

El Paso County to join digital inclusion initiative to expand broadband internet access

El Paso County will be participating in a three-year program to expand broadband internet access and promote digital inclusion to residents.

For three years, Digital El Paso, a public-private partnership collaboration among the city, county, El Paso Independent School District and the city's Housing Authority, will work with the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and technical consultant, Magellan Advisors, to better understand community needs, infrastructure and other factors in expanding broadband internet access.

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"Tackling the digital divide will take our entire community working together," El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego said in a news release. "The assistance we will get from the Dallas Fed and Magellan Advisors will help to keep building momentum behind digital inclusion in our region and moves us closer toward tangible outcomes."

Digital El Paso was started in 2007 to "improve government efficiencies and provide internet access and application delivery to citizens and businesses," according to a 2007 Cisco news statement about Digital El Paso's launch.

The wireless mesh network would bring internet access to underserved citizens, school children, public housing residents and small businesses in El Paso, the news release read.

"Broadband access plays a critical role in improving education outcomes and creating economic opportunities," Barbara Walker, a territory account manager for Cisco Systems and a Digital El Paso member, said.

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The public-private partnership that makes up Digital El Paso consists of Cisco, The Borderplex Alliance, El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, El Paso Community Foundation, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas – El Paso Branch, Microsoft, Rio Grande Council of Governments, Region 19 and the University of Texas at El Paso.

"The vision of the group is to establish El Paso as the largest binational connected community in the world and as a visionary leader in closing the digital divide," a statement from the county's Economic Development Department read.

Digital El Paso is also coordinating with Doña Ana County to also participate in the Dallas Fed's Digital Inclusion Initiative to improve regional access to broadband internet.

Digital El Paso will host a virtual public discussion titled "The State of Broadband In El Paso County" at 10 a.m. Thursday, June 24. The meeting will address the county's broadband feasibility study and market analysis conducted by UTEP's Mike Loya Center for Innovation and Commerce and the university's Hunt Institute for Global Competitiveness.

To participate in the Zoom call, register for the event at https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_bCHYNJ4_T_S1KW7c99g4AA.

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