



## Let's Talk Broadband & Digital Democracy

Welcome to *Let's Talk Broadband*, a newsletter published by the California Emerging Technology Fund ([CETF](#)), a statewide non-profit established at the direction of the California Public Utilities Commission. CETF's mission is to close the Digital Divide in California by promoting and accelerating broadband deployment and adoption. This issue focuses on the intersection of digital democracy and broadband and includes interviews with Secretary of State Alex Padilla and Inyo County Clerk-Recorder & Registrar of Voters Kammi Foote.

### In the News

[DSL Providers Save Fast Internet for Wealthier Communities](#) October 14, 2016

[Facebook Helped Drive a Voter Registration Surge, Election Officials Say](#) October 12, 2016

[Smartphones Don't Necessarily Bridge the Digital Divide](#) October 3, 2016

[State Official Makes the Case for Inland Broadband](#) September 29, 2016

[Connectivity Key to Farmer and Rural Community Growth](#) September 26, 2016

[Digital Readiness Gaps: Pew Research Center](#) September 20, 2016

[New Program Connects Housing Projects to Internet](#) September 16, 2016

### Funding Opportunities

[Frontier-CETF Broadband Adoption Grant Opportunity](#)  
Applications are due December 7, 2016.

### Affordable Broadband Resources and Offers

[Everyone On](#)

[Internet Essentials \(Comcast\)](#)

[Access \(AT&T\)](#)

### Digital Democracy Resources

[California Quick Guide to Propositions](#)

[Voters Edge California](#)

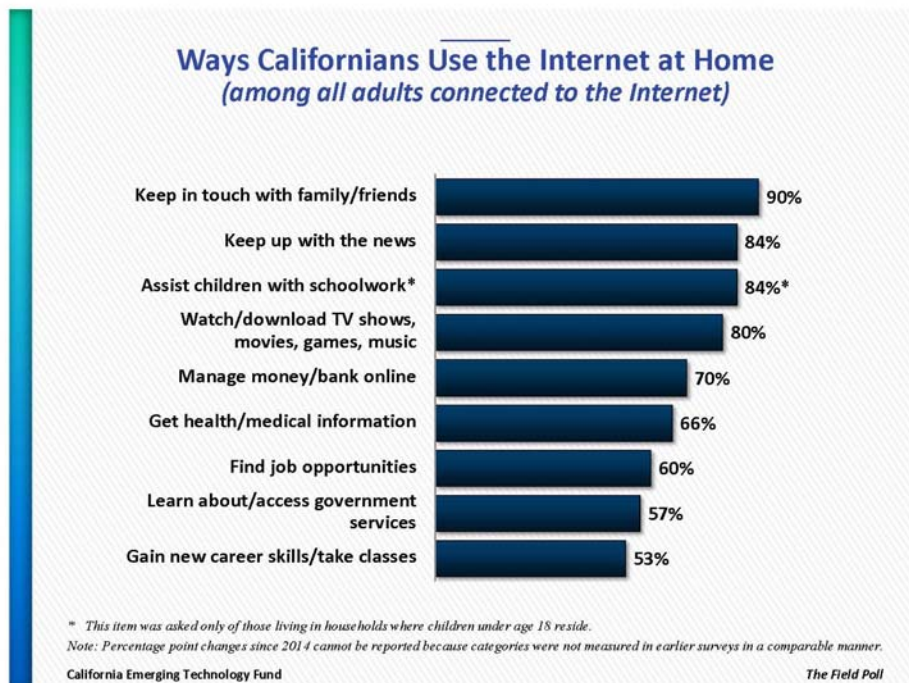
[Digital Democracy Cal Poly](#)

[Election Tools](#)

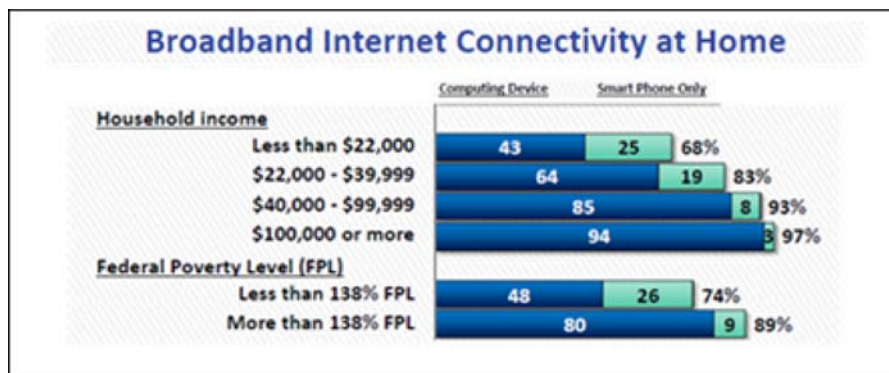
[Open Government Initiative | State of California](#)

### California Government Services Going Online

Over the past decade, government services have steadily been going online. The reasons are numerous: online services make provision of government information more efficient and accessible and they cut personnel costs. As the chart below from the [2016 Annual Survey](#) on Broadband Adoption makes clear, learning about and accessing government services are a top reason Californians go online.



Yet, for too many low-income Californians, access to online government services is difficult because of the cost of broadband and a computing device. The same survey conducted by the Field Research Corporation found that households earning less than \$40,000 annually are behind state averages in connecting to broadband through a computing device. See the chart below for detail about these under-connected populations.



Rural Californians face the greatest hurdles in accessing government services online. According to the [2015 Annual Report of the California Advanced Services Fund](#), 43% of our rural residents do not have access to reliable broadband. The 2016 Field Poll confirms (see chart below) that in lower population areas, especially in the Inland Empire and Central Valley, the percentages of under-connected Californians are not meeting Legislative goals.



As Inyo County Clerk-Recorder & Registrar of Voters Kammi Foote makes clear in the interview below, this lack of access in rural areas is detrimental to citizen engagement and government services. Likewise, Secretary of State Alex Padilla's comments confirm that high-speed Internet access is crucial to engaging and empowering California voters. Their statements and the results from the 2016 Annual Survey underscore why CETF will be sponsoring the [Internet For All Now Act](#) in the next session of the Legislature.

Sincerely,



Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO  
California Emerging Technology Fund

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### Empowering California Voters Through the Internet An Interview with Secretary of State Alex Padilla



California Secretary of State Alex Padilla has long been committed to increasing voter registration and participation, strengthening voting rights and ensuring broadband access for all Californians. While State Senator (2006-2014), Padilla chaired the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications and authored legislation establishing the California Advanced Services Fund and the California Broadband Council, enabling the funding of broadband infrastructure projects for low-income and rural residents. Over the past two years, he has been a major force behind both open government and online civic engagement initiatives, as he describes in the following Q&A.

#### Why have you made voting rights and voter registration priorities in your role as Secretary of State?

When I was a candidate for Secretary of State, I saw that legislators in other states were passing laws to make it more difficult to vote. During the four years prior to my election, 21 states had enacted laws that restricted access to voting. I wanted to make California the counter-example. That was my fundamental goal—to remove barriers to voting. Our democracy is stronger when more citizens participate, and registering to vote is the first step to becoming an active voter. I decided to follow the lead of Oregon and build support for automatic registration for eligible citizens in California. Governor Brown signed the bill and the technology should be in place in July of 2017. Removing barriers strengthens our democracy.

#### What is your position on both the feasibility and necessity of online voting?

I do not believe online voting is a viable option for California as it stands today. I don't believe that voting online is ready for prime time. There are just too many risks. As I see it, as long as we experience hacks of hospital data, banks, our federal agencies, retail outlets and others, it is clear that online voting would pose too great a risk. Here in California, the equipment you see at the polling place is never connected to the Internet and requires an auditable paper trail.

While Internet voting is not on the horizon in California, technology is still improving the voter experience in California. Once the New Motor Voter Act is implemented next year, voters will be able to seamlessly register when visiting the DMV. Our office also recently launched "[Quick Guide to Props.](#)" This new

brier nonpartisan analysis. The campaign finance elements are dynamic and will be updated daily.

Governor Brown also approved Senate Bill 450, which will modernize California elections. Under the new election model, which will be phased in beginning in 2018, registered voters would automatically be sent a ballot 28 days before the election. Voters could return their ballot by mail, take it to a drop-off location or cast it in-person at any vote center in their county. SB 450 will also empower California voters with a major expansion of early voting. Vote centers will preserve the in-person voting experience and provide flexibility to voters, allowing them to cast a ballot at locations throughout their county.

### **The weekend of September 23, 2016 saw a significant spike in voter registration. What happened?**

On Friday, September 23, Facebook users here in the U.S. age 18 and older began receiving a reminder to register to vote through a link appearing at the top of their News Feed. The result was a major surge in online voter registration. In fact, in just 3 days there were nearly 200,000 completed registrations or updates of registration information through the Secretary of State's online voter registration website. But Facebook was not alone, we also saw Google facilitate tremendous registration activity. This year the power of social media has been clear: hundreds of thousands of citizens will participate in the Presidential Primary and the Presidential General Election because they were nudged by Silicon Valley. The impact cannot be overstated: California recently broke the record for registration with 18.2 million registered Californians. Only 4 states in the U.S. have more than 18.2 million residents, let alone 18.2 million registered voters.

### **CETF's Annual Survey found that 30 percent of Californians do not have computers at home connected to high-speed Internet. What problems does that pose—for individuals, for educators, for employers, for the state?**

High-speed Internet has transformed the world we live in. But too many Californians have been left behind. We need to do all we can to reach every Californian so they can access and share the benefits of high speed Internet. On any given day, your average Californian may need a high-speed Internet connection to telecommute, schedule a doctor's appointment and pay bills online. Connections to high-speed Internet are vital to education and government, as well. College students need a reliable Internet connection to register for classes, and access to high-speed Internet can allow teachers in even the most remote areas of our state to take their classrooms on a journey throughout history and around the globe. Every day, thousands of Californians use the Internet to quickly and easily register to vote or update their voter registration, ensuring they can participate in our elections. During my final years in the Senate, I pursued federal funding to provide high speed Internet to the communities in the Eastern Sierra. Digital 395 is helping these communities realize their potential as they provide a vast array of services to visitors to the region. It is creating jobs and improving the quality of life.

### **What can the Legislature do to further close the Digital Divide?**

The Legislature must continue to invest in the infrastructure necessary to close the Digital Divide throughout California. Access to high-speed Internet for all Californians can improve our state's economy, educational systems and ability to provide government services. It really comes down to investment. I believe we need to work with the federal partners to draw down the level of funding this type of work requires.

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### **Advancing Digital Democracy An Interview with Inyo County Clerk-Recorder and Registrar of Voters Kammi Foote**



When Kammi Foote campaigned to serve as Clerk-Recorder & Registrar of Voters in Inyo County in June 2010, she promised to bring innovation into the election process. "I had a wonderful mentor and predecessor, whose shoes were big to fill," she said. "But one thing that was lacking in the Inyo County Office was any kind of online presence or services." Foote has been taking advantage of the Digital 395 Project—the 583-mile fiber optic network that brought high-speed

### **Why is digital access necessary in California's rural areas?**

Local governments produce information that is important to its citizens. In order to engage a modern citizenry, local officials must have modern ways to communicate with voters. Most people talk about the Digital Divide in terms of individuals who do or don't have access to the Internet. But there's also a Digital Divide between jurisdictions. There are large jurisdictions, with significant resources and the ability to invest in infrastructure to reach out to the public and provide services. And then there are jurisdictions like Inyo County, which have limited budgets and cannot invest in the best communication tools. However, digital tools like the [Election Toolkit](#), a civic engagement platform for election officials, can help small jurisdictions to innovate—to take what's already out there in terms of voter information and adapt it to reach their communities.

### **What is the status of online voting efforts in California?**

Online voting is a complicated topic because many experts say the current voting system cannot be easily adapted to ensure against voter fraud. I personally believe there is technology out there to help secure the vote, but people would have to have faith and trust in implementing a new system. The number one hurdle is the privacy and secrecy of the vote. There is already successful online voting in Canada, Alaska, Norway, Estonia and other places in the world, but because of security concerns, many Americans are reluctant to push for changes to the voting system and move to online voting.

### **Does broadband access change voter activity or citizen engagement?**

We know that communities can face significant barriers to civic participation. The election process can be very complicated and without easy access to election information, less people vote. In Inyo County, we're lucky to have amazing rural broadband infrastructure, thanks to the Digital 395 Project and the California Advanced Services Fund. I fully support further rural infrastructure efforts. Inyo is a 10,000-square-mile county; we have one single election office to get information out to the entire voting public. So we rely heavily on the Internet to disseminate information. I think it's imperative to understand why rural communities must have access to high-speed Internet. In an urban community, you might have an election office within 15-minute drive. In Inyo County, you're going to be driving 4 hours one way to get information from election officials.

### **Give me an example of a change wrought by the Digital 395 Project?**

Unfortunately, I don't have exact data correlating voter turnout percentages. But I can tell you an anecdotal story: during the June 2016 election, we had 6 poll workers who didn't show up to their posts on election morning. Six doesn't seem like a lot, but in Inyo County, it's a significant number. We reached out through social media asking for last-minute volunteers and were able to get 6 people into the polling place, sworn in, and working within an hour. If the election office hadn't built a social media network, which was enabled by the Digital 395, I don't know think we would have been able to respond so quickly to this need.

### **Why is broadband important to democracy?**

Broadband has the power to connect us to each other, to our government, and to important civic information. But if broadband isn't accessible by everyone, it can actually widen our democracy's existing Digital Divide. If we want all communities to be informed and engaged, we must increase access to broadband. More and more civic and government resources are being put online, because government budgets are getting leaner and personnel is being cut. So as we move toward that model—of saving government dollars through use of the Internet—it's imperative to have broadband access. For example, if government offices cut their hours or the amount of people who are available to offer services—answer questions in person or on the phone—then it's going to be more important that people have access to broadband through their devices and in their households.

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Spread the word! The last day to [register to vote](#) online, in person or by mail is October 24.