



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: COUNTY MANAGER

File #: 20-571

Board Meeting Date: 8/4/2020

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Michael P. Callagy, County Manager
Jon Walton, Chief Information Officer, Information Services
Subject: Public Internet Connectivity Pilot Project

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution:

- A) Approving a \$2,879,010 allocation of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds for the purposes of funding the “Public Internet Connectivity Pilot Project” to improve high-speed internet access for disadvantaged students; and
- B) Waiving the Request for Proposals (RFP) process and authorizing:
 - 1. The County Manager, or the County Manager’s designee, to prepare and execute agreements with Smartwave Technologies for the provision of design, installation, and maintenance services that will expand the current SMC Public Wi-Fi network in an amount not to exceed \$1,916,585, and for the provision of mobile wireless access points in an amount not to exceed \$250,620, with both agreements having a term of August 4, 2020, to August 4, 2021; and
 - 2. Ratification of an agreement and amendment with Kaizen Technology Partners for consultancy and data services for the term of May 29, 2020, to May 28, 2021 in an amount not-to-exceed \$495,000.

BACKGROUND:

In March 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, as well as local and state shelter-in-place orders, San Mateo County school districts resorted to distance learning conducted virtually over video conferencing platforms. The proliferation of students engaged in distance learning revealed significant internet connectivity challenges for school districts, especially those serving students in vulnerable communities.

During the 2020-2021 school year, it is anticipated that San Mateo County school districts will continue to implement distance learning until the risk of COVID-19 has been abated. The effective implementation of distance learning requires access to reliable and fast internet service, which not all San Mateo County students currently have.

DISCUSSION:

To enable students to effectively engage in distance learning, the County is launching a pilot project in partnership with the San Mateo County Office of Education, La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District, Ravenswood City School District, Redwood City School District, and Sequoia Union High School District, as well as community business partners to be identified, in order to improve high-speed internet access for disadvantaged students in those districts (the “Public Internet Connectivity Pilot Project” or the “Project”). The Project will provide up to twelve (12) months of internet access for more than 1,200 students living in East Palo Alto, Redwood City, and unincorporated San Mateo County in the communities of La Honda, Loma Mar, Pescadero, and San Gregorio.

The scope of the Project includes a variety of internet access solutions to provide and improve internet service including expansion of the County’s Public Wi-Fi network and in-home internet access as well as the distribution of mobile hotspots and mobile wireless access points.

The specific components of the Project authorized in the accompanying resolutions include:

Expansion of San Mateo County Public WiFi (\$1,916,585)

Smartwave will provide design, installation, and maintenance services to expand the County’s existing public WiFi services to areas that are densely populated by students who currently lack reliable internet connectivity (East Palo Alto, Redwood City, and unincorporated San Mateo County in the communities of La Honda, Loma Mar, Pescadero, and San Gregorio). This WiFi expansion will increase the number of wireless access points within the Wi-Fi network to allow students to stay in or near their homes and safely connect to the internet to effectively engage in distance learning. Students and their families will also benefit outside of the school context by gaining improved access to general online, tele-health, and other video-related services, as well as benefiting from expanded teleworking capabilities.

Provision of Mobile Wireless Access Points (\$250,620)

There are geographic areas within the boundaries of the above-referenced school districts that do not currently have internet connectivity. Smartwave will assist the County to improve this connectivity issue by providing mobile wireless access points (*i.e.*, devices that create a wireless local area network). Smartwave will provide equipment, installation, configuration, and maintenance services for these mobile wireless access points that will be deployed to the greatest areas of need.

Waiver of the Request for Proposals process with respect to the above-referenced services is in the County’s best interests because of the short time period - less than four (4) weeks - before the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. The County would not be able to complete an RFP process in that time period and the delivery of internet access is an urgent need. Delaying the provision of internet access to students would in turn delay their access to curriculum and instruction. Further, the County currently contracts with Smartwave to support the SMC Public Wi-Fi network. The contractor is familiar with the County’s network, has been a reliable partner, and the County has previously found its work to be priced competitively.

Kaizen Technology Partners is currently providing project management and data analysis services to

develop data models that enable decisions about the which internet access solutions will provide the optimum internet access for students in particular geographic areas. Waiver of the RFP process and ratification of the agreement with Kaizen Technology Partners for project management, data analysis, and data modeling services will allow the County to identify the most cost effective and appropriate solutions for providing students with internet access is also requested. The amended agreement is for the term of May 29, 2020 to May 28, 2021, in an amount not-to-exceed \$495,000. Initial waiver of the County's competitive processes and execution of the agreement by the County Manager, acting as the Director of Emergency Services, was pursuant to Resolution No. 077305, and the agreement is now being presented to the Board for ratification.

The remaining additional contracts that are required to successfully implement the Project are within the contracting authority of the Chief Information Officer, or the CIO's designee, and are described below. These agreements are in the process of being finalized but will not need to be brought to this Board for approval.

Data Collection/Analysis Services & Outreach Communication Services (\$100,000)

Strategy of Things has been retained by ISD to assist with the Project to provide stakeholder communication and outreach to identify needs, solicit feedback, and support the Project implementation efforts. Additionally, it will assist with data gathering and data analysis to help determine best practices and solution alternatives for districts.

Provision of Mobile "Hotspots" (estimated at \$78,000)

Many school districts are providing hotspots, which provide a portable internet connection via a cellular network, to their students to enable distance learning. AS part of this Project, ISD estimates that mobile hotspots will be provided to the Project's school districts to support student's in-home connectivity and to provide an alternate internet access solution when the other Project solutions are not available. The precise number of Mobile hotspots required by school districts is to be determined.

Provision of In-Home Internet Access (estimated at \$38,805)

ISD will partner with various internet providers to be selected based on price, reliability, and service territory. These providers will provide low-cost, high-speed Internet connection to students in their homes. Pending a final determination of districts' needs, home access internet accounts will be provided to students. These accounts will include free training and support.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact on the County General Fund associated with approving this allocation of \$2,879,010 of CARES Act funds to the Public Internet Connectivity Pilot Project.