



Recommendation for Action

File #: 22-2627, Agenda Item #: 8.

9/1/2022

Posting Language

Authorize negotiation and execution of an interlocal agreement with Travis County to provide \$40,000 over a two-year period for research, survey, and outreach assistance relating to digital access in an effort to reduce barriers and increase access to broadband.

Lead Department

Financial Services Department.

Fiscal Note

Funding is available in the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Operating Budget of the Financial Services Department.

For More Information:

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Additional Backup Information:

On June 12, 2013, the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission (CTTC) passed a recommendation for the City to conduct a Residential Technology Study every three years to measure the digital divide in the City. The last study was conducted in 2017 and published in 2018. Due to the restrictions created by COVID-19 the subsequent study was delayed until 2021. The pandemic highlighted the City's disparities in connectivity and access to essential services, health care and tele-health services, and remote education and telework for City residents. The strategy for the 2021 survey was to deploy the study in two parts:

1. A qualitative study with a focus on community lived experience of the digital divide and inequity, brought to greater focus due to the impact of COVID-19, and
2. A quantitative study to help support data- driven solutions and strategies to reduce barriers and increase access to broadband.

Reports of barriers such as affordability, training and access to appropriate devices, speed and strength of connectivity, bandwidth sufficient enough for tele-education, tele-health, workforce training, and remote work still persist in both Travis County and the City. In 2021, the Travis County Commissioners Court approved funding of \$250,000 for solving digital equity. Additionally, the City allocated \$100,000 for the same purpose. This provided an opportunity for the City to partner with Travis County on a county-wide survey and community outreach to identify needs and merging sustainable solutions for affordable broadband and devices to remove the barriers previously mentioned.

The \$40,000 being requested will support research collaboration between Travis County and the City, including door-to-door surveying, citizen advisory groups, focus groups, and other research methods as agreed upon by both parties. Additionally, this funding will support analysis of the research findings and generation of responsive recommendations. This data and analysis will then provide the County and the City with critical information allowing us to make important updates the 2014 City of Austin Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan.

Strategic Outcome(s):

Government that Works for All.