



SACHI A. HAMAI
Chief Executive Officer

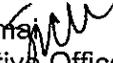
County of Los Angeles CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

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May 15, 2020

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To: Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Chair
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From: Sachi A. Hamai 
Chief Executive Officer

Selwyn Hollins, Acting Director 
Internal Services Department

REPORT BACK ON DIGITAL ACCESS DURING COVID-19 (ITEM NO. 17, AGENDA OF APRIL 28, 2020)

On April 28, 2020, the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Executive Office (CEO), Internal Services Department (ISD), and relevant departments to report back in 15 days with a plan to provide access to communities that lack digital connectivity. The Board also directed the CEO and ISD to work with private partners to increase access to hardware, internet access, and digital literacy training for residents and businesses; particularly in unincorporated areas that lack the high-speed, quality internet access at home.

The attached report outlines the digital access plan developed in conjunction with County departments that typically provide computer and free Wi-Fi connections to the public, as well as various ways the County and private partners have put in place to increase internet access and literacy training for the County's residents.

If you have any questions or need additional information, your staff may contact Bill Kehoe, Chief Information Officer, at (213) 253-5600 or bkehoe@cio.lacounty.gov, or Dave Wesolik, General Manager ITS, at (562) 940-2901 or dwesolik@isd.lacounty.gov.

SAH:TJM:WSK:pa
SH:DW:FC

Attachment

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
LA County Library
Parks and Recreation
Regional Planning
Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service"

REPORT ON DIGITAL ACCESS DURING COVID-19

On April 28, 2020, the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Executive Office (CEO), Internal Services Department (ISD), and relevant departments to report back in 15 days with a plan to provide access to communities that lack digital connectivity. The Board also directed the CEO and ISD to work with private partners to increase access to hardware, internet access, and digital literacy training for residents and businesses; particularly in unincorporated areas that lack the high-speed, quality internet access at home.

This report contains (a) the digital access plan developed in conjunction with County departments who typically provide computer and free Wi-Fi connections to the public, and (b) the various approaches the County and private partners have put in place to increase internet access and literacy training for the County's residents.

Digital Access Plan

The digital access plan includes the following components:

- Current state of departments that provide computers and Wi-Fi to the public, and the departments' short and long-term plans to make these computers available;
- Prior report and recommendations to expand Wi-Fi access at County parks;
- A new website to locate internet availability by the public; and
- Recommendation on how to disseminate components of the digital access plan.

In developing the digital access plan, the CEO collaborated with the Departments of Parks and Recreation, Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS), and LA County Library as these three departments provide Wi-Fi internet access and computers to the general public.

- **LA County Library** – While all 86 County libraries are currently offering only virtual services to the public and are closed in terms of physical access into the facilities, Wi-Fi remains available from outside the buildings and the public can connect to the internet from library parking lots (connection speeds may vary due to signal strength). LA County Library locations remained closed to the public, and reopening plans are dependent on direction from the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the County's Recovery Framework. However, they are likely to resume location-based services in a limited, phased manner. As the County executes its Recovery Framework, LA County Library plans to initially open approximately 20 locations that will offer limited walk-ins and contactless material pick-up services to its patrons in the lobby area only. While time limits may be imposed, there will be several computers setup at select locations (meeting physical distancing requirements), and made available for self-service public use in library meeting rooms. Wireless printers also will be available to the public at those locations. As more libraries open in the coming weeks, their public-

use computers (close to 2,000 in these 86 libraries) will be available to the patrons, and staff assistance will also be offered.

- **Parks and Recreation** – The department is committed to providing healthy and resilient communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic by providing online recreational programming and educational services for the public to access with their Virtual Recreation Center – Parks from Home. Computer skills training, such as digital literacy, internet essentials, and social media basics will be available for free as part of the technology classes category at parks.lacounty.gov/virtual. In addition, the department offers public Wi-Fi access at 36 park locations, as well as more than 300 computers with wired-internet access in computer clubs at 41 park locations. However, these computers are only available within existing Parks and Recreation facilities, and the facilities are currently closed to the public due to COVID-19. While outdoor park areas have remained open and County golf courses and trails are now open, all indoor park facilities will remain closed. The re-opening plan for indoor Parks and Recreation facilities is anticipated in Stage 3 of the County's Recovery Framework.
- **WDACS** – The department is offering public Wi-Fi at all 14 community and senior centers, and 11 of the centers have public access computers. However, all centers are currently closed to the public due to COVID-19, and eight of the sites have been repurposed to provide emergency food distribution. Another site is used to cook and prepare 1,200 meals daily for home delivery to older adults. Assuming public emergency food needs will continue for the foreseeable future; WDACS estimates that only two sites may be reopened to the public in the near future. When these sites are operational, limited staff can be made available for computer-user assistance. In addition, WDACS contracts for operation of 19 federal-funded America's Job Center of California (AJCC) locations that offer more than 300 public access computers with internet access. These computers are for time-limited, self-directed job search, education search, supportive services search, and applications, and only available for adults 18 and over. While AJCC facilities are currently closed to the public due to COVID-19 and reopening plans are dependent on directions from DPH and the County's Recovery Framework, all AJCC services are now available online at workforce.lacounty.gov, and assistance is being provided either over the phone, or in-person via appointment. When facilities are re-opened, limited technical assistance will be available at select AJCC sites.

All County departments are working on the recovery framework that will determine when they can reopen their facilities and services while adhering to strict guidelines to protect the public, as well as County employees. In the meantime, the above-referenced departments have made it a priority to post information to their respective website for the public on available facilities, operating hours, and access to their combined 2,000+ public-use computers throughout the County.

On January 31, 2020, ISD, Parks and Recreation, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer made recommendations to the Board on an approach to provide new and additional free Wi-Fi services to the public at County parks, which, if adopted, will further

enhance the public's access to the internet via Wi-Fi. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly evolved into an unprecedented global health crisis and spurred a severe economic downturn. Due to the uncertainty involving the duration of this emergency, it will be difficult to identify a viable funding source to finance this project.

In addition to the above, ISD, in cooperation with the Department of Regional Planning, will be deploying a public-facing website (with an announcement on lacounty.gov) around May 15, 2020 that will assist households to locate internet availability via a map/GIS front-end. Upon entering an address, this Internet Locator website will show nearby library and park locations offering free Wi-Fi. The website also displays school district information which may provide additional internet connectivity options for students, as well as information on available fixed and mobile broadband carriers. This website is built upon the State of California's Internet Broadband Map (broadbandmap.ca.gov) with added local information.

Because of the quandary of needing digital access to find out where in the County digital access is available, there may be a benefit to developing a coordinated communication plan identifying alternative channels to disseminate this information to constituents. Some possible alternative channels are the school districts, the Board offices, the County Public Information Office, and local news outlets.

Increase Access to Hardware, Internet Access, and Digital Literacy Training

ISD held numerous discussions with telecommunication carriers, hardware vendors, and firms that offer educational training, to identify ways that they can assist our residents with online access. Below is a summary of our findings regarding how the residents can obtain low-to-no-cost access to internet services and equipment, as well as learning resources.

EveryoneOn (everyoneon.org) is a national non-profit organization that partners with many internet service providers and computer companies to provide low-to-no-cost access solutions for low-income families and others that meet certain program criteria. By entering the household zip code and selecting programs that a household may qualify for, the website displays internet connection options (many ranging from \$10 to \$20 per month), as well as special computer offers (several ranging from \$75 to \$160) that are available immediately. Through this website, several carriers also offer free internet access for two-to-three months during the COVID-19 period, depending on program qualification. Some of the qualifying programs are:

- Low income (household of four at \$49,000 annual income or lower)
- Live in public housing
- Have a K-12 student or college student in the household
- Participate in National School Lunch Program (free or reduced lunch at school)
- Participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps)
- Participate in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF)
- Participate in Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI)
- Participate in Medicaid or Medi-Cal
- Participate in Veterans Pension and Survivor Benefits

- Participate in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)
- Bureau of Indian Affairs

For example, by entering the South Whittier zip code of 90605, the website displays internet access packages ranging from \$14.99 to \$19.99 per month. The \$17.99 per month offering indicates that households with a K-12 or college student can receive two months of free internet service, as well as free access to the carrier's public Wi-Fi access points for two months. Computer offers for this zip code range from \$75 to \$160.

The EveryoneOn website also displays digital literacy training locations in nearby areas, and many of those locations point to the County libraries.

Families that have a K-12 student also need to check with their school districts, given that many carriers have signed agreements either with local school districts, or with the State of California (through the California Emerging Technology Fund at cetfund.org, or California Teleconnect Fund at cpuc.ca.gov/ctf) to provide free or low-cost internet service to those who do not have connectivity at home. In some cases, free tablets and Chromebooks also may be available.

The Los Angeles County libraries, while currently physically inaccessible, offer an extensive number of online resources that are available to anyone with a library card number. Lynda.com and Gale Courses, available through the LA County Library website library.lacounty.gov, contain many instructor-led classes (enrollment required) and self-paced training videos that range from improving computer literacy, to advanced classes for students, adults, seniors, and professionals. Other library programs/events include virtual story time, spring and summer discovery, tele-reference, career online high school, online homework help, and many more.

In addition, Microsoft Corporation is offering virtual workshops and trainings for students, parents, and adults on working or learning from home. These resources can be found at microsoft.com/losangeles. Other interesting topics offered include: learning how to code; virtually exploring the Smithsonian's famous "Hall of Fossils"; learning about natural history in the Jurassic age; and learning how to create your LinkedIn profile.

CEO and ISD will continue to work with departments and their Public Information Officers to make digital access information available to the public during this difficult period.