



City & County of San Francisco
**Department of
Technology**
Powered by Innovation

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March 12, 2009

Mr. Mark Seifert
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
United States Department of Commerce
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Seifert:

On behalf of the City and County of San Francisco (City), I am writing to introduce our experience with expanding broadband Internet connectivity to San Francisco's underserved communities. I hope our many years of experience in this area may prove useful to the NTIA as you develop the rules and regulations for meeting the goals of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

1. The definition of underserved must include attributes of Internet speed, price, and availability. Our belief is that the minimum speed of 50 mbps is required for current users and will evolve at an accelerating pace. Price must be free or at a low enough cost that it does not represent a barrier for any family. Finally, availability must be universal in low-income areas.

In San Francisco, with limited funding, we have been able to provide some of our most disadvantaged residents in San Francisco Housing Authority developments the fastest broadband speeds available to consumers here 30-100 mbps, for free.

2. Urban areas, even those with relatively high Internet use, contain underserved neighborhoods and populations with very low broadband adoption rates.

In San Francisco, a survey found that certain neighborhoods have Internet adoption rates at least 20% below the City average, namely, Bayview/Hunter's Point, Chinatown and the Crocker Amazon. In addition, certain populations—low income residents, the elderly and Hispanic males have very low internet adoption rates.

3. Local governments build infrastructure, engage community groups and address educational, public safety, health and human service needs on a routine basis and can bring this unique combination of capabilities to play in building state of the art infrastructure to expand opportunities for underserved communities.

In one of the City's initial pilot projects to bring free broadband to low income housing units, we were able to bring together City workers skilled in installing fiber

optics; a non-profit low income housing developer; community based non-profit organizations devoted to training Latina women in computer based job skills; and another teaching youth digital storytelling skills. We created not only San Francisco's fastest, most affordable residential broadband network, but also the necessary complimentary training to make the network useful and relevant.

4. Creating both good jobs in the technologies of the future and a method for providing requisite training to create a ready workforce, must be an integral part of a digital inclusion strategy.

San Francisco's computer refurbishing program not only puts low cost computers into the hands of low-income consumers and diverts e-waste from the waste stream, but our partners in this effort—Goodwill Industries and Reliatech—train people in computer repair and maintenance. Similarly, San Francisco's broadband network initiative will include training the workforce to build 21st century infrastructure.

5. Architecting broadband networks as long-term infrastructure open to all, rather than as short term, closed service delivery platforms serves the needs of long term economic development, including the ability to meet the needs of data-intensive enterprises.

As part of San Francisco's pilot projects, we have been able to support educational institutions critical to the development of our digital media industry, a bandwidth intensive industry that will be helped by broadband infrastructure investment. Our broadband pilots are designed not only to deliver high-bandwidth to these key digital media innovators (and employers) – but also to deliver digital producers' interactive content to schools, libraries, and community centers throughout the country.

I hope that some of the lessons that San Francisco has learned as we have grappled with improving our broadband infrastructure are helpful to you. We are including some background information with this letter. However, should you wish more information or have questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Chris A. Vein
Chief Information Officer
City and County of San Francisco

