

South Los Angeles Can Show Leadership in Closing the Digital Divide

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In June 2009, the Public Policy Institute of California released its second annual Information Technology survey to document how computers and the Internet are changing the way we communicate and use technology to improve health, education and economic outcomes. The report also documents how the state is faring in its efforts to close the Digital Divide between those who have a computer and Internet access and those that do not.

According to the report, the good news is that despite the current economic climate, Californians and Angelinos maintained and expanded their broadband access, recognizing how important being connected is for seeking economic and educational opportunities. Over the past year, Californians who reported having a broadband connection at home increased from 55% to 62%. Of the five major regions tracked in the report, Los Angeles County moved from the least connected region within the state (at 48%) up to the fourth (at 58%.) Latinos, low-income residents, Asians and people with disabilities increased their connectivity by an average 7.5% among the groups.

The bad news is that African Americans lost some traction during the past year, dropping from 66% of the population having broadband connectivity at home to 62%. The encouraging news is that the PPIC survey found that despite the drop in connectivity, 79% of African Americans believe it is very important to have access to the Internet--higher than any other ethnic group in the state.

Significantly, the lower broadband adoption rates reported by low-income residents contribute to Los Angeles County remaining behind other major counties in broadband adoption. This Divide, among the regions and segments of its population, is unacceptable if Los Angeles County is to remain competitive economically and provide greater prosperity for all during this economic crisis.

There is a tremendous opportunity at hand for Los Angeles County to provide the leadership necessary to close the Digital Divide. President Obama and Congress allocated \$7.2 billion nationally to address the lack of broadband access and encourage the adoption of broadband. For the first time, the nation is developing a vision for broadband policy which will help guide how we invest in the technology and applications necessary to move Americans further along in the digital age. But these investments, paid with all our tax dollars, will only bear fruit if all of us learn to use the technology and help others connect. The combination of broadband investment and community aspirations is a winning combination to move Los Angeles County and the nation forward.

The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) is working closely with Los Angeles county government and grantee organizations on a major statewide public awareness and education program called Get Connected! We encourage all who have not yet adopted broadband at home to please visit www.GetConnectedToday.com for more information about how broadband can make your life easier. We also encourage you to attend the Taste of Soul event on October 17, 2009 and speak with someone at the Get Connected! booth about what services or training are available in the community to help you and your family "Get Connected" and join the online world.

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