you know, it's theirs on a more permanent basis. And it can be anything from screen readers for blind users to adaptive computing equipment,

communications devices, a wide range of equipment that could be available through this program, and so that's kind of one option. Another option we have, I mean, I know CPUC has been mentioned, and so we have a great partnership with the CPUC to administer their voice options program. And so what it does is it provides eligible Californians with speech-related disabilities access to speech-generating technology. So it includes a tablet-based computing device. It's an iPad, is what the program uses currently with applications for, you know, speech-related applications on it. The program's intended to ensure equal access to telephone and communication services for people with speech disabilities. And again, it operates through a partnership between the Department of Rehabilitation and the Public Utilities Commission. So that... the program includes assessments of communications needs, demonstrations of the products training, long-term loans of the equipment, the software, technical assistance as it's needed. So, you can access this program by just contacting a local provider, you can get referrals from our office, and the links that I put in the chat. You can get there through those links as well. There's one for voice options, and so yeah, so those are some kind of, I would say, more standalone programs. Now, our main business at Department of Rehabilitation, or sort of our... I shouldn't say main, but our largest part of our business is our employment services, and so, the other... the remaining ways of getting ahold of the assistive technology that I'm going to talk about are through employment services. So what... what that...the way that works is if someone, a person with a disability comes to us and applies for employment services, there's an application process, and then there's an eligibility determination, and then once... Once that's done, they would work with our qualified rehabilitation counselors and would, would develop a plan for employment, and then through that employment plan, we would provide assistive technology and related services. So, that could include, sort of, the type of assistive technology that we've been talking about, screen readers, various hardware and software, braille displays, there's just a wide range of assistive technologies, mobility-related products, maybe it's an accessible wheelchair, that sort of thing. And we have some sort of specific, you know, I would say maybe more specialized, types of technologies, like, for example, our mobility evaluation program for our, we call our program participants on the employment program consumers. So, if a consumer is determined to need it, we could provide a mobility evaluation to determine, you know, what types of adaptive equipment would be needed for them to drive safely, right? Maybe that's required for their employment plan. So that would be an evaluation, maybe. Assessment of physical and cognitive driving ability, recommendations for products that might be needed, like hand controls, wheelchair lift, steering modifications, transfer equipment, you know, various vehicle modifications. So again, that would be available through our employment program. Then, as I mentioned, just sort of more generalized assistive technology. Shouldn't say generalized, I mean, it's specific to the individual, but it's, again, it's the kinds of things like screen readers and braille equipment, that sort of thing,

communications devices, computer access technology. And then, talking about training and technical support, again, that's available. Usually, if we're gonna purchase the the equipment or the software for, for the purpose of the consumer achieving their employment goal, training would go along with that, right? So that would be, like, device setup and installation, accessibility configuration, one-on-one training, software support.

Jacob, I, I, I...wanted you just to introduce a little yourself and the organization, and we are kind of time-limited with...

Yeah, yeah. Sure.

Thank you very much for that very comprehensive introduction about all the range of, kind of, products and services that you're making available to your community, so appreciate that.

Sure thing.

A very brief introduction to our panelists, which is Ryan Easterly, who has a more forward-looking perspective on proactive inclusion, and working specifically with intellectual and developmental disabilities. So, Ryan.

Hello, everyone, and thank you, Andrew, for having me. I'm Ryan Easterly, I serve as Executive Director of the WITH Foundation, and we're a private, endowed foundation that focuses on promoting comprehensive healthcare for adults with developmental disabilities in the U.S., and although we primarily exist to focus on healthcare equity, we recognize that digital equity is inseparable from healthcare access because of the way that technology is changing how people access healthcare. So, through our digital health initiative, we understand and support the inclusion of the perspective of disabled adults. At the beginning of the development process for technologies, because we understand waiting till the end, it's never enough, and that everyone benefits when people with disabilities are included at the beginning of a development process. Through our grantee partners, we also seek to promote digital literacy, accessible communications, and increased access to telehealth supports across the board. So again, thank you for having me today, and I look forward to sharing more.

Yeah, great to have you with us, Ryan. Thank you for that introduction. And next, we have Mark Bella, who's with the CPUC, and he can just give a very brief introduction, just in terms of some of the specialized hardware distribution and communication interventions taking place through CPUC. Mark?

Thank you very much, thanks for having me here. I appreciate that. My name is Mark, like they just said. I work with the California Connections Program and that is something for the deaf and disabled community, so it's a telecommunications program, so one of our focuses really is on helping the people that live in the state of California with their communication needs.

So, maybe that might be accessing equipment, support, so that they can communicate more independently from their workplaces, their homes, their schools, just anywhere in the community. We have focused mostly on 5 different groups, the deaf and hard of hearing, the blind, the speech, the mobility group, and then also the cognitive as well, so DDID. So, those are the different areas that we really do focus on, and right now, we are working through the modernization of our program. So I'm super excited to be a part of that, and I'm hoping to share a little bit more about that with all of you later. I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you so much, Mark, for that introduction. And finally, our last panelist is Marisol Ferrante, who's in San Francisco with the Independent Living Resource Center. So, Marisol, would you like to introduce yourself, please?

Hello, everybody. My name is Marisol Ferrante and I'm the Assistive Technology Coordinator at ILORCSF, which is short for Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco. And, we service anybody with a disability of any age, and we have... I speak Spanish, and another colleague speaks Spanish, and we have a person that speaks Mandarin and Cantonese, so we could service people with disabilities of all types. And, we try to have in our device lending library items that the statewide database doesn't have. And I also help people with finding the accessibility features on their tablets, phones, and computers, and... and how to use those. Did you want us to go into more detail, or is it just... this is just the introduction part?

Just the introduction part, but we see on your slide a lot of the device lending library, and, you know, you're doing some training, as you indicated, and you're doing some pilots, too, in healthcare, I believe, telehealth, and kind of some.

Oh, yes, and we have a legal program that... that somehow I forgot to put that on there. Free legal help for disability-related issues.

Great. Well, thank you, Marisol, and I'm going to jump straight into a question that kind of related to what came up in the State Digital Equity Plan findings, which is around training for individuals with disabilities, and
The question is like, what specific types of training and resources are available on accessible hardware or software? As well as kind of digital skill training specific to individuals with disabilities, in terms of, you know, kind of basic, intermediate, advanced skills, as well as cybersecurity. So would anybody like to

take that question in terms of... I know, Jacob, you talked a lot about some of the training that you're doing, Marisol. And also, you know, Mark, you know, anything there that you'd like to highlight in terms of what's specific in serving the kind of disability community, specifically when it comes to training?

Yes, this is Mark. I'd be happy to take that one. Yeah. So, we do offer different ways to meet the clients and the consumers and their needs. So some of them maybe are quite good already. Maybe they can pick something up, you know, quickly. Maybe some of them are overwhelmed. You know, they just... there's just such a range of how people approach this. So we do offer different solutions. We do have one-on-one training that we can offer. We can even go visit them at their home and sit with them while they're using their equipment in that space. There's also a service center. We provide training there. People can come to our location. We recently just set up, like, a learning management system. And so, that's got lessons for each of the different types of, you know, equipment needs, or, you know, these services. Like, for example, the service for maybe the iPhone. And so how we can set that up with the accessibility in the functional settings, we can work with them and expand on that. We allow that, or we provide for that kind of training, for that kind of access. Another example would be someone working with a cognitive disability. Maybe we're providing the equipment and the phone, and maybe we're using pictures. Maybe we're using pictures for the family members, for their parents. Maybe we're putting... this is the picture... oh, if I have this picture, I'm calling my mother. And so we work with that. Maybe some of the training, leading them through that, guiding them to different steps. Really depends on what their needs are, but it is so exciting to see. We really expect that we're going to be launching this, this learning management system, very soon, hopefully as early as summer. So, it's going to be a big part of our program, our connections program, and we're looking forward to how we can individualize that training for specific needs, and use different approach for different people, and make sure that we can provide their training and their learning in a way, in a system that's accessible to them, that they can understand. And, you know, everything's moving pretty fast now, so we're excited to be a part of that.

Great, thank you, appreciate that. And Marisol, I'm just curious, at the community level, what are you offering in San Francisco when it comes to supporting the training needs of your community?

Well, we do it on an individual basis, so the client will call up and say they don't know how to do whatever on their iPhone or whatever device they have. And so then, they just make an appointment, and I show them how to do it. And then, if it's something really big, I can refer them to, like, the community living campaign that have classes that are ongoing, if they need that kind of thing.

Okay, great. And I'm going to ask another question now, which I'm going to ask you, Jake, you know, maybe to take the lead in answering. Again, going back to the state plan findings about the, you know, people being not able to access online content or government programs or other essential services. So can you speak to the importance of accessible technology to enable individuals to be able to do that? And what's taking place now that might improve that situation, given the findings in the state plan?

Absolutely, and I have to, you know, admit that I... for... specifically around the state plan findings, I think I'm more familiar with, sort of, what's required from a state perspective, or what's needed, right? So, if we think about...you know, what digital equity is. Everybody should have access to the information they need. I mean, you mentioned the statistic, 1 in 4 people have a disability. That's huge, right? We know everybody needs to get their content online, right? So the state's required to make everything accessible. Anything that it puts online through its website, right, has to be made accessible. That's forms, it's web pages, it's anything, right? That's... that's state law. And so, which... it's been the law for some time, I mean, since the, since the Rehabilitation Act was updated, and then adopted by reference with California statute in 2002, right? So it's been... it's been required for 20 years, and I would say, just in the past you know, maybe since 2019, right, there's been, you know, additional statute passed that actually requires states to certify... state departments to certify that they're making their content accessible. We partnered with the Department of Technology to help to, you know, to make sure that that's happening. If you folks go to our website, we have a web accessibility toolkit for anybody who wants to find out information, either just about what the requirements are, what the law is, or if it's a state department that needs help with that. It should be happening now, I think is the bottom line, but there's always more to do. I mean, we have to make sure, even with our own web content, we double and triple check it to make sure that it's fully accessible.

Okay. Anybody else have any other comments just on accessibility of online services or resources, and what they see as kind of, you know, developments that might kind of make for improvements for individuals with disabilities?

We have a soundproof booth that's set up for people to come in, and if they need help, you know, we... one of us will be in there with them to help them, but it's soundproof for privacy for them. So that they can... if they... if they don't have the ability to do it at home, like, they need to apply for benefits or whatever.

Great. Okay, that's good. So, I remember you talking about that, having that kind of in your offices to give that privacy space, etc. So, for telehealth or legal kind of consultations. And so, kind of, Ryan, I wanted to pick up on what you

had talked about, like, some of these emerging best practices or innovative approaches to technology accessibility. You talked about baking it in early, and you know, there's a number of initiatives that you're kind of engaged with. Would you like to talk to some of the work that you're doing in a way that's more future-looking and proactive?

I think across the sector, through various partners, we see many companies embracing a co-designing approach, which brings people with disabilities together with designers and developers and encourages them to learn from the lived experience of individuals with disabilities at the front end of a development process, and engage them as co-designers. I know through some support that WITH Foundation has been able to provide. We've also seen some of our partners engage in a project we loosely call Beta Day, which helps to bring together designers and developers with people with disabilities, and through the Beta Day project, we also developed an accessible NDA materials, because with some companies, when they're engaging people with disabilities at the beginning of a process, they get concerned about their technology and, you know, how much of it is available to the public, so I do want to raise that if you look at our website, there are materials, and there is support and resources for if you have technology that you don't want available to the public quite yet, there are ways to engage adults with IDD in the process, and ways that you can make your NDA agreements accessible to folks with a variety of intellectual and developmental disabilities. I'd also mention that when we see the use of virtual reality technology, that alongside the innovations that are happening there, it is critical to engage people with disabilities in that process. And I would say, on behalf of some of our grantee partners that are doing that work, it is yet another example of when you engage people with disabilities earlier in the process, it benefits everyone. It makes your technology more useful for the broader population. We know with several of our grantee partners, they feel as though they've been able to serve better serve the general public, as well as better serve the veteran community as a result of their intentional work to incorporate adults with IDD early into their process. So I will stop there.

Okay, great. Well, that sounds very promising, so we can expect good things coming down the pipeline from the tech industry in terms of products and services, that...So, no meeting would be kind of complete without mentioning AI. So, this is our kind of last kind of section, but really wanted to kind of get people's thoughts on the role artificial intelligence can play in making technology more accessible, more personalized for individuals with disabilities. So, anybody like to kind of talk to that in terms of what they're seeing? And yes, please, Mark, yeah.

Sure, yes, I'd be happy to. With AI, it's a very interesting topic to discuss right now, because we have been doing some research and some testing of various

equipment that's already built in with AI. And it's something new for us, and we want to make sure that we evaluate that it's a good fit for some of the populations that we are providing for. And we do see some benefits for... Well, which can be provided for independence, instead of having to rely on other people for certain needs. independent communication. As an example, we tested several small classes for the blind population. And that's an example of what the blind... if the blind population has a guide dog, and they want to walk with it, you know, if they need to go to the restroom, Outside, you know, sometimes, a blind individual doesn't know where their... their... Their guide animal had, going to the bathroom outside, so it will allow them to see where... where it is, and where the garbage is, 50 yards away, and where they can throw it away. Another example is that we're finding different perspectives of how AI can help in the home environment for mobility issues? They can say commands to turn the lights off, or use their voice to command the temperature to change to fulfill their needs, you know, so all these functional needs are something that we've been looking at. Right now, we're doing some research and some testing in this area to see if the new products will be able to meet the needs of the various populations. And we're... it's a very exciting part, you know? We're also concerned about privacy issues and... we want to make sure that people are aware of the functions of AI. So I think overall... that's the overall perspective, and we're committed to it. And I've also seen a lot of companies who are really pushing AI, you know, having it built into the equipment, so...

Okay, that's great. And I know, Ryan, you've been involved with the Disability X Tech Fund and looking at AI and algorithmic bias. Anything you'd like to highlight there?

I would say I'm somewhat similarly aligned to what's been raised, in that, ultimately, we do see a lot of potential and opportunity in AI, especially when it comes to assisting with real-time captioning, transcription, helping with visual descriptions, image descriptions. Also, assisting with voice navigation and conversational support with AAC users. So there is a lot of opportunity, a lot of things to be excited about. But at the same time, as far as with work, we acknowledge that there is a level of risk, especially for folks with disabilities, because it can reproduce bias that exists in technology and algorithms, and we know that disabled users have been excluded from some historical data sets that go into developing some of these large language models. So from our perspective, we remain hopeful and optimistic about the ways that AI could support adults with IDD in living their lives, and we are hopeful that as we look to AI for these solutions, that the goal of the technology will be ultimately to increase the autonomy, inclusion of people with disabilities in practical ways, and ultimately help them engage in surviving and thriving in their lives and in their communities.

That's great. Okay, well, thank you, thank you, Ryan, for that important work that you're doing that. And we have about a minute just before getting to a Q&A session, but Jacob or Marisol, anything you wanted to add just about the AI factor when it comes to the work you're doing? Yeah. In about a...

I'll say, just very quickly, just agree with what's being said. It is an exciting time, and you know, I would just say that a lot of the AI, in terms of just not speaking to, like, the decision-making and decision support and sort of what large organizations are doing, but really just thinking about more the accessibility of the everyday products, phones and computers, and then some of the other, sort of the assistive technology that we use. It's being built in right now. There's a lot that's being built in. I mean, Apple and Google have just made big announcements. You know, the screen reader that many people use, blind users use, JAWS is being updated to include more AI support, mostly around, like image, automatically describing images, for example, so there's a lot being done. I think that we're gonna get a lot of this technology in our accessibility-related products just sort of by default, right, as it's being updated over the past couple years, we've just been seeing more and more AI just sort of being worked into these products, so... Agree that it is an exciting time, and I also would recommend for everybody to, start learning if you're not doing it already. I mean, AI can be a huge productivity tool to save our time, so it is absolutely worthwhile for people with disabilities just even to learn how to effectively develop prompts and use, like, ChatGPT or one of the other sort of mainstream chatbot, you know, products to sort of enhance their work, right? So it is a very exciting time.

Okay, great. Well, thank you for that, Jacob. Appreciate that. Aracely, just curious, any questions that we have for the panelists, based on everything that they've been sharing here today?

Yeah, looks like there's already a couple of questions that came in through the Q&A, and folks, you know, please feel free to raise your hand, or continue to ask some questions through the chat or the Q&A box. So I'll go ahead and start off with the first question that was asked. It looks like this question is specifically for Jacob from the Department of Rehabilitation. The question is, where can folks applying to DOR find accessible forms to complete? In working with students and my own child, we have not been able to download forms nor complete forms online.

Yeah, so I actually got that. I was just getting ready to hit send into the Q&A. But I'll just verbally say that, so I'm... I posted the Getting Started page for us to get started with applying for services. That's in the chat, you know, there's of course, an accessible way to apply for services. All of the forms on our website are

intended and designed to be accessible. If there's a problem with, with any of our forms, we have an email address for our webmaster that folks can, can use to report any problems, and I'm, I just put that in the, the, the answers for the questions, so, so you have what I just said in the chat, in the Q&A, rather.

Okay.

Got it. Thank you so much, Jacob. And it looks like another question, that also came in, related to employment. The question is, to prepare for employment exploration and training, are there accessible asset building and career interest surveys, and where can we find this? I'm not sure if that question is specific to one of you, or, you know, if there's any resources that you want to share related to this employment question.

Anything from a DOR's perspective, Jacob?

So, yeah, we would handle that through our employment services. I mean, we do... for us, it really all starts with folks applying for services, and of course. If they're... if it's for... for a student, right, for somebody who's, you know, qualifies as a student, there are... there are services for job exploration that are available to transition-age students, like high school students and... and soon after high school, that... where you don't have to actually be signed up for our employment services, they're, they're available, you know, certain ones are available to... just to students, but for most, most people, they would just apply for our services and then get, get that, that kind of support through them.

Great.

Thank you, thank you for that. Another question, with technology, digital equity, and access to broadband, how are folks dealing with power issues? In our rural areas, when weather comes in, it's not uncommon for Pacific Power to cut power.

Hmm.

Any thoughts on how that's impacting, you know, folks with a disability, and yeah, that's... a challenge.

Yeah, anybody want to talk to that ... no taker, maybe Mark want to say something? Yeah.

Mark says, sure. Yeah...I know that we have... that's a topic that we have been discussing for quite some time, with California the Office of Emergency Services, OES. You know, when the power goes off. We've got natural disasters, those sorts

of situations. We want to work together with the Office of Emergency Services and other partner agencies to provide an emergency backup power plan for those kinds of services. For example, maybe like a small generator, or...maybe, like, a backup battery, something that we could charge that we'd keep maybe a phone functioning if you need that for communication, those kinds of things. I mean, we are in talks about it. It's something that's on the table that we're discussing with the Office of Emergency Services to figure out what are the workarounds for this. How does that look for the different counties? State of California, and trying to make sure that we educate people when you have solutions to figure out, you know, let people know what do they need, and how do they access what they need.

Great, thank you, Mark. Aracely, any more questions come in, or...

Yeah, I mean, I think just some folks have questions around eligibility, in terms of acquiring assistive devices, yeah, if folks want to speak to that.

So, I think that one's to me. So, so' it, so there's a process for eligibility for our employment services, and I'm... I gotta apologize, because I don't work in that program, so I wouldn't be able to go into any, like, great detail, but generally, for a person with a disability, services would be... they would be eligible for employment services, which would include assistive technology that's focused on them meeting their employees employment goals. So, what I would suggest is to apply for services, and there's... there's a, you know, there's a process that our counseling staff would apply to, determine eligibility, and then develop the employment plan and go from there.

Thank you, Jacob. And Mark, looks like you were also getting ready to respond to that question.

Yeah, also, I just wanted to add something, too, like, for the home needs, you know, maybe there's, like, the website of California... of California Connect, they've got that application link on there as well, and they can get certified by a doctor, an audiologist, you know, so we can work and get the authorizations approved, we can get that information done, and I, you know, depending on what the need is for the services. So it is possible to apply on the website as well to be able to get the assistive equipment. You know, maybe voice options, you know, the different communications. We work closely with the DOR as well, so there are different, different access points to these programs. Yeah, and we are certainly happy to help out.

Thank you for that, Mark. And we also, just as we're, you know, quick or close to wrapping up this segment, we do want to encourage folks to, you know, raise

their hands if you have any last-minute questions, before we move on to the next section.

Marisol Ferrante: I have two funding sources, like, if the insurance doesn't cover it. Friends of Man.org. They used to only help people in their state, but they... they help in all... they... they spread it out to other states now. And so, your doctor, your OT, PT, or whatever therapist or AT specialists will have to request on the behalf on behalf of the client, to... and they will help you get the device you need, whether it's a... if it's, like, a van or a specialized wheelchair? Or even smaller things.

Great.

Hmm...

And then the other one is HelpHopeLive.org. And that one is a fundraising, but they help you through it. You don't have to do it alone, and it doesn't count against your benefits the way GoFundMe does. And you get to keep it all, and you can use them as many times as you want.

And are those... are those national or local to the Bay Area or California?

No, it's... it's... anywhere.

Where?

You just go to the... to their website and apply.

Okay.

But for the... for the Friends of Man, your... the AT specialist, or... or doctor, or some kind of professional has to apply for you.

Great. Thank you so much, Marisol. We really appreciate having you along with all of our panelists. Thank you so much, Andrew, for facilitating such a great discussion, and I'll turn it over to you to wrap up and, you know, say our last words here.

Yeah, no, thank you. I want to thank everyone, Mark, Jacob, Ryan, and Marisol for today's discussion. I think we could spend a lot of time just really digging into even just one of these issues, but really do appreciate you coming here and making yourselves available and kind of talking about what resources are available here in California, and just want to thank you for your time and contributions.

Mark says, this was my pleasure, thanks for having me.

Thank you.

My pleasure, as well. Thank you for having me, too.

Thank you.

Well, go ahead, Anh. I'll pass it over to you.

Yeah, thanks, Aracely. Thank you so much. It was a wonderful panel, and without further ado, I would like to introduce Mr. Robert Machado from USDA to share with us a bit more about Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant. Over to you, Robert?

Yes, thank you. So, thank you all for your time. I, I do want... We have, right now, open for applications, our Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program, excuse me. Not a horse. The, the...allergies have... have got me. So... So, we... we do have our Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program open. Okay, so... the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program is primarily focused on...creating a real-time interaction between a provider and patient, or instructor and student. We see here that, in the current round, the cap is at 750,000. So, in prior rounds, it was a little bit higher. I do want to allow time for questions and answers. Can we... can we go to the next slide, please? So, basically, anyone can apply for this. If you're not a sole proprietor, or, like...And... and... and individual, next slide, please. The... the application portal is through Grants.gov. And I'm here to help assist with any questions or technical assistance regarding the regulations, or, which is to help make bureaucracy a little bit more user-friendly. Next slide, please. So, here's... here's my email who'd... there is a... we do have a webinar coming up on June 3rd. But I... I also want to invite folks to contact me via my cell phone. It's 202-934-0601. I'm sorry, if we could go to the next slide, please. And...

I'm happy to share a screen of the USDA website, too. I know you wanted to share that with the audience as well before we go into questions.

Yes, yeah.

I'm happy to laugh. Give me 2 seconds. Sun. Is this the set you want to show everyone, Robert?

Yes, thank you. So, this...This site is... this is a great resource for folks who want to apply for this program. If you could scroll down, please? And under the "To

Apply" tab, at the top there. So, that tab has a lot of very useful information. The application guide is, is very helpful. We also have, we, we also have... the sample worksheets here. These simple worksheets were... will be...useful while putting together the application. They're not required, but they are suggested to use. We do suggest to use the application worksheets. There's also... it...towards the bottom here, we'll look at previous years awarded. We have, we have a list of all the awards we've made in the past. It is helpful to, to gain perspective on previous awards that have been given. I... I do want to disclaim that there is a minimum of 15% of matching component for... for... for...And there's a caveat to that. But, in... in general, there is a 15% minimum match. So, it is a reimbursement type of grant. If an award is made, the reimbursement is made generally prorated. That, that whole process is something we can navigate, but... the... the...the process itself is... is such that we try and be very hands-on, and we try and...be here to assist our users and make this as user-friendly as possible. I... I would like to open it up to a question and answer portion.

Yeah, thanks, Robert, thanks so much. I want to, yeah, say, you know, like, it takes a lot for the state and the federal government to collaborate. You know, we want to acknowledge that digital opportunity requires effort funded by many streams of funding, including ones from USDA, so thank you for making time to join us and sharing all this information regarding the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program. I'm sure our partners and stakeholders may have some questions, and I know you're eager to hear from them as well, so I don't want to hold that off, so I want to check to see if there are questions in the chat. I see here... oh, this is for Jacob. That's from the earlier panel. So I don't see any for this one yet, Robert, but we can keep an eye out for them in the chat. I encourage folks to, you know, raise your hands so we can make sure to unmute you.

Okay, thank you. I will say that, you know. It's oftentimes very tough for rural healthcare clinics and school districts to put together an application. There's... I'm not gonna sugarcoat it. There are a lot of hours that go into putting together these applications. But, sometimes it is helpful to leverage some of the institutional resources that folks might have at their educational facilities, or their practices. One of the best executive summaries that I've ever read was put together by some high school students, and...it... it... It made for a great class project but also a really compelling application, so I would just say to look at the institutional resources that folks have.

Yeah, thanks, Robert. There's one question in the chat that I want to raise for you. If the county population exceeds 20,000, can applicants still qualify by serving rural subpopulation or geographic region within the county?

That is... that is... that's a great question, so... the... the way that...the DLT Program is written is... there's opportunity for folks to be really strategic with how they structure their applications. So, for example, when we're looking at rurality, we can... we can take the hub sites, and we can isolate those, for the objective scoring values, which means that the hub sites, as long as there's a fixed end user site, the hub sites are not factored into the scoring value. When we're looking at the SAIFE (Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates) scores, that is a different metric, and that's written into, unfortunately, the funding announcement. So, that is different, but when we're looking at the rurality calculations for the objective scoring values, those are calculated based off the hub and end user sites.

Thank you, Robert. And Michael, if you would like to expand on that, please email Robert or get in contact through his contact number he shared earlier. A question from Wally, are there plans for a grant program to support telemedicine in metro regions where congestion and the cost of mobility... oh, sorry, it jumped while I was writing. The cost of mobility is constraining access to medical care?

Should I read that again, Robert? I know I stopped in the middle.

Yes, I'm sorry, I have multiple displays up right now. Let me... let me pull this up. If you could read that again, that'd be helpful.

Yeah, sorry, I also realized I was still sharing screen. Are there plans for a grant program to support telemedicine in metro regions where congestion and the cost of mobility is constraining access to medical care? If that's not relevant to USDA, it's okay.

Yeah, I... I wish I could...give insights on... on future appropriations, but, unfortunately, I'm not able to provide insights on that.

That's alright. Jeremy has a question for you as well. Can applicants... applications come from joint applications involving a local government agency or NGO and a broadband provider, or does that hurt the application's needs status? What if the broadband provider would be involved by covering the 15% match, as an example? And Jeremy, I see you on camera, so if I didn't correctly address that question, please feel free to chime in.

That is a great question, Jeremy. Okay, so there's a couple things we want to address here. There's a 15% match. First of all, it is...Because of how the regulation is written, it is mostly preferable to have that matching component be from a be from a cash match. The regulation does require that, the... if there is in-kind contributions to the matching component for it to be...

new, undepreciated equipment. So there are constraints on what we can utilize as that 15% cash match. Now, it... when... we're looking at...whether or not it would hurt the application's needs and status, we, we do try and review these applications as equitably as possible. So, we, we do use fairly standard metrics when looking at various applications. But also, for... for all my folks in California, they won't... they won't let me review applications in my own state, you know, conflict of interest. Yeah, and all that. That, that is a really good question, Jeremy. I hope I answered it, but, because please let me know if I did not.

You did. Maybe it's best for the broadband provider to be behind the scenes, helping out the agency or NGO in any way they can, and as you said, providing in-kind support to the program.

Yeah. Well, thank you, Jeremy and Robert.

Thank you, Robert.

Yeah, thanks both. With the time that we have left, I would like to continue on to our next agenda portion. So again, Robert, thanks for joining us, and I would like to invite up Aracely Hernandez, our Digital Inclusion Manager, and the slides for our team to give brief OBDL Updates, CDT OBDL Updates. There we go. Next slide, please. All right, so I know in the last few couple Community of Practice, we shared with you about the Digital Equity Resource Finder, so again, we want to let you know that it is live here, and our team will link it in the chat. The services that a resident can search for includes the following listed here, but also a reminder that organizations can also find supportive services as well. So we encourage you to check it out, share with folks in your community. An exciting plan that, you know, we hope you can support us with is, outreaching and letting folks know about this Resource Finder. In a couple weeks, we will share additional resources, including email templates and newsletter templates, social media posts, for you all to use on your newsletters and reach your community where they're at. So, just a... just a preview and a sneak peek, but, you know, communicate that via emails. And yeah, I would like to pass the mic over to Aracely for the next few updates.

Thank you, Anh. Next slide, please. So, as part of our grant updates, the Public Utilities Commission has some upcoming deadlines through the California Advanced Services Programs. There's a Broadband Public Housing Account, the Broadband Adoption account, and the CASF Tribal Technical Assistance Program. They all have a deadline of July 1st to submit any applications. And just as a, you know, quick reminder, you know, the grants here are focused on building or connecting networks, digital literacy, and broadband access in community spaces, call center support, as well as assistance to improve voice and broadband communications. The QR codes will direct you to the

appropriate page to the PUC website, for more information on eligibility and some funding requirements, and of course, just, you know, overall grant application details. Next slide, please. So this is very specific to the Broadband Public Housing Account, sorry, the Broadband Adoption Account, which we want to prepare folks, given the upcoming July 1st deadline. The Public Utilities Commission is hosting an informational webinar on Thursday, June 4th from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., so please, go ahead and save the date. They're going to be going over some changes to the application, and so we just want to make sure that folks are aware, you know, of this webinar that's coming up, and feel free to use the QR code there for more information, and to, you know, go ahead and join. There is no registration required, you can just join in into the webinar on that day. In the meantime, if you are interested in learning more, you know, go ahead and visit the PUC's California Advanced Services Fund Adoption Account page. Next slide, please. Lastly, we do continue to track the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, as we are aware that this is a very important source of funding. While the NOFO still has not been released, the Get Ready Primer outlines information on how to prepare, along with the summary report that was recently posted, on the tribal consultations that took place earlier this year. Again, you can use a QR code to access the Get Ready Primer and learn more information there. Thank you so much, and so I'll go ahead and turn it back to you for any next steps.

Actually, I would like to invite back our Deputy Director, Scott Adams, for this slide.

Oh, yeah. Hey, everybody. So, I know that we've gotten some questions about the Request for Innovative Ideas. James Spencer, who usually, well, who's leading this effort, is on well-deserved time off. He wanted me to come and tell you that we are getting very close to, you know, in our conversations with the finalists of this, and we look forward to have more information at the next Community of Practice meeting.

Thanks so much, Scott. Yes, well represented, James. So, just a quick reminder, folks, we are meeting every Thursdays of the month, or the third Thursday of the month. And here are some future dates. The next one is on June 25th, same time, 10:30 to noon. Registration is now open and as I mentioned before, really appreciative of your feedback. It does help us create this collaborative and partnership Community of Practice. So, just a quick reminder of the next few meetings, save the date and register for the one in June. Last slide. Yeah, so if you have any other questions that we weren't able to answer, do know that we're available both on our website and via email. We send out monthly email updates to provide a comprehensive update of Broadband for All. So if you haven't already, please register, either QR code or the link in the chat, and our team will stick around. I know it is right at noon, but our team will stick around if

you have any other questions for us. Thank you again to our presenters, panelists, participants, our ASL interpreters, who did such a good job. Thank you again, and we'll see you next month. Bye, everyone. Let us know if you have any questions. We'll be around for a bit. Thanks, Andrew!

Just wanted to say thank you.

I appreciate your time. Talk to you soon. Thanks, Jeremy.

Are the interpreters free to go?

Yes, thank you so much for your time with us. We appreciate your help.

Okay.

Have a good day.

Bye-bye.

Bye. Bye, Sarah. Jeremy, I see you still on. Do you have any questions for us? We're good? Alright, bye now.