

Los Angeles Times

From the Los Angeles Times

Nonprofit group aims to promote Internet access

The California Emerging Technology Fund launches a campaign to boost awareness in poor communities.

By Nathan Olivarez-Giles

June 11, 2009

About half of California's low-income households have no Internet access, the California Emerging Technology Fund says, creating a gap that the nonprofit is hoping to close with its \$1.5-million Get Connected campaign debuting in Boyle Heights today.

Financial constraints and a misunderstanding of technology are the major factors causing this "digital divide," said Sunne Wright McPeak, the fund's chief executive.

The nonprofit is hoping to increase the number of broadband Internet users in communities such as South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, where the first of several community fairs will be held Saturday, McPeak said. In its arsenal are Get Connected print, radio and TV ads, community fairs, a special website and outreach through neighborhood centers.

"This is not only about connecting people to the Internet but making the Internet useful to them and their lives," said McPeak, former state secretary of business, transportation and housing. "We can't leave an entire generation behind, and if we're going to solve this problem in California we have to start here in Los Angeles."

Internet access can change a person's life, but convincing people that a monthly bill is worth it can be difficult, said Ozzie Lopez, executive director of the Boyle Heights Technology Center, which is hosting the Saturday fair.

The Internet "can be where you find your next employer. It can be where you fill out your financial aid forms, apply for scholarships, everything," Lopez said. "It empowers the community."

The Technology Center, run by the city's Community Development Department, is regularly filled to capacity, he said, because people don't have computers or Web access at home.

If the fund can increase the number of broadband users in Boyle Heights and other communities over the next year, it should be able to attract corporate donors to fund an expansion of the program into other parts of the state with low Web saturation, McPeak said.

Get Connected doesn't include discount programs on monthly Internet access bills, McPeak said. But increasing broadband access could entice Internet service providers to offer lower rates, she said.

The state Public Utilities Commission required the group's creation as part of the 2005 mergers of telecom firms SBC-AT&T and Verizon-MCI. The companies agreed to a five-year donation commitment of \$60 million, which is helping pay for the campaign.

Interest from private donors and public grants would also help the campaign expand into the Inland Empire, Orange County and Northern California, McPeak said.

The campaign currently receives no public funding, she said. But local politicians are watching to see if the effort works, said Councilman Jose Huizar, whose district includes Boyle Heights, El Sereno, Chinatown, Koreatown and other Central L.A. neighborhoods.

"In the city of Los Angeles we oftentimes get information out to our residents through the Internet," Huizar said. "And if a certain part of our population doesn't see that information because they don't have Internet, then we're not reaching all of our people. Sometimes we don't see that, but living today in America you need access to the Internet."

nathan.olivarezgiles@

latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2009 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

partners:

