

2021 ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit

**Best Practices for Finding and Leveraging Grants - Facilitated Ideas
Exchange**

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

Erich Yost: Welcome, everyone, to the Best Practices for Finding and Leveraging Grants, our facilitated idea exchange as part of our 2021 ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit. So hopefully all of you have had an opportunity to listen to other sessions or even participate in some of these facilitated idea exchanges.

I'm very excited about this particular session, to have a chat with all of you about finding and leveraging grants for your work. I kind of view this as the dialing for dollars session; right? We get to dial in and see where the money is, how you can blend and braid it or sequence it from a variety of sources, whether it's public, private, and then the public sector, is it federal, state, or local? And what waivers are available, et cetera? So to learn from each other and to ask those tough questions that we have today.

So I wanted to, again, thank everyone for participating. We will be going over a couple questions, but before we do so, I wanted to remind all of you to, like you heard before, mute yourselves unless you're speaking. But it's okay to unmute and ask questions once we get through a few things here.

So I'm just going to jump in real quickly here, and we're going to start out with some polls here because I think this will be kind of fun to get some information about those that are participating.

So question one. Have you had trouble finding grants for your digital inclusion program? Simple yes or no? Second question answer at the same time, please. What type of organization are you affiliated with? [inaudible] choice and hopefully, you fill those buckets, and if you don't, feel free to align yourself to one that you feel the most comfortable with.

So with that, we will be excited to see the responses on this question, and we will move forward to see how those results come out.

Fantastic. So our results for today, from those that are participated in our first two polls. Have you had trouble finding grants for your digital inclusion? Interestingly, 79 percent said yes. 21 percent said no. So those that are in the 21 percent, we're going to be picking your brains to find out what you've utilized, and the 80 percent, time to ask those questions.

And then what type of organizations are you affiliated with? So fantastic. We have our public housing authorities. We have representatives from multifamily properties, nonprofit organizations, and some other federal agencies.

Now, I want to go over just the brief agenda for how these idea exchanges work together. As I mentioned, I will be doing some introductions to our guest speakers and just a brief overview of the topic, which I've shared a little bit about and you got from the questions.

And so, first, I wanted to give you some background information about our guests that are with us today that also spoke this morning. And I am Erich Yost. I work at HUD, at the Office of Community Planning and Development for the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for

Economic Development. So I'm excited because this effort on broadband digital inclusion, the digital divide, is all about economic development.

And with us today we have Emy, Michell, and Robert. So Emy is a senior broadband program specialist with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, also known as NTIA. Her policy, stakeholder engagement, and grants administration work focuses on expanding broadband access, adoption and digital skills in underserved and vulnerable communities.

Prior to NTIA, Ms. Tseng was the digital inclusion director for the city and county of San Francisco, where she developed one of the country's first local government digital inclusion initiatives. She holds a Master's of Science degree in Technology and Policy Program from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Math and Physics from Brown University.

We also have Michell Morton, who's a broadband program specialist and federal program officer for the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, NTIA. In Michell's current role, she serves on the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program.

Previously, Michelle was the program develop manager for the District of Columbia Government Office of the Chief Technologies Connect D.C. and Tech Together D.C. Digital Inclusion Initiatives. Michelle has over 15 years in digital inclusion and equity experience working as a consultant for the HUD Neighborhood Networks Initiative and as the Chicago program director for One Economy Corporation.

And then we have Robert Tse is a recognized expert on rural economy and broadband in California and currently serves as the senior policy adviser on broadband in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service. Suring his 30 years of public service, his focus areas have included agriculture technology, health food agriculture system, goods movements, international trade, water, and energy.

So you can see we have a breadth and depth of amazing experience from our three speakers that will also share a little bit of information before we open it up to an idea exchange and to chat further. So with that, I'll turn it over to Emy and Michell.

Emy Tseng: Great. Thank you so much for having us speak again. Again, I'm Emy Tseng from NTIA, and so a little bit about NTIA. NTIA is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. So we're in the executive branch, and our policy making and programs focus on expanding broadband access and adoption, the use of federal spectrum, and we work on issues such as privacy and internet governance.

The program, the initiative that Michell and I work for, BroadbandUSA, really focuses on broadband, not surprisingly, and ensuring that every American has access to affordable and reliable broadband and that they have the skills and opportunities to participate fully in the

digital economy and society. So we focus both on infrastructure as well as use and digital inclusion.

Michell is going to speak about a particular grants program, just to give you an example of what we fund, but I just wanted to highlight a couple of resources -- actually, several resources that I think will be useful to you, and I'll put these links in the chat.

One is the the Federal Funding Guide, and we actually just released an interactive version. So you will -- you're able to use this website to look at federal funding opportunities for both broadband and digital inclusion programs. So we have tagged it according to whether a program may fund broadband deployment, may fund digital literacy training, may fund devices across the whole federal government. So hopefully, you'll have a chance to take a look and find that useful.

The other thing that you might find useful is our indicators of broadband need map, and this map, again, another website, pulls together data sources about broadband, as well as broadband use and computer ownership and broadband speeds and affordability across from a number of different sources, including the FCC, the census, the information that NTIA collects directly, as well as commercial sources like Ookla and Microsoft.

So when you want to look -- analyze and support your community need and also analyze the ways that you might most effectively direct funding, I think this tool might be very useful to you.

Another thing that you might also want to look at is the State Broadband Leaders Network. We have a directory of state broadband offices. Note that much of the funding, particularly federal funding, are going through the states around broadband, as well as a number of states have also started their own broadband and digital inclusion funding programs.

So I really encourage you to get to know your state broadband leaders. I know that a number of you -- we also have a directory of local digital inclusion programs, and I think that my -- in my history of working with ConnectHome, participants -- a lot of you are already working at the local government level, but I encourage you to reach out to your state.

And then also, maybe to kind of build upon what Erich was saying about braiding different sources, even though our funding guide, for example, highlights what is eligible for digital inclusion or for broadband deployment, most of the time, you're not going to find things so explicitly labeled.

So when you're looking for different sources of funding, presumably, a lot of times you'll have to braid together different sources because different programs have different eligible entities. They might have a different program purpose around education and health or public safety or different program restrictions.

We see this a lot in the technology world that programs will only fund the technology and equipment and maybe the building of the infrastructure but not actually the investment in human capital. So I'd say really keep your eye out on those programs that will invest in people because,

without the people to do the training and to do the outreach and to engage with people, technology is just a tool.

So anyways, I will hand it over to my colleague Michell, who will talk about a specific funding opportunity that NTIA has. Thank you.

Michell Morton: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm here to talk about the Connecting Minority's Needs Pilot Program, which is a \$268 million grant to historically black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, and minority serving institutions for the purchase of broadband internet access service and eligible equipment or to hire and train information technology personnel.

The grant also provides funding for eligible education institutions to form consortia with minority business enterprises, as well as 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations. The HBCU, MSI, or TCU must serve as the lead applicant, but to be clear, NBEs and 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations can receive funding through this grant.

Funding can be used in various capacities to support digital inclusion and equity needs of the schools, the students, and surrounding anchor communities. Funding may be used to build out technology on campuses such as broadband connectivity, IT staffing, tech programs, and internships and apprenticeships, digital literacy, and advanced career tech training programs. Funding may also be used to spur digital equity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic development in anchor communities.

The deadline for the CMC application is December 1st at 11:59 Eastern Time. And for more information about the grant, you can visit BroadbandUSA.ntia.doc.gov.

And just a quick reminder, our next webinars for the CMC grant are on October 20th and 21st from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time. You can register on the BroadbandUSA website, and if you have any questions about the NOFO, there are several FAQ documents to help answer any questions about the CMC pilot program, and you can also contact NTIA staff if you have any questions. And I will put the website and our contact info in the chat. Thank you.

Erich Yost: With that, we're going to turn it over to Robert. So Robert's a senior policy adviser with the USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service.

Robert Tse: Great. Thank you. And let's go to the next slide.

Before I start on this, I want to give a shout out, when we were talking about this earlier before we started, to Cynthia Abbott at HUD -- who's at HUD in California because she is an example or -- actually, we worked on a project together called Strong Cities, Strong Communities, which is a federal agency collaborative project. In this case, we've worked with the city of Fresno. But it's an example which I think you have replicated here of different federal agencies collaborating and working together and sharing information because we have pieces from all over the place.

I have two slides, and I just put up to illustrate how big USDA is, that that's the organizational chart for USDA. We have eight undersecretaries. We cover every aspect of both rural and farm production and food systems. And actually, it's global as well. And I -- if you look on this chart, if you look all the way down, I thought I -- okay. We have a whole -- more than 100,000 people that work at USDA. So if you look on the chart where I am, it's all the way down there, that little box on the left. Since it's -- this is Halloween month, I -- the skeleton is me above the pumpkin.

So that's that's just to give you an idea how big the department is. But within that, there are many resources across the department that, if you're a housing group, you can utilize. Some of it's not broadband, but I throw it in there because we cover everything.

If we just go to the next slide, and this slide is just meant to show you. I went through, and I sliced out things that, if I was in housing, things that I would be interested in beyond broadband. So I think earlier we talked -- I talked about the broadband programs. I won't talk about that, but USDA also does fund. We have multifamily housing loans. We have a community facilities program, which is like it sounds like. I won't explain it. We have tribal college initiative grants, which has been used to fund tribal dormitories. So that is housing.

On the electric side, there are two things you should know about. One, we have the smart grid, and, in fact, we have funded more miles of smart grid just for the electric utilities. And smart grid is broadband, and it's broadband that goes right up to the electric meter of the building. So it's another piece of broadband infrastructure being done. If you are housing, you could talk to whoever it is that provides your electricity, if they're part of that program, to see whether you can benefit from that.

The other program and they -- they really asked me to talk about this -- the RESP program, which is a energy savings program. It's a zero-interest loan program that goes to the utility. Utility turns around and makes those funds available to -- we'll just say our purposes consumers, and they can fund any kind of project that gives you better energy efficiency.

So this is the one and only project that I know of that you could get a zero-interest loan and buy a new manufactured home because there's -- in rural areas, there's a lot of manufactured homes. They're not very efficient. It's impossible to retrofit them. It's actually more effective just to get a new manufactured home, and they can fund that. So it's an option that's there.

It is something that a rural housing authority or a complex could negotiate something with their utility provider for energy efficiency things in their complex, for new insulation to new HVAC, stuff like that. It's open for innovation.

Then the last two things I just wanted to throw out there as part of the scope of USDA, USDA does run all the feeding programs, which I'm sure you know about, from SNAP and the school lunch program. There's a smaller program that is less known called the Summer Food Service Program, which provides food for those who would have gotten their food in the school lunch program when school is open but not in the summertime.

They're always looking for venues to serve that because schools are generally -- buildings are generally closed, and a housing complex actually could be a venue. And so, there's an opportunity there, and I will throw out one tip. If you're rebuilding or building a new complex, if you build the community facility room within it that has a kitchen, it would help with the -- to be a venue in the summer food service program.

The last piece I'll just throw out there is the Farmers Market Promotion Program. This is a program that funds -- has grants to support farmers markets, and one could develop a farmers market either within or adjacent to or close by to a housing complex. The goal here is to increase the quality of food available to the residents. So it's an all-encompassing thing.

So that's my -- I'm through here. That's my sort of snapshot going across USDA as to what is there, and I look forward to the discussion. That's it. Yeah. You can skip that. That's the RESP detailed discussion.

Erich Yost: Got it. So I'm excited now. So now, we are going to have a exciting and robust conversation with those on the line because this is your opportunity, as I mentioned, to potentially dial for dollars. So those that have not got funding can ask some really poignant questions to those on my panel, or those that have received funding, if you've already received it, maybe you're willing to share some of your tips and tricks of getting funding.

I do want to highly promote the new tool that NTIA has come out with. I have actually used it already several times on calls with communities, and it's very user-friendly where you can just click right on a topic area and click on pre-development funding, click on what type of organization you are. So I highly recommend you use that tool because it is really, really a great source to narrow in on some of those grants and funding that you may not have even known about, that you don't realize actually could be used for different things. So definitely take advantage of that tool, if you have not actually had a chance to look at it. Spend two minutes, and it's very user-friendly and intuitive.

So we're going to open it up for questions. Feel free to unmute yourself, and feel free to jump on the screen and pose questions to our speakers or to each other. Anybody have some direct questions?

So now, this is the fun part. I'm going to actually do two things. We want -- Jacquelyn M. [ph] We want some success stories. So who? Why don't we start out -- we can ask some of the panelists if you can share some models of grantees that you know have leveraged funding and how they did so or people that have come up with plans to try and leverage funding. So if you want to share some ideas or if anyone wants -- oh, do we have Edward? Edward, you unmuted yourself. Would you like to share a question or answer that question?

Okay. So we'll let our panelists Emy, Robert, Michell, can you share some success stories of funding that you know, organizations or places that have leveraged the funding that you've shared?

Robert Tse: This is on the -- our distance learning telemedicine program. One success story is from New College, which is in the southern part of Virginia, and they got, I think it was a \$500,000 distance learning telemedicine grant. They leveraged that with other dollars they had from the state of Virginia to build basically a virtual campus, and they were -- and this is several years before COVID. But they were out there in front of building something with the ability to do both tele-education or distance education, but also they built links to other schools like other engineering schools to make those offerings.

And they -- there's a health component to it because that area of Virginia apparently has, according to them, the highest per capita prescriptions for opioids in the United States. So it's an obvious problem, and they were able to set up these sort of telemedicine clinics for training on that.

Emy Tseng: Well, just to clarify, so, it's only been recently that we've had funding again, grants program, but I can talk about some of the -- at least one example from the field that maybe Michell can share some things from her recent experience in the field.

But one example that I often highlight is in terms of braiding together different sources of funding and also dealing with the whole array of barriers to broadband access is Albemarle County, Virginia, who -- Albemarle actually encompassed both very urban areas but Charlottesville but also rural hill country and Appalachia.

So particularly during COVID, they had an interesting experience trying to make sure that all the students were served, and so they were able to actually get funding or they had already received funding from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative, I think, VTI, which is state funding for broadband infrastructure to deal with the rural areas. But they also have funding from the Department of Education around parent and teacher training and also a pretty robust laptop -- one-to-one laptop program. So again, and did a bunch of toolkits and also had technical support.

So actually, they were able to address -- when the pandemic hit, they were actually -- because they had a lot of these both funding sources and programs in place, they were able to address a lot of the issues around remote instruction pretty quickly. So again, not only did we see the importance of braiding together different pieces of funding but the real importance of partnerships. In this case they were partnering with the county, with the school district, with some local after school programs.

Michell Morton: And I'll say, for me, coming from the District of Columbia's government, really with the federal funds, it was the DTOP [ph] program that actually allowed the District of Columbia to start its digital inclusion program. From that initial funding, we were able to prove the value of having an initiative in the District of Columbia, and it remained funded through the district's government and continued since 2014. So I would say the funding is really important to [inaudible]. If you don't have any existing program, these funds really can help your city, your state just start a program.

Erich Yost: Yeah. And I wanted to share some of my experience, interesting, because of ConnectHomeUSA. So I -- prior to the current position I have now, I worked in our HUD Los

Angeles field office on several of our ConnectHome sites and the Housing Authority for the City of L.A., the Housing Authority for San Buenaventura, and a few others that we worked on.

And when we had our last round of applications to get 13 or round out our 100 ConnectHomeUSA communities and get our last 13, I approached the city of San Diego and the San Diego Housing Commission. The San Diego Housing Commission is a unique housing authority in the country because they don't have any public housing units. They converted it all to a voucher program years ago, but they have very innovative staff and systems.

And if you heard the presentation yesterday as part of the opening session, it was interesting because it's like there wasn't one group that wanted to take the lead with anything. There wasn't any group that was established in San Diego. Everybody was bifurcated or siloed away to do their pieces of the digital inclusion, digital equity, digital divide work, as many of you probably have witnessed.

But what happened was we said, hey, why don't we work on applying for an Economic Development Administration Economic Adjustment Assistance grant? And so, the very nature of using that particular grant to then get all the stakeholders together, say, we could probably get the golden ring going around the merry go round and hit potential jackpot of getting some money from EDA around this funding, brought everybody together to do all these community engagement strategies and work on all this effort. And guess what? They didn't get the funding.

That's okay because what you heard, hopefully, yesterday, or if you haven't, listen, it actually spearheaded their entire efforts in San Diego to create a more comprehensive plan, create San Diego Access 4 All, set up a department within the city, work with their stakeholders to have that convening power. So just by the nature of applying for funding, I always say sometimes, if you don't get it, it's really what the process that you went through to get it because it forces you to come up with a particular plan.

So from that, I'm going to open it up. Others on the line here today, feel free to unmute yourself. Tell us some of your success stories, some of your bumps in the road because we'd love to hear from you as well about some of your stories of securing federal, state, local funding or philanthropic funding.

Okay. So we will -- we are going to get you guys -- we're going to warm you up here shortly here.

So my next question then for our speakers here, to get the juices flowing again, is, depending on where you're located -- right -- some of this effort can happen at a state, or it can happen in local government at a county or city. So can you share your experiences either working in getting funding at the state level and leveraging that or getting federal funding to a state or how states have done their work and/or at kind of a local level, if you're working in local government, and some differences between the two?

Robert Tse: Unmute. There we go.

Erich Yost: There you go.

Robert Tse: I can give you two examples. One -- because I'm in California. So with the state of California -- and I work pretty closely with them -- so, they have actually a brand-new state of California \$6 billion broadband initiative deal with all these issues of unconnected areas.

And then a second area that I've worked with is actually at the county level. Sonoma County is in the process of putting together its own Middle Mile Initiative using a lot of county assets. And then they put together this plan, and they are now, because the timing has worked out for them, in the position to apply for some of this federal money that is all out there, that has become newly available.

So there's no substitute for the planning because then you're ready to move. And I always tell people this is not like applying to college, where if you get one shot, you apply, you either get in, or you don't get it. If you don't, if you're not successful, there are a lot of good lessons learned from that, and you can always come back and apply next year or the next round of things and probably with a better application because there's things you learned along the way.

I actually have a question to throw at the audience is that, for the audience of potential applicants, what's your biggest barrier to actually doing the application? Is it a capacity issue that you don't have the staff or the people to be able to do these applications, because we often have a -- we think from the feedback we get, that one of the biggest constraints in applications is the daunting task of the government grant application, all the different pieces in there, and that -- and if -- the smaller you are, the less resources you have?

So the question I have is, is that true? I mean, do you -- is that something, if the assistance was provided to actually literally do the application and plan, would that be valuable?

Emy Tseng: I'll also add, is the reporting and the whole dealing with the federal oversight over time also a barrier?

Erich Yost: So if anyone wants to unmute and share your kind of response to Robert's question about whether or not it's a capacity issue, a timing issue, what your kind of constraints are, now's your chance to share back to our federal team here so we can incorporate your feedback.

Robert Tse: It's important because this is the opportunity. We get the feedback to sort of craft our federal programs to accommodate that because I'll give you a specific example for the USDA broadband programs and the Reconnect Program. If you are -- if you get an award, you can recover a certain amount of pre-application expenses. It's a limited box, but you can. But if you're unsuccessful, you get nothing.

And so, the question is, if you are a resource challenge and time challenge small community or small organization, do you roll the dice and invest in something that maybe you have a 30 percent chance of getting an award? If you get the award, you could recover some of those funds. If you don't get the award, it's gone, and you may not have those resources.

So the question is, if the resources were provided -- and it doesn't have to be the federal government. It could be foundations -- to enhance -- more applications from people who otherwise wouldn't have the resources to take the chance because only in baseball is hitting .300 a good day. So I just leave it at that.

Erich Yost: I think it's always interesting working directly with communities on any type of leveraging federal funding. One thing that we always used to talk about was the importance of not only having strong grant writers so that grant writers can help you tell the compelling story, but sometimes it's just a matter of timing, understanding when those grants are coming out, because by the time you may find out about an opportunity, you may have lost two or three weeks into the grant period.

So we really advise people, as much as you can, stay tuned. Subscribe to our federal agency newsletters to know what's potentially coming. I always say, one good tip is always, if you really want to dive in, you can track -- look at specifically where the funding might be coming when we get our appropriations; right? So you get to get an idea of where funding is coming.

Emily -- Emy, you had shared NTIA has had funding for the first time in a while. Can you share more about that and what that was like not for a while and what it's like to have it and the differences now?

Emy Tseng: Yes. Well, actually, I was going to expand upon something I think that touches on the last two topics. One is the whole local, state government and also the finding funding. And this is actually -- again, we most recently had funding, but we had -- or we got from the Appropriations Act of 2021, we got funding. But before then we worked on technical assistance with -- particularly with local and state governments.

And so, just to bring up the example of North Carolina, which for a long time, cities -- local governments in North Carolina had very robust programs. You might have -- might know about Digital Charlotte, also Raleigh, and they were really early -- relatively early exemplars of locally -- a local government led institutions. And that actually prompted the state government to look at digital inclusion as statewide, particularly how to help areas that didn't necessarily have the resources that the urban areas did.

And actually, it ended up that a lot of the organizations that worked in Charlotte or Raleigh actually expanded operations and helped rural. And then -- and as the state established its broadband and digital -- and its Broadband Adoption Office, they also facilitated funding.

For example, before they actually were allocated funds -- state funds to get funding for digital inclusion, they actually worked with the -- worked with the state library system to get a state digital literacy coordinator with a grant from IMLS. So in this case, the state was -- even though they didn't have direct funds, they were aware of a lot of the opportunities that come by, and also, they worked with some philanthropic organizations.

So sometimes the local and state governments or statewide foundations, like we were talking about CTF and in California, can act as those intermediaries not only to inform folks, but they

also even might be an intermediary in terms of funding where they can handle federal funds and the oversight in ways and then direct the funds down to the folks on the ground doing the actual direct work.

So that's kind of an example that maybe weaves in all the different topics that we were just talking about.

Erich Yost: Great. I think I see in the chat here some people are having difficulty unmuting. I was wondering what was happening. So if we have the ICF team on the line, if they could help us with the technical assistance to ensure that we can unmute our guests that are trying to unmute themselves. It appears there's been some problems with people unmuting themselves.

So I will turn it over then to some of the questions -- chat online. So I see Maria Licon from Mesilla Valley Public Housing Authority in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She shared, "I do agree that our barrier is having someone to help apply for funding and mostly knowledge of what funding is available to apply for or even where to go to find the funding."

And I do -- I think that's very true and those areas there. So I wanted to put that question up is -- and that also followed a question that someone said, "Where do we find the funding again?"

So if you want to, Michell, share more about your Federal Funding Guide, that would be great.

Michell Morton: Sure. So the Federal Funding Guide is a new interactive tool, and it really allows you to drill down on topic areas such as weather -- and identify yourself as an entity, whether you're a community anchor institution, government. And then from there, it's very easy to navigate and allows you to pick topic areas.

So whether that be health care or the institutions, kind of feel down further until K through 12. And then the topic areas, there's numerous topic areas that actually lead you to different funding resources that may be available to you as that particular entity. So whether that be planning, digital literacy skills, telehealth, devices, it really allows you to focus on those areas and find a lot easier way to navigate those resources and what's available out there. Emy, I don't know if you want to add to that.

Emy Tseng: Yes. The -- I think going to the Federal Funding Guide. I'll also reiterate the using the state as a resource. In fact, this question was from Texas, and I know that Texas is actually going through a similar process that North Carolina has gone -- has been going through or went through in terms of having very robust city -- large city programs but then that work, basically, being taken on more frequently at the state level.

And I think they are establishing or have a state broadband office, and I know that we've had discussions with them at the state level about digital inclusion. So I'll put the link for the State Leaders Network, but also, I'll see if I can get the link to the actual Texas Broadband Office.

Robert Tse: And I'll add to that. There are a lot of efforts in different states. State of Washington, they have a State Broadband Office. Very active. State of Indiana has grants for

broadband. I think it comes out of their Economic Development Office in Indiana, and there are several states who actually have -- they're much smaller grants. They're not like these giant federal grants, but within the state, that's actually quite significant. They have smaller grants.

So for whatever state you're in, it's worthwhile talking -- looking at state government or even county government in some cases.

I also found an area to look at to try to find potential resources and also register, if you want to express that you don't have broadband, at the state level or the Public Utilities Commissions. The Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission, the California Public Utilities Commission, many of them have sort of a broadband section because they regulate telecommunications. That's why they come in. New York has one, too. So there are opportunities directly at the local level.

Emy Tseng: In fact, Wisconsin and California directly fund digital inclusion activities as well as the infrastructure.

Erich Yost: Hey, Robert --

Michell Morton: And the same thing with --

Erich Yost: Oh, go ahead.

Michell Morton: I was going to say, the same thing with the District of Columbia funding directly, but also, I think it's -- having worked in Chicago, some states and some cities will have strong foundation presence. And so, working with your local foundations to find that money, I think, is very important and just developing relationships because, with digital inclusion, all of a sudden because of the pandemic, it has highlighted the importance of it once again to be connected. And there's a lot of funding out there.

I think it's also working with the private industry, whether that's forming private-public partnerships to fund some of this work or working with private industry social corporate responsibility departments to maybe fund a tech program or whatever it may be. But besides going after the larger federal grants, which I can honestly say sometimes do take a lot of time, and when you are working for local government, it's just about dividing your time and trying to guesstimate whether this will be a worthwhile venture, to be quite honest. And so, looking at your partnerships.

I believe Robert brought up the planning process. Always be planning so when those opportunities are present, you're ready to go and you -- it's less time having to find partners maybe. A lot of times working with universities or the local nonprofits, you're ready to present your ideas and have something in place that allows that starting planning process to go a lot easier.

Erich Yost: Yeah. And I was going to share, it's interesting, having worked on well over 300 federal grant applications from 17 different federal agencies in place-based work, one interesting area that I always talk about and most people should realize is, the process of applying for a

federal grant, as I mentioned with the case for the EDA grant in the city of San Diego, can be so inspiring and impactful for the work you're doing.

If you don't get awarded a federal grant, you can always ask for a debrief. So in some cases, you may get a written response about all the comments of where you didn't score higher or maybe a verbal contact where the agency will debrief you on that process. And those can be extremely valuable because you can get that feedback you need for the next time the application comes out.

The other thing I always tell people that's really important is, when you see a grant that was awarded, whether you applied and didn't get it or whether you were thinking of applying and you didn't and you saw everyone awarded, usually, if you reach out to the organizations that were awarded a grant similar to what you're doing, they're very open on sharing data and information, sharing -- they've gotten the award now. So they might be very open on sharing some of their narrative from their application or others have gone through the Freedom of Information Act process and the federal government to ask for parts of applications to learn more about those.

Many times, just the summaries of those grants are published on respective websites, whether it's the EDA, NTIA, USDA, HUD, et cetera. All our federal agencies will post either the list of the grant awards and sometimes kind of some summaries about them so you can see what kind of these grants have done historically and similar type of activities that you might be able to leverage to do similar type of things and efforts with that funding.

So I know in the beginning we had done a poll question So have you had trouble finding grants for your digital inclusion program? And there was 80 percent that said no, they haven't had -- or sorry. 20 percent said no, and 80 percent said yes; right? I think that was the questions we had. So I want to hear from individuals, if there's anyone on the line as well.

I see -- thank you, Emy, Michell, and Robert for sharing resources online, but is there -- I'm going to pause here for a second to see, does anyone want to unmute themselves and ask a question for the broader group? Or does the broader group that's with us here today want to share some of their ideas and examples of what they've done around securing funding or attempting to secure funding?

Okay. So since we haven't had anyone speak up, I'm going back to my standard bears here with Emy, Michell, and Robert.

So some questions for you. In your most recent round -- if you're aware of your most recent round for your funding applications, what's the -- what generally -- you see these dollar amounts. They're big for federal grants. Obviously, a lot compared to some other type of grants you can apply for. But what's kind of the scope of -- do you think of the number of applications you get? Do you have an idea for those grants? Is it thousands? Is hundreds, or where it's kind of that general number and percent that get awarded? I mean, I know it varies by grant year and grant types, but what kind of numbers are we looking at?

Robert Tse: I'm trying to remember off the top of my head that the Reconnect Program I believe we had -- Okay. We've already had rounds one and two. We have 105 -- oops. I'm looking at the

wrong number. We have, let's see, 181 projects. And if I remember off the top of my head, 181 projects, there's something under 500, under 400 total applications. So it's roughly -- it's like this baseball thing, two to one or three to one, depending upon how you want to read the numbers.

There were some programs that it was pretty high percentage because not too many people knew about the program and then they all found out about it. And then you had three or four times the number of applications.

I know that that other NTIA program, the one that's supposed to come from states and local government, got -- I think the original thought was they were going to get applications funneled in from 50 states plus a couple of territories. And it didn't come that way. It just came out as a huge number that was five times as many as what was expected.

I will say, though, in terms of -- I work pretty hard on trying and looking at broadband for tribal communities, and we just had that \$1 billion NTIA tribal broadband program. And I think it was \$1 billion program. If I believe they got \$5 billion, something like that, in grant requests. It was five times the amount. So there's always going to be more applications or applications for -- either more applications and more money than what you have. So then you have to sort it out.

But what I was going to say, this is going back to this capacity issue, that I actually -- I work with Jeanne Rice [ph] and some people may know at NTIA. And a white paper was developed to deliver to philanthropy who could fund the capacity to be able to apply for a federal grant or a state grant. And this was intended for small, medium-size foundations.

You might think, well, how could it really help because I don't have that much money? But in point of fact, if you had \$50,000 and you could pay for a grant writer or you could pay for the development of the strategic plan that could be used, that's like the nail in the shoe of the horse, that whole story, that they can be critical for that. And they can turn around -- if they like a project, they can turn it around much quicker than we can.

And so, TechSoup, which is a company, has developed this white paper, and I think I have the citation for it. I can -- I'd have to go find it. But I think if you Google TechSoup white paper tribal broadband, it's basically the paper explaining what philanthropies can do.

And I've also worked with Philanthropy Northwest, which has a project specifically to help tribes access broadband. It's not just Washington state, but it's all tribes. And so, there are efforts going on, and part of it is dealing with this capacity issue to get you to the door of federal or state applications to build the capacity for that.

Emy Tseng: Yes. I was just looking up the -- we did receive more than 280 applications, over \$5 billion in funding requests for basically a, well, \$980 million program for tribal connectivity, and then received for the broadband infrastructure \$2.5 billion in requests for a \$288 million program. The CMC program is still open. So we'll see in terms of the applications for that.

But just to, again, build upon what was said, just I think there's real importance for planning, both broadband planning, digital inclusion program -- planning at the local, regional, and state

level, and that actually putting out the plan, figuring out what is actually needed in the community, doing some data analysis as well, seeing what programs already exist.

I often see communities come and they -- or organizations come, and they say, we want to start a new program that does this kind of training. I'm like, but you already -- have you talked to so-and-so in your community who already provides that kind of programming? Maybe you don't need to start up a new program. So that kind of resource mapping is really essential in this. And then from there, you can basically see what programs you want to scale, what programs you actually want to create.

The whole idea about leveraging philanthropic funds not to necessarily for operational expenses but actually for the planning, the grant writing, and the help for grant writing is really -- is a great way to leverage those funds, as well as from sometimes corporate foundations will also support that.

Note that a lot of folks, both in the philanthropy world and also from the grant-seeker world or the funder world, not just philanthropy, they -- they think immediately, we just have to buy lots of computers. We have to buy lots and lots of equipment. But then programs flounder because they don't actually have the staffing. They don't have the training. They don't have the outreach, all of that, which, unfortunately, is harder to find funding for because those are operational usually.

But there's more and more recognition, particularly with pandemic, about the importance of, again, the investment in people and the human capital in the -- in skills and digital connectors and such.

So really think about, when somebody offers funding, for example, a lot of businesses offered, oh, we'll just buy a bunch of computers for the students or we'll pay for all the internet access. But then there's the FCC EBB program, or there might be other avenues for the subscriptions and the devices. So be aware of what is needed to actually build a full program and see -- look for those pots of money that you support the the staffing, the personnel, et cetera.

Robert Tse: And I'll add one more thing as part of that data analysis, that there are minimum standards that define whether you are considered to have broadband or not, and then the funding goes to where there is no broadband.

And if you are -- no matter what group you are, housing authority, you get a housing project somewhere, one way you can help yourself is to go and map, document what kind of -- because you're going to have to. Somebody's going to have to -- is document what kind of broadband that you have. It's a measurement of the speed, those Mbps things that we've talked about.

But you need to document it because even if the official maps say that you don't have -- you have broadband when you actually don't, you can counter it with proof. And because I work on mapping, it's a big issue is getting accurate, granular maps. And if there's one thing that people can do to help themselves as a part of the planning process is document what kind of broadband

you have. And there's many people that can help you with it. It's not super complicated kind of thing, but it's part of the process.

And the other is -- yeah -- identify the assets that are already there that you can leverage. There are more assets out there than you might think that can be leveraged, and they sit in other silos. That's part of the challenge.

Erich Yost: Yeah. And I was going to share a couple things. So especially just kind of building off of what Emy said and Robert and Michell's experience in working in D.C., what's really important too is you're developing both your plan, whether it's or digital inclusion, digital equity, digital divide plan, is having that funding plan. The funding plan is so important to have that because, whether you're providing services, equipment, broadband access, training, support, whatever it may be, really need to lay out that funding plan.

Then you can start to piece together where you can get the particular funding from. As you mentioned, it could be from philanthropy for some pieces. It may be federal funding for others. It may be blending and braiding several federal funding sources to do different things. It could be using CDBG funds from HUD. It could be a variety of different sources that you may be getting competing for that may take time to plan out.

So I always say it's uplifting and braiding of funding, but it's also sequencing because our funding isn't just an open rolling all the time. So our funding comes out usually at periodic times. Sometimes some funds can be open rolling or periodic applications. And so, you really need to be aware of when those different application cycles come and start.

Right now, we're in this very unique time because us in the federal family are in this transition of our federal funding waiting for budget, budget reconciliation, build back better infrastructure. All our kind of funding models are kind of in this flux period, but once things start to settle down, you'll get a good idea of where the buckets of funding will come, depending on how those monies land from Congress.

And so, it's a good chance to start to look at at least the federal side while you're looking at both state funding and, as mentioned, private, corporate, or philanthropic funding, what's really important.

One other resource I wanted to share with all of you that I found really useful from my perspective is the U.S. Ignite had prepared a very detailed case study on the variety of infrastructure, different types of models and funding models for broadband. And so, many people think, oh, it's just one model, and this is how you do it. But there's many different structures and how they're funded, and they have both a summary report but also case studies on all the different types of models that they've -- that they put together.

And I find that document extremely useful because, as Robert said, you really need to understand what the structure is you're trying to develop, what the existing structure is if you're doing kind of broader infrastructure type development around that effort.

And I want to turn over to Michell. If you want to add some flair or comments to this from your work in D.C., I'd be glad to hear some additional insights from you as we're getting close to wrapping this up here. I'll give you one final shout out to close us out, and we'll do one last question. And -- but let's do a final round between all three of you to share your words of wisdom. We'll go Michell, Emy, and then Robert.

Michell Morton: Okay. Words of wisdom. Like I said, I think its -- planning is everything, being prepared when the funding hits. As you mentioned, knowing the time frames and when funding may come out, but planning means everything.

Emy Tseng: Yes. Planning, being nimble because sometimes these pots of funding come out. They are announced, and you don't have that much time. So setting up those partnerships, planning and partnerships, and then acknowledging that there's very little funding that will out -- and out say broadband or this is digital inclusion funding. So again, NTIA is trying to help with that through our guide, but we know that there's a lot. So look for the funding in education, health, workforce development, economic development. There's all sorts of avenues for digital inclusion and broadband funding.

Robert Tse: And I'd echo that, too, in terms of planning. Do the mapping. Identify where the needs are in terms of what kind of broadband you have. I would take a strong equity lens to this to make the case for things. It has to be inclusion because this is the opportunity to bring in communities that have been left out traditionally from all kinds of infrastructure, and we have the opportunity to fix that, I guess you could say.

And then find partners. There are lots of allies out there one could collaborate with, and you're much stronger in that sense if you can do that. So I would take a look at those things.

And then finally, set your stuff together so that you can respond to an unanticipated external event. COVID is the unanticipated external event, but what it did was it blew up. It showed everybody the real need for broadband, for telehealth, distance learning, and telework. It's not that we didn't know that before, but it was an event that just blew up the household need for that. There are external events that will blow up, and those who are ready to go through that door get there faster, I think. And so, that goes back to planning, I guess.

Erich Yost: That's great. Well, thank you all for your words of wisdom and your insights today.

I think we have one final survey that we want to do for those that are still around to take it here. So if we could pop up that final survey here, is, did you get a new idea or strategy from the session that you will implement? A yes, no, or a maybe.

And I also, while you're filling that out, wanted to thank you so much for attending our session today. We look forward to having your attendance at day three tomorrow in attending the events we have tomorrow for the ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit. And join us for a conversation about innovative approaches to digital inclusion, action planning, and recognition of our ConnectHomeUSA communities.

So with that, I think can we post the final results, or we're going to keep those private and wanted to -- oh, there we go. Thank you so much. So fantastic. Did you get a new idea? Yes, and some maybe. So the maybes, take a shot at implementing and looking at our materials, and we'll keep the dialogue going. And thank you so much, and have a great afternoon, everyone.

(END)