Access to affordable, reliable internet service is an important component of staying connected to community events, educational opportunities, and basic services.

Richmond residents are struggling with both broadband access and digital literacy.

According to the 2020 US Census, 90 percent of households in Richmond have access to the internet. However, **the quality and cost of internet access can vary widely** across income groups. For families that had parents and students relying on the internet for work or school at the same time, the quality of their internet access dipped.

Digital literacy, including accessing virtual meeting spaces, became a constraint for many residents, particularly those from older demographics. Community events, including religious groups, met online; not being literate in programs like Zoom limits the ability to connect with others or participate in remote work. Many services, such as vaccination and testing appointments, required online scheduling further compounding access to care.

Emerging from the pandemic, it is essential to both **increase digital access and literacy** and **reinvigorate physical spaces for connection and community**. By investing in parks, libraries, and community spaces, residents can come together while still reaching their families and communities online.

CASE STUDIES

Los Angeles County is home to over 400,000 families who do not have a reliable home internet connection. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Los Angeles County Internal Services Department (ISD) designed and supported the implementation of Community Broadband Networks and Digital Navigators, both of which are solutions to broadband access, affordability, and adoption for communities impacted by the digital divide. Community Broadband Networks are public-private partnerships to deploy new high-speed internet infrastructure and guarantee affordable internet service. ISD was awarded $56 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding to implement the Community Broadband Network program and is currently partnering with a consulting firm to implement the digital navigators program.

Other cities and counties across California have set aside ARPA funding to address broadband access. The library system in **Paso Robles** used ARPA funding to purchase hotspots, which residents can checkout. In **Santa Cruz County**, funding was allocated to connect housing developments and low-income neighborhoods with free or low-cost Internet service. Around the country, municipalities have gotten creative with their ARPA funding to address broadband needs. For example, **Dallas County** is using ARPA funding to focus on providing residents with a minimum of 100 Mbps download and upload speeds; funding will target households and businesses without access, as well as those with low speeds.

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OUR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY | POTENTIAL INVESTMENTS

The City can use ARPA funds to support expanded cultural programming and amenities to enhance mental health, community wellbeing, and quality of life.

	Alignment with Community Needs Needs Addressed & Beneficiaries	Alignment with ARPA Requirements Eligible Uses, Timing, & Suitability	Implementation Needs Responsibility & Approximate Cost
Provide grants to community nonprofit organizations providing critical cultural and supportive services to Richmond's communities	Richmond is a diverse city, with half of residents speaking a language other than English; a third of the population was born outside of the U.S. However, the lack of culturally competent and representative resources means that a significant portion of the city continues to struggle accessing information and resources.	H&E, PS Make deployment deadline a requirement of the NOFA Funds for temporary or one-time programming; no ongoing commitment	Nonprofit organizations TBD based on NOFA responses
Dedicate funding to commission local artists to create public art installations	Arts and cultural institutions were among the hardest hit industries during the early stages of COVID and were less likely to receive Paycheck Protection Program funding. Investment in public art will not only support local creators, but also provide a sense of community pride and connection.	H&E, PS Make deployment deadline a requirement of the NOFA Funds for temporary or one-time programming; no ongoing commitment	Arts organizations, City TBD based on NOFA responses

Strategies
K. Expand cultural and recreational programming and public art
L. Make improvements to public facilities and subsidize available programming
M. Expand access to broadband

Eligible uses for ARPA funds:
- H&E – Responding to the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19
- PS – Replacing lost public sector revenue
- PP – Premium Pay for Eligible Workers
- WSB – Investments in Water, Sewer, and Broadband Infrastructure
* indicates eligibility in Qualified Census Tracts or disproportionately impacted communities)

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OUR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY | POTENTIAL INVESTMENTS

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	Alignment with Community Needs Needs Addressed & Beneficiaries	Alignment with ARPA Requirements Eligible Uses, Timing, & Suitability	Implementation Needs Responsibility & Approximate Cost
Make improvements to parks, open space, community centers, libraries and other amenities to improve safety and utility	Richmond residents rely on their churches, neighborhoods, and community organizations to stay socially and economically connected, and need events to return safely and quickly. Improvements and upgrades to these facilities will help connect residents who have felt socially disconnected from their neighbors and community or faced mental health challenges.	PS City to confirm timing for improvements Funds for one-time capital improvements; no ongoing commitment	City
Provide additional free or subsidized community and cultural programs through the City's parks, libraries, and community centers	During the pandemic, there were significantly fewer places to connect, contributing to mental health challenges and feelings of isolation, as a result of closure of day programs for the disabled, churches and community centers, the cancellation of large cultural celebrations and community festivals, and the closure of ethnic restaurants or the shift to take-out only service.	H&E (may depend on type of programming), PS City to confirm ability to deploy subsidized programming Funds for temporary programming	City
Address digital access and service disparities by expanding broadband to under-resourced communities	While 90 percent of households in the city of Richmond have internet access, statewide data shows that this access is likely not equitably distributed across income levels. During the listening tour, residents shared that the need for internet service and technology added a new expense and source of stress.	WSB, PS City to confirm timing for improvements Funds for one-time improvements; no ongoing commitment	City

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OUR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Nonprofit organizations played critical, central roles for many types of communities during the pandemic, but still face tight resourcing and some competition for funding.

CITY PROGRESS MADE	IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH	OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

ARPA Expenditures

- The City has dedicated over $2M in ARPA funds to make critical repairs and improvements to community amenities, including the main library, Nevin community center, the recreation center, Richmond Museum, and MLK. Jr. Park.

Dual Approach

- Part of the implementation approach for culture & community involves issuing a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) or identifying arts and cultural service organizations to provide expanded programming and public arts in the near or intermediate term.

- The other part relies on investing directly into improved city services for recreation and community amenities.

State Funding

- California Arts Council has several grant programs that provide general operating relief for arts and cultural organizations that experienced negative economic impacts of COVID.

- The California State Library has a state-funded high-speed broadband program that supports libraries and other organizations with internet access.

Federal Funding

- The Affordable Connectivity Program provides eligible households with a $30 monthly credit for their internet service plan.

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