

Center for California Studies

[Center for California Studies | Sacramento State \(csus.edu\)](https://www.csus.edu/center-for-california-studies)

FACULTY RESEARCH FELLOWS PROGRAM

Public Broadband: Impacts and Conditions for Success

Request for proposals

Project Title

Public Broadband: Impacts and Conditions for Success

Background

California is the birthplace of many of the technological innovations that we rely on today. While this distinction is a source of pride for many leaders, many policy makers are concerned about the state's digital divide. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, in 2022 95% of Californians had access to the Internet, but only 85% of households had access to broadband/high-speed Internet.ⁱ Low-income households make up the majority of those without access to broadband: the 2021 American Community Survey reported that of the 1.2 million households in California without broadband subscriptions, 80% of those made less than \$74,999 per year (considered low-income), while a third made less than \$20,000 per year, (considered extremely low-income.)ⁱⁱ A more recent survey of Californians' access to technology showed some improvements, with 91% of California households having access to high-speed Internet. The same study showed that while in recent years Internet access among disadvantaged groups has improved, broadband access among households with school-aged children declined slightly.ⁱⁱⁱ

Given the central role that Internet access plays in access to education, jobs and even emergency services, access to broadband/high-speed Internet is an important part of addressing the state's disparities in income, health and educational outcomes. Due in part to these concerns, California policy makers took a huge leap toward addressing this divide with the passage of the 2021 state budget and the accompanying trailer bill legislation, SB 156 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 112 of 2021. The budget and accompanying legislation set aside billions of dollars to expand access to broadband, by creating the Middle Mile Broadband Initiative. This initiative, funded by a combination of funds from the state budget and the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, intends to create a statewide, open-access middle-mile broadband

ⁱ [California's Digital Divide - Public Policy Institute of California \(ppic.org\)](https://www.ppic.org/publications/california-digital-divide)

ⁱⁱ [Digital Equity \(ca.gov\)](https://www.digital-equity.ca.gov/)

ⁱⁱⁱ ['Digital divide' narrowing in Calif. low-income residents often underconnected \(usc.edu\)](https://www.usc.edu/research/digital-divide-narrowing-in-calif-low-income-residents-often-underconnected)
[2023 Statewide Digital Equity Survey \(ca.gov\)](https://www.digital-equity.ca.gov/)

network to which non-profit organizations, Internet service providers and other entities can connect to provide households with broadband access. This effort is being led by the California Department of Technology, working in conjunction with a third-party administrator, the Public Utilities Commission and Cal-Trans. For more information about the Middle Mile Broadband Initiative, see here: [State of California Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative](#)

For more information about California's Digital Equity Plan, see here: [2. State Digital Equity Plan - Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity | Broadband for All \(ca.gov\)](#)

Purpose of Research

This research is intended to aid state policymakers in crafting policy around the construction of public broadband networks. To that end, we are looking for information on what academic research (including evaluations of public broadband networks) says about the following questions.

- What are the direct and indirect impacts of public broadband networks? These impacts could include (but aren't limited to):
 - technological impacts,
 - health impacts,
 - social impacts, educational,
 - economic,
 - environmental (e.g., a reduction in vehicle miles travelled due to telework), and
 - impacts on quality of life.
- Are there substantial differences in measurable impacts between urban and rural communities?
- Are there factors within a community that affect the types and magnitude of impacts of a public broadband network?
- Are there elements or characteristics of a public broadband network that affect its impacts on communities?
- What economic, physical and social conditions contribute to the success of public broadband networks?
- What lessons might California take from answers to the above questions? Scope of Research

Scope of research

This project is focused on informing state policy making as it relates to ensuring that all Californians have broadband Internet access. The researcher or research team will review and summarize existing research on a) the direct and indirect impacts of public broadband networks and b) the conditions affecting the success of public broadband networks.

Deliverables and Timeline

1. Participate in a planning call with requesters and Center for California Studies staff, prior to beginning the project.
2. Provide preliminary drafts of the following to the Center for California Studies by September 30: a report and a two-page summary of findings and recommendations.
3. Respond to any comments or questions about the draft and provide a final report and two-page summary to the Center for California Studies by October 31.
4. Be available to present research to requesters and other interested parties, on a date mutually agreeable to both the researchers and the requesters, no later than December 20, 2024. (If an in-person presentation is agreed to, the Center can cover travel costs for faculty to travel to Sacramento.)

Budget

\$ 30,000 This amount includes any indirect costs charged by the recipient's institution, as well as travel costs and all other costs (except for travel costs related to the presentation, which will be covered by the Center for California Studies).^{iv} Additional funds may be available to pay for class buy-outs of faculty (up to 2, as permitted and approved by the home university) for the fall, 2024 semester.

Who May Apply:

Faculty and staff at any California State University campus may submit proposals. Preference is given to principal investigators who are full-time faculty or staff, but part-time faculty may also apply. Part-time faculty and CSU students may also be included as secondary investigators and assistants.

How to Apply

Proposals are due May 22, 2024. Submit proposal by email (in a single Word document or PDF file) to Leonor Ehling, Executive Director, Center for California Studies, at leonor.ehling@csus.edu. Include "FRFP Public Broadband: Impacts" in the subject line. Notification of awards will occur no later than May 28, 2024.

The proposal should include the following:

1. An introductory statement that demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter.
2. Explanation of the research design including the methods of analysis and source of data, if applicable.
3. A timeline for completing the project in the allotted period.

^{iv} Award of this grant will be subject to the availability of funding in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

4. A proposed budget including the portion to be devoted to faculty time and travel to Sacramento for presentation of the research.
5. Description of the researcher's (s') qualifications for performing the study.
6. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the principal researcher (s).
7. A resume or vitae for each person funded under the project.
8. Approval by the principal investigator's campus office of research and sponsored programs, in conformance with Chancellor's Office Executive Order Number 890
[EO 890 - Administration of Grants and Contracts in Support of Sponsored Programs \(csusm.edu\)](http://www.csusm.edu/EO890)

Questions about this RFP may be directed to:

Leonor Ehling (leonor.ehling@csus.edu)

Executive Director

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