

October 24, 2025

Tribal Digital Village Improvement and Expansion Strategy

Background

In March of 2023, the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (SCTCA), in partnership with the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) was awarded a \$483,452 Local Agency Technical Assistance grant from the California Public Utilities Commission. The purpose of this funding was to create a plan to modernize and expand the Tribal Digital Village Network (TDV) --a tribally led internet service provider that currently connects more than 110 tribal buildings and up to 500 tribal households.

While TDV has been a critical resource in getting Tribes connected to the internet, service remains limited, and many households, tribal buildings, and services are still considered unserved under California standards. Tribes have expressed that the lack of reliable, affordable internet remains a barrier to education, healthcare, public safety, and economic opportunity. This grant funded the first-ever comprehensive strategy to assess the existing TDV system and create a roadmap for improving and expanding its network.

Overview

Over the past two years, SCTCA, TDV, and SANDAG have worked with the technical experts at TwoP, LLC to produce the following deliverables:

- Broadband Infrastructure Existing Conditions Analysis – an independent assessment of the current state of TDV broadband infrastructure, identifying bottlenecks and gaps.
- Tribal Internet Connectivity Outreach – direct engagement with tribal leaders and stakeholders to understand and document connectivity challenges and needs.
- TDV Network Modernization Design- a scalable design ("TDVnet 2.0") that shows how the network can reach FCC broadband standards (100 Mbps/20Mbps).
- TDV Implementation Strategy – a roadmap with funding options, risk management, and organizational recommendations to position TDVnet and SCTCA for expansion.

Through interviews, surveys, and conversations with tribal leaders and staff, consistent themes emerged. Many households still lack reliable or affordable internet service, and the options that do exist are often expensive and unreliable. Geography remains a significant barrier, particularly for communities in remote or canyon areas where extending infrastructure is difficult. Aging tower infrastructure is also a barrier to network reliability and expansion. Tribal leaders and community members recognize the importance of connectivity for education, healthcare, emergency services, and economic development, but capacity and cost remain major challenges.

Action: Information

Staff will present an update on the Local Agency Technical Assistance Grant funded Tribal Digital Village Improvement and Expansion Strategy.

Fiscal Impact:

This project is funded by the CPUC administered Local Agency Technical Assistance Grant for a total of \$474,509.29.

Schedule/Scope Impact:

Project is expected to be completed during winter 2025.

This project was originally designed to complement the State of California's planned *Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative*, which aims to extend high-capacity fiber near tribal lands across the region. When portions of that statewide middle-mile network were deferred or eliminated mid-project, the team adapted its strategy to ensure continued progress toward improving connectivity for tribal communities.

The work funded through this grant represents the first comprehensive technical and community-driven roadmap for the TDV. It provides a technical blueprint for upgrading the network while documenting community needs and priorities.

Next Steps

The final deliverable, TDV Network Modernization Design, is expected by November 2025. Upon completion, SCTCA and TDV are positioned to compete for grant programs for implementation.

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