



## California Emerging Technology Fund Calls on ISPs, Public Agencies to Step Up Outreach for Broadband Subsidies

*Only 35% of eligible California households have enrolled in Emergency Broadband Benefit program; CETF leader urges ISPs, agencies not to “squander the opportunity” to enroll all 2 million eligible state households*

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Los Angeles and Bay Area** — Amid alarming reports that billions of dollars allocated by Congress to help low-income households afford home Internet are going unused, the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) calls on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and public agencies to begin advertising and increase awareness programs to reach the nation’s neediest residents.

In the latest reporting by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as of September 19, only 1 in 12 eligible households, or 5.7 million households nationally, have enrolled in the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB). In a separate analysis by CETF, based on FCC enrollment data, 35% of 2 million eligible California households have enrolled for a total of nearly 706,000 households. The analysis finds that nearly 1.3 million state households are eligible but have not enrolled.

“We cannot afford to squander the opportunity to connect all eligible households. We are calling on ISPs and public agencies to do a much better job — and without delay — to get the word out,” McPeak said. “Our research shows cost is the main reason that 16% of California households are not connected or only use a cellphone to access the Internet. EBB will help tear down the wall of poverty by helping households in need get and stay online.”

A joint [CETF-USC statewide survey](#) on broadband adoption in spring 2021 shows that millions of Californians do not have access to the Internet at home—disproportionately affecting low-income and Spanish-speaking households, seniors, people with disabilities and rural residents. The high cost is cited as the main reason, and many say they were not aware of earlier subsidy programs, underscoring the need for advertising now. Nearly 2 in 3 unconnected or smartphone-only households in the spring survey were unaware of discount Internet plans offered by ISPs (before EBB), and fewer than 1 in 4 has ever applied - often for lack of knowledge for what to ask for or lack of trust in signing up.

The EBB program was approved by Congress earlier this year to help low-income Americans afford home Internet during the COVID-19 pandemic, and launched on May 12. Eligible households can sign up through an [FCC portal](#) to find a participating ISP or contact the ISP directly to obtain a discount of up to \$50 a month on home Internet, and the ISPs are paid back from government funds. Please visit [Internet For All Now](#) for more information.

“It is time for ISPs and the myriad agencies and utilities that regularly interact with lower-income residents through existing social service and financial aid programs to get everyone connected immediately. We are calling upon ISPs to advertise and all State Agencies, School Districts, Counties (CalFresh and other programs), Cities, Higher Education Financial Aid, Covered California and Power Utilities (CARE customers) to notify low-income households and get everyone signed up,” McPeak said.

McPeak and others note that another critical reason to enroll every eligible household now is so these residents will be able to quickly transition to the proposed EBB successor program that is included in the infrastructure bill recently passed by the U.S. Senate and pending before the House of Representatives.

FCC Acting Chair Jessica Rosenworcel told [Bloomberg News](#) that “we heard that the success of the program could be improved if there was funding to support the efforts of community-based organizations that spend time providing in-person assistance for families not familiar with federal assistance programs, interacting with ISPs, or educating low-income households about the technology necessary to sign up for the EBB Program.” The FCC and others recognize that community-based organizations are in the best position to help enroll low-income households because they are trusted in those communities. But as the EBB law was written there was no provision to fund outreach activities to groups that are best positioned to help individual households enroll.

To identify sustainable solutions, in the [first-of-its-kind collaboration](#), nationally-recognized researchers from the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, in partnership with the CETF and with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, will identify effective and sustainable strategies for bringing affordable Internet to all Americans.

As states and the federal government design programs, researchers are seeking models that produce results with a high return on investment to help inform policymakers, Internet Service Providers and corporate, education and philanthropic leaders. The partnership is being guided by an [Expert Advisory Panel](#) of national broadband policymakers and consumer leaders.

### **About California Emerging Technology Fund**

CETF is a statewide non-profit foundation with the mission to close the Digital Divide in California. CETF provides grants to non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs) to assist low-income households adopt broadband and become digitally proficient, leads and manages School2Home to successfully integrate technology into teaching and learning with deep parent engagement to close the Achievement Gap in middle schools in low-income neighborhoods, and promotes Digital Inclusion in public policy to achieve Digital Equity.