



United Ways of California Final Report for the California Emerging Technology Fund June 2017

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Name of Project: Get Connected!
Grant Number: 8010309
Start Date: May 2013 **End Date:** June 2017

I. Financial Summary

- Total Project Budget Spent: \$3,180,731
- CETF Grant Amount: \$600,000
- Number of First-Time Adoptions Achieved: 4,622
- Percentage of Cash Match Funds Raised against Goal: \$2,400,000: 100%
- Cost Per Unit of Outcomes: (Total Outcomes/Total Budget): \$200

II. Project Description, Goals and Objectives, and Outcomes

Project Description

United Way of California (UWCA, fiscal sponsor), 2-1-1 California (2-1-1-CA, Lead), Radio Bilingüe (RB) and the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) proposed to increase Latinos' access to broadband at home and improve their ability to access low-cost computer, broadband and digital literacy resources. The partners know that low-income Latinos and language minority groups, when aware of the benefits, DO want to be connected to computers and Internet-related resources -- but cost and availability are the main barriers.

211s assist a broad cross-section of working-poor and underserved communities to access resources with the aim of preventing an escalation of further needs and improving their well-being. As access to resources, and individual and family well-being, become heavily inter-dependent on having Internet at home, broadband adoption becomes critical to the overall 2-1-1 endeavor.

UWCA's work to improve health, education, and income attainability similarly recognizes that without access to the Internet many of California's families will be unable to access health care and health insurance, maximize educational opportunities, and take advantage of economic opportunities.

Radio Bilingüe was founded to ensure Latinos have access to the public airwaves to empower our community and other marginalized groups. Over 33 years, having built and sustained 12 non-commercial radio stations in the Southwest, a national Spanish-language news, information and 24-hour satellite programming service, they are experts in communications technology issues and committed to ensuring low-income Latinos not only have access but are part of the dialogue about access.

And, as a leading mover for fairness and equity for Latinos in the media, NHMC's four top policy priorities include promotion of universal and affordable connections.

Radio and television educational messages, public service announcements and other programming -- either produced by and aired on RB's Latino public radio stations or on commercial Spanish TV and radio networks through in-kind agreements secured by NHMC – will educate audiences on the importance and benefits of having access to broadband at home and using the Internet. EVERY broadcast message and program will guide listeners to call 2-1-1 CA for assessment of needs and connection to local low-cost broadband, computer, and training resources. 2-1-1-CA will not only screen callers responding to the media outreach but ALL of their callers in order to assess need and interest in being connected to low-cost Internet options to improve their lives. Low-cost broadband partners will be identified and monitored for each region targeted. 2-1-1s will continue this work after the grant is completed by offering this suite of services to callers seeking information about a computer, the Internet, or any service best accessed via the Internet, e.g., homework help, Covered California and job searches. The project expected to encourage 8,750 households to subscribe to broadband for the first time. This goal was later reduced to 7,136 which the project exceeded.

Priority counties were Fresno, Kern, Tulare, Stanislaus, Los Angeles, Orange, Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo, Riverside and San Bernardino.

Goals and Objectives Summary

All goals and objectives have been completed. As noted above, the original goal of 8,750 adoptions was reduced to 7,136, with sub-goals of 1,760, 754 and 4,622 for Radio Bilingüe, NHMC and UWCA/2-1-1, respectively. We achieved 7,790 total adoptions, which exceeded our target for overall product distribution by 9%. We screened 267,867 calls from households. Further details provided below.

Project Outcomes Summary

Outcome Description	Actual	Goal	Percent Completed
Number of Adoptions for First-Time Subscribers	7,790	7,136	109%

III. Accomplishments and Challenges

Summary of Accomplishments and Impacts of Project

We achieved 7,790 adoptions, 109%, of the goal of 7,136 adoptions.

Assessment of Outcomes Achieved in Comparison to Grant Agreement

- The program achieved its goal of connecting 7,136 households to broadband in the home. We required extended time to achieve these outcomes, however, and this goal also was reduced from our original goal of 8,750 adoptions, unfortunately. The rate of adoption was not what we anticipated in the original 18-24 months of the grant period. Turnover among project lead staff and at participating United Ways/2-1-1s caused disruptions in service. Staff reductions meant we lost our Program Coordinator in February 2015, and then lost our 2-1-1 Director in December 2015. The rate of adoptions fell significantly in late 2015 and most of 2016, unsurprisingly. By the end of Q3 of 2016, we had achieved 4,849 adoptions. In December 2016, our grant scope was amended to shift our remaining focus to public education about the Digital Divide and to educate United Ways and 2-1-1s about the continued need for connecting households to broadband.
- After this Amendment and shift, in March of 2016, we conducted a survey of households that had indicated they did not have broadband and were interested in accessing it, and who had given us permission to contact them for follow up. From over 12,000 numbers, we de-duped and identified 6,128 usable mobile phone numbers and sent the survey to them. Of the 6,128, 458 started the survey, 346 completed it, and of those who completed it, 48% indicated that they had subscribed to broadband since our original screening. Applying that rate of 48% to the 6,128 usable mobile numbers (setting aside the number of callers screened who may have called from a landline), we estimated 2,941 adoptions. These adoptions were not confirmed

verbally but by SMS/Text, and errors are possible, so they should be taken with some grain of salt. When added to the 4,849 adoptions documented as of end of Q3 2016, they bring our total number of adoptions to 7,790.

- Digital Inclusion education and training: The grant was amended several times: in June 2014, December 2015, June 2016, each time to extend the term of performance. In December 2016, the grant was amended to revise the scope of work and extend the end date to June 30. In this last six months of the grant, our objectives became training and educating United Way and 2-1-1 staff on the need for reducing the Digital Divide and strategies for doing so, including strategies for integrating digital inclusion into other programmatic efforts in education, health and financial stability; public education about digital inclusion through social media, op-eds and earned media; inclusion of digital inclusion issues in briefing materials for United Way leaders for the annual Capitol Day event; regional convening's of business and community leaders on digital inclusion, including a briefing event in Sacramento. The goal of all these is to sustain efforts to increase digital inclusion after the expiration of this grant. During January-June 2017, we successfully included digital inclusion issues in our Capitol Day briefings, developed training curriculum on digital inclusion, delivered trainings for United Way leaders, submitted op-eds to the LA Times and LA Daily News newspapers, and published an op-ed on our organizational website. We will continue training and educating United Way and 2-1-1 leaders, and educating the public, about digital inclusion issues, certainly over the remaining months of 2017.

Delineation of Deliverables and Outcomes Not Achieved and Explanation

Not applicable.

Discussion of Other Positive Results from Project

Additional positive results have included increased awareness on the part of United Ways and 2-1-1 providers about the unconnected population and the need for affordable broadband access, and integration of efforts to connect low-income households to broadband into the full range of program work by United Ways and 2-1-1s.

Impacts of the Project

Over 7,000 households connected to broadband is a significant impact, and research indicates that access to broadband in the home expands opportunities for low-income families to participate in civic life, to apply for jobs, pursue education and access health coverage and care. For all the data we collected from individuals and families referred to broadband, however, in over 30,000 in-depth conversations out of over 267,687 callers screened, we did not collect stories about the beneficial impact of obtaining broadband access in the home. This is a lamentable oversight. We developed scripts for screening and referring clients to broadband, and scripts for interviewing clients to determine if they had adopted broadband, but we should have had an open-ended question in the evaluation survey to gather stories from clients about the changes in their lives.

Overview of Major Challenges to Achieving Planned Results

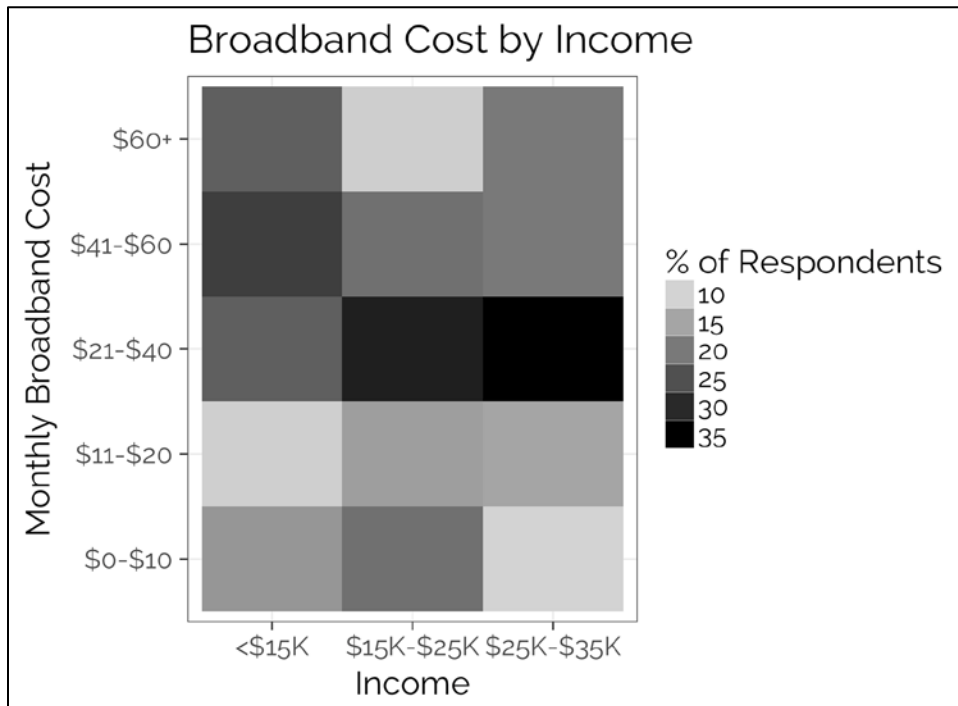
Identify Major Challenges to Successful Implementation

We encountered three major challenges during the grant period: (1) lack of availability of quality, affordable broadband offers, particularly early in the grant period; (2) relative lack of interest in, or distrust of, offers to connect low-income households to affordable broadband; and (3) staff turnover among our program staff and 2-1-1 partners, as well as good but not optimal coordination of outreach campaigns via radio, TV and other media

- When we began this grant in 2013, the only major carrier that had an affordable broadband program was Comcast, which did not serve some of our target counties with the largest populations (Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles). By the end of 2016, AT&T, Frontier and Charter/Spectrum had launched affordable broadband offers.
- We screened about 1 in 3 callers to participating 2-1-1 programs (see Lessons and Recommendations, below). Of callers we screened, 38% reported they had broadband already, and of those who did not have

broadband, 3 in 4 declined to receive further information. Essentially, about 12% of callers screened ended up not having broadband and expressing interest in obtaining it. From follow up calls to those we referred to broadband, two top reasons expressed for not having broadband were that it was too expensive (72%), and not owning a computer (13%).

- While many of the callers we targeted for in-reach report already having an Internet connection at home, and 3 in 4 other callers reporting they weren't interested in connecting, when we are able to refer the callers that were currently unconnected and interested in discounted broadband resources, issues with the providers, such as spotty geographic availability and complicated eligibility rules and application processes hindered our ability to capitalize on adoptions.
- Looking back now, it's possible, perhaps likely, that many who declined to be referred to broadband options had similar barriers as callers eventually referred to resources – that they did not own a computer, so felt no point to obtaining broadband, or that they expected no matter what the option provided, it would be too expensive.
- Another observation from hindsight – 37% of callers we screened reported that they had broadband in the home. That certainly seems like good news. Results from our SMS/Text survey, however, indicate that of those households who adopted broadband following our contact with them, far too many reported paying \$40-60 a month or even over \$60 a month, even with incomes as low as \$15,000 annually (see chart below; N=346). This indicates that further conversations with these low-income households might have been a fruitful source of adoptions of affordable broadband offers, but the design of this grant was focused specifically on first-time adopters of broadband. Research has found as many as half of low-income households that are unconnected have had broadband access at some point in the past.



- As described above, turnover among project lead staff and at participating United Ways/2-1-1s caused disruptions in service. We lost our Program Coordinator in February 2015, and then lost our 2-1-1 Director in December 2015. (These staff reductions were largely the result of budget decisions by new leadership of the 2-1-1 California state network board.) The rate of adoptions fell significantly in late 2015 and most of 2016, unsurprisingly; without focused staff attention, participation in the program by United Ways and independent 2-1-1 providers declined.

Discuss Efforts to Address Challenges and Resolve Problems

- The first challenge listed, availability of affordable broadband offers provided by major carriers, was beyond our influence. Thankfully, toward the end of the project, several affordable offers came online, from AT&T, Frontier, Charter/TimeWarner/Spectrum, but in each case, these were due to regulatory requirements of FCC and CPUC arising out of mergers and acquisitions by those firms.
- We adjusted our screening process to adapt to what we were hearing from callers. We used two strategies to reach households, one was marketing over radio, TV and other media, in which Radio Bilingue and NHMC, our partners, as well as CETF, would distribute messages encouraging eligible families to call 2-1-1 to learn about broad resources. The other strategy was “in-reach,” the process of asking callers who contacted 2-1-1 for a presenting need other than broadband whether they had broadband access and, if not, whether they were interested in accessing it. The goal of the in-reach process was to target callers who are a good “fit” for broadband Internet. Our experience revealed that callers who call 2-1-1 for access to assistance with emergency basic needs (food and shelter) or crisis were not a smart fit for in-reach. Accordingly, for in-reach, we adjusted our screening process in 2014 to rely more on the call agent’s determination that broadband might be a good fit against the caller’s original needs, and then only ask one question after meeting the presenting need, which was whether the caller had Internet access at home and, if they did not, whether they were interested in obtaining it.

IV. Lessons and Recommendations

Summary of Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: In-reach via 2-1-1, that is, asking people who are seeking something else whether they need and are interested in broadband, is an effective way to reach a large number of people, but effectiveness of 2-1-1 providers in implementing this strategy varies between different providers. This leads to variation in funding flows to 2-1-1 providers – they have some good quarters and some bad quarters, which may affect the priority providers place on the broadband in-reach compared to other priorities within their programs.

Lesson 2: Through our survey of households we referred to broadband resources, and our work connecting people to free tax preparation and the federal and state earned income tax credits, we have come to see SMS/Text messaging, paired with an online platform for finding and scheduling appointments for assistance as a promising way to reach a large number of people and efficiently connect those seeking resources to assistance. This approach promises to allow more efficient use of staff time to support people seeking broadband. Emphasizing SMS/Text and other methods also may be more sustainable over the longer term after expiration of this grant, as 2-1-1 providers are hesitant to add extra minutes to tens of thousands of interactions without a dedicated source of funding.

Lesson 3: This may be more a question we’ve learned is important, rather than a lesson. We know consistent focus from staff, both from the grant coordinator and from sub-grantees like local United Ways and 2-1-1 providers is important. The financial model of paying grantees per adoption makes sense intuitively –more outcomes will mean more revenue, and so sub-grantees should be motivated by revenue and therefore will work more diligently for the outcomes, in this case, broadband adoptions. We wonder, though, whether the program should think about possible unintended effects – larger United Ways and 2-1-1s may earn much more than smaller ones by virtue of serving large populations, but that revenue is smaller relative to the overall budget of those organizations, while smaller United Ways and 2-1-1s may earn less even if they work just as hard. Further, quarterly payments in arrears for adoptions may make the funding flow even less visible to grantees than a lump sum grant amount documented in a sub-grant agreement. These factors may cause the broadband adoption work to fall lower in priority than it might otherwise, especially when competing for attention with other grant funded goals.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations for Expanding the Project in Region or Scaling Up Statewide

Recommendation 1: Use SMS/Text, paired with an online, self-serve platform for smartphone users (very prevalent among low-income households) to assess what affordable broadband offers may be most relevant to them, authorize us to contact them for follow up, and schedule appointments for assistance, if needed. Many low-income households may be able to access affordable broadband through this self-serve approach, and connecting to them via SMS/Text may allow more economical and efficient follow-up assessment to determine the rate of adoption.

Recommendation 2: Consider screening households that have adopted broadband previously or those paying excessive rates relative to their income. The grant just concluded focused solely on new adopters of broadband, but research has shown as many as one in four unconnected households formerly had access to the Internet and lost it. Our March SMS/Text survey also showed some alarmingly high monthly expenses for broadband compared to their income level.

Recommendations to Close the Digital Divide Based On Your Experience

Recommendation 1: Expand availability of low-cost devices to more low-income households. The current Frontier offer of a free HP Chromebook is an excellent example, but it is available only in ZIP codes served by Frontier.

Recommendation 2: Develop a detailed map of the reach of affordable broadband offers to highlight unserved and underserved areas. This would be very helpful to grantees seeking to serve low-income households (it would help avoid wasted effort and frustration), and also would be very helpful in developing champions and advocates for access to broadband. Even when many public officials and business and community leaders understand that low-income households lack access, that barrier can seem very diffuse, but if the unserved areas could be shown clearly, located within a particular neighborhood in somebody's district, that may motivate more leaders to get involved.

Recommendation 3: Consider a remote medical monitoring pilot with one or more health systems or health insurers, perhaps on diabetes in the Central Valley, in which CETF, a local nonprofits such as United Way and the health partner work to connect low-income households to broadband in order to monitor and improve health outcomes. This may in turn help persuade other foundations and government funders, such as county health departments, to support digital literacy and the work of helping people adopt broadband at home.

Recommendations to CETF Regarding Grants Management

Recommendation 1: Our CETF program officer was a pleasure to work with, as were all CETF staff, in fact. The work plans, templates, trackers, and funder charts were more complex than most of our other funders. While most funders require timelines or work plans as part of the proposal, most ask for progress towards the overall objectives twice yearly, at most. They do not generally ask for the progress on each line of the work plan. We found the reporting a little cumbersome for a small non-profit.

V. Grant Agreement Requirements

Purchased Equipment

Not Applicable.

Unspent CETF Grant Funds

All of the CETF grants funds were expended.