

# 2023 DIGITAL EQUITY Strategic Plan

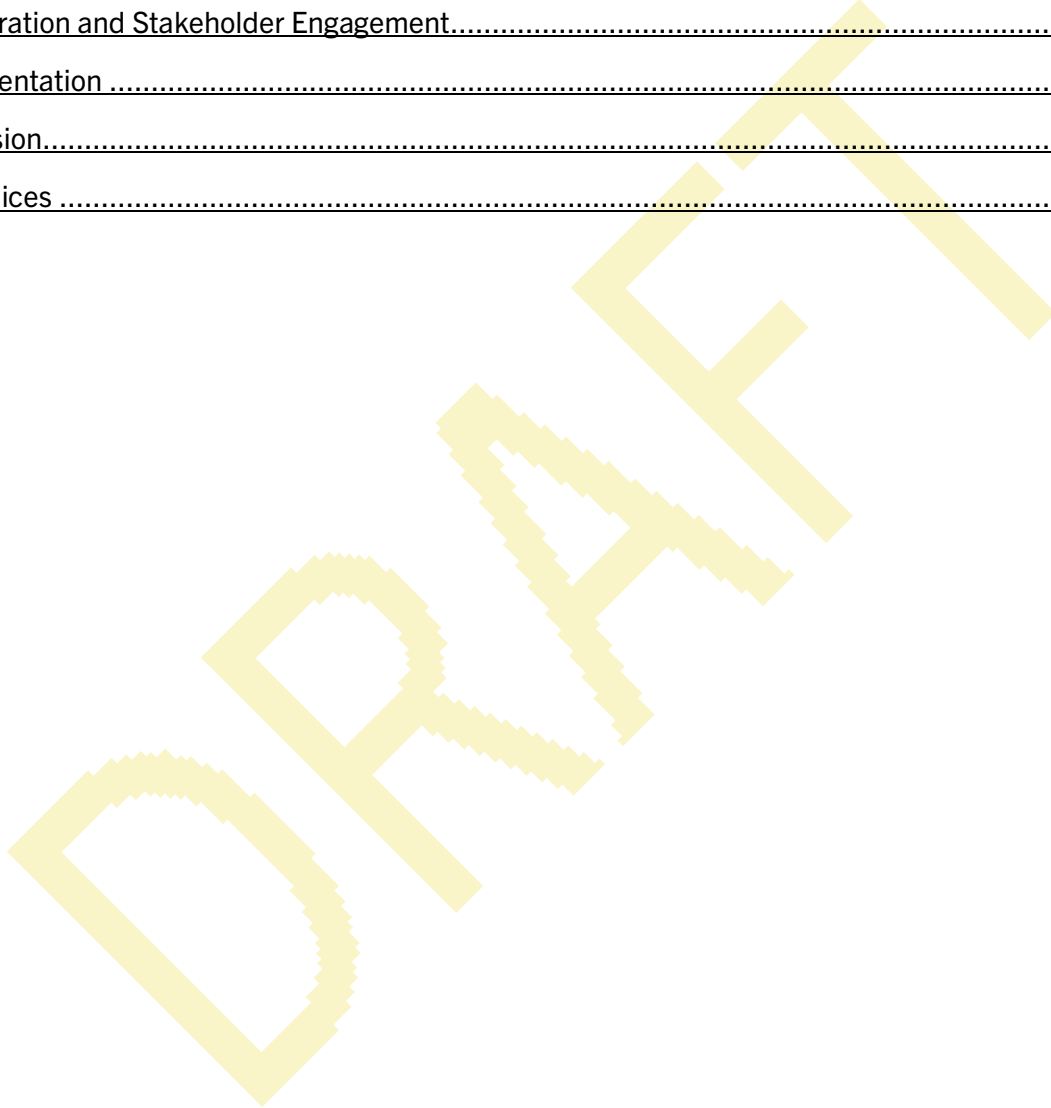
## DRAFT

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For Public Comment Review



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Note: Please see the Glossary to quickly confirm any abbreviations or acronyms in this document.

# 1. Executive Summary

“If we are serious about competing in today’s global economy and recruiting the best talent to come to our state and keeping our children where they grew up, then we must do everything in our power to end the digital divide.”

— Governor Laura Kelly

“Broadband equity starts with access, but also includes adoption and application. [Kansas] is committed to providing capacity and resources to ensure everyone has the access and skills needed to benefit from digital technologies in their lives.”

— Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of Commerce David Toland

“Kansans use the internet to work, learn, keep in touch with family, grow a business, get health care, and more. While access to high-speed internet is a gateway to opportunity, that opportunity is not distributed equally in our state. I’m proud to have voted for this new federal funding from the bipartisan infrastructure law that will help every Kansan thrive in the digital age.”

— Rep. Sharice Davids (KS-03)

Ensuring every Kansan obtains access to reliable and affordable broadband service and the digital literacy skills necessary to live, learn, work, play, and compete equitably in an increasingly technology-driven society is a priority of the Kelly administration. In 2020, Governor Kelly established the Kansas Office of Broadband Development (KOBBD), housed within the Kansas Department of Commerce, to lead the state’s broadband deployment, affordability, and digital equity efforts.

## **Kansas Office of Broadband Development (KOBBD)**

**KOBBD believes in taking a comprehensive approach to federal and state funding opportunities to close the digital divide**, which has made Kansas a national leader in applying for and using a wide range of opportunities to benefit our residents. Kansas is poised to leverage the historic federal infrastructure investment made to ensure all Kansans have access to affordable broadband and the necessary devices, training, and technical support to participate in our digital economy.

KOBBD has already secured significant funding to date:

- \$15.5 million from the U.S. Treasury’s Capital Projects Fund-Digital Connectivity Technology (CPF-DCT). This was the first award in the nation made under this program by the Treasury Department.
- \$42.5 million from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s (NTIA) Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program (EMMBI) in collaboration with the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT).
- \$83 million from the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) for infrastructure projects.
- \$451.7 million to support universal broadband service through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program.

These funds will support a wide range of programs, including support for community anchor institutions (CAI), internet-enabled devices for unserved and underserved Kansans, a 682-mile open-access, middle-mile fiber optic network, along with fast and reliable internet service to nearly 30,000 homes, businesses, schools, healthcare facilities, and other public institutions. In support of the universal broadband coverage goal, KOBBD ensures all

# 1. Executive Summary

Kansans have access to the training affordable devices, and technical skills needed to fully participate in the digital economy.

## Understanding Digital Equity in Kansas

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, statewide, over 153,000 Kansans lack subscriptions to high-speed internet due to infrastructure availability, affordability, or access to devices, digital literacy skills knowledge, and support. The connectivity gap is particularly noticeable within covered populations who have historically experienced lower rates of computer and internet use. Covered populations as defined by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration are:

- individuals who live in covered households (referred to throughout the rest of this plan as “low-income households”)
- aging individuals who are 60 years of age and older
- incarcerated individuals (referred to throughout the rest of this plan as “justice involved”)
- veterans
- people with language barriers
- members of racial or ethnic minority groups
- individuals who reside in rural areas.

To better understand these digital equity gaps, KOBD conducted a statewide “Broadband Roadshow” in the spring of 2023. Staff traveled over 50,000 miles, presenting and leading discussions during more than 28 events. These meetings served as the initial introduction of KOBD to the residents, businesses, local officials, nonprofits, CAIs, and associations of Kansas, with a goal to meet Kansans “where they live.” This comprehensive and collaborative approach helped KOBD better identify the needs and barriers of those populations experiencing gaps in broadband adoption, affordability, device and technical support availability, and digital literacy skills and knowledge. These communities helped KOBD understand the impact digital equity issues have on economic opportunities, healthcare, education, workforce development, and civic engagement, helping shape KOBD’s digital equity vision and this digital equity plan.

### Digital Equity – Definition

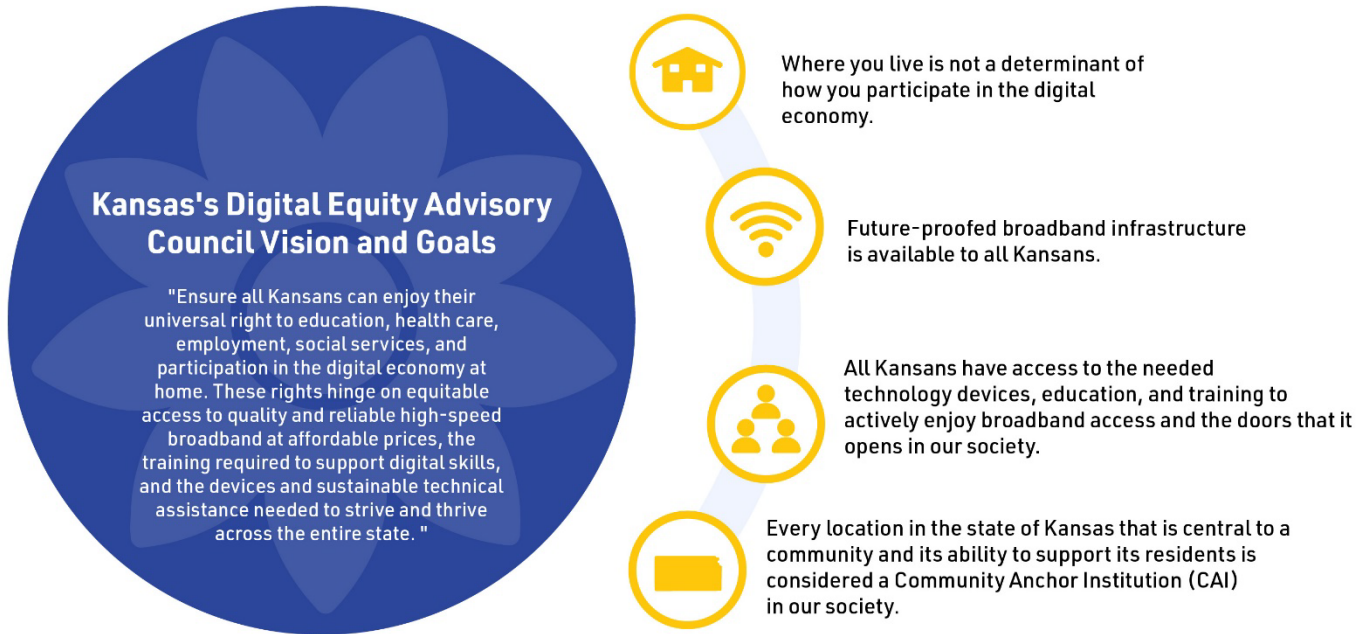
*Digital equity is the condition in which all individuals have the information technology capacity needed to fully participate in society, democracy, and the economy.*

*See other key digital equity terms defined in Appendix 1.*

Moreover, KOBD enlisted the expertise and support of the University of Kansas (KU) and Wichita State University (WSU) to help draw a clearer picture of the needs, assets, and opportunities for digital equity in Kansas.

## The Goals and Vision for Digital Equity in Kansas

KOBD's Digital Equity Advisory Council is a group of respected leaders who represent Kansans from all covered populations and every area of the state. The Advisory Council authored the vision for digital equity and this plan:



## Lessons Learned

### Financial Resources and Partnerships

In addition to the funding detailed earlier, KOBD has utilized and is pursuing specific funding (see 2.2.1) to address digital equity in Kansas. KOBD also recognizes the road to close the digital divide requires strong partnerships and financial resources. Partnerships with communities and organizations across the state are foundational to the role KOBD plays to unify, amplify, and expand the important work of those entities. KOBD's investment in productive partnerships with all types of organizations and communities includes state agencies, municipalities, counties, Sovereign Tribal Nations, schools, foundations and other philanthropic entities, libraries, public-private partners, nonprofit organizations, labor unions, associations, and other non-traditional entities.

### Common Themes

Consistent themes around digital equity KOBD heard in outreach efforts are that broadband access, affordability, knowledge, and support improve lives and communities. Participants shared stories about how equitable broadband access and adoption relieved isolation, provided a level playing field for employment searches, advanced education, attracted business, and opened telehealth opportunities. Demand for broadband is universal.

Even with the hurdles of connectivity issues, nearly 95% of WSU survey respondents reported working at least partially from home or relying on the internet for email, shopping, news and entertainment, healthcare appointments, or education.

The KU needs assessment identified barriers for members of covered populations. Individuals in low-income households tend to prioritize funds for other expenses beyond broadband, while those living in rural areas may not

live near broadband infrastructure. For some Veterans, affordability and lack of awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) are clear obstacles to access. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority frequently face issues related to affordability or language barriers, while people with disabilities may find the cost of special technology to be a barrier.

KOBD and KU surveyed Kansas digital equity leaders and advocates to identify partners providing services that support digital equity work. Library access, job training programs, digital literacy skills training, accessing government benefits, providing technology equipment, and workforce development training were the identified activities where partnerships are needed.

## Strategies and Objectives

This plan was built on key strategies and measurable objectives that will guide KOBD's efforts to close the digital equity gap in Kansas.

### Strategies

1. Leverage the work of existing partners to enhance the number of digital equity resources throughout the state
2. Create sustainable affordability options building on the success of current partners and programs
3. Establish KOBD's digital equity division as a repository of information and connections
4. Engage and educate partners and donors to cultivate long-term investment in digital equity
5. Empower Kansans with in-demand workforce skills so they can thrive wherever they live

### Objectives

- **Availability:** Improve availability of broadband across Kansas
- **Affordability:** Increase access to and adoption of affordable broadband service
- **Digital Literacy Skills:** Focus on the growth of digital literacy skills, education, and knowledge
- **Cybersecurity:** Increase awareness of and proficiency in dealing with online privacy and cybersecurity issues
- **Devices:** Expand access to affordable devices with accommodating technical support
- **Public Services:** Promote the online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services

## Aligning Efforts to Improve Outcomes

As mentioned earlier, the creation and nurturing of partnerships is a key contributor to the success of digital equity efforts. Beyond merely establishing these relationships, KOBD will work to ensure collaboration and alignment among those partner plans and activities. To maximize the impact of the state’s digital equity efforts, KOBD must coordinate local, regional, and Sovereign Tribal Nation activities. Collaborative effort to plan and invest in reliable broadband access, affordability, skills, and support can increase reach and efficiency while reducing duplication of effort and competition for scarce resources. KOBD understands that the alignment of these efforts to increase workforce development, health access, educational attainment, and more is vital to secure digital equity for Kansas. Sections 3 through 5 of this plan provide more detailed information about potential partners and strategies for alignment.

## The Digital Equity Plan – Development and Implementation

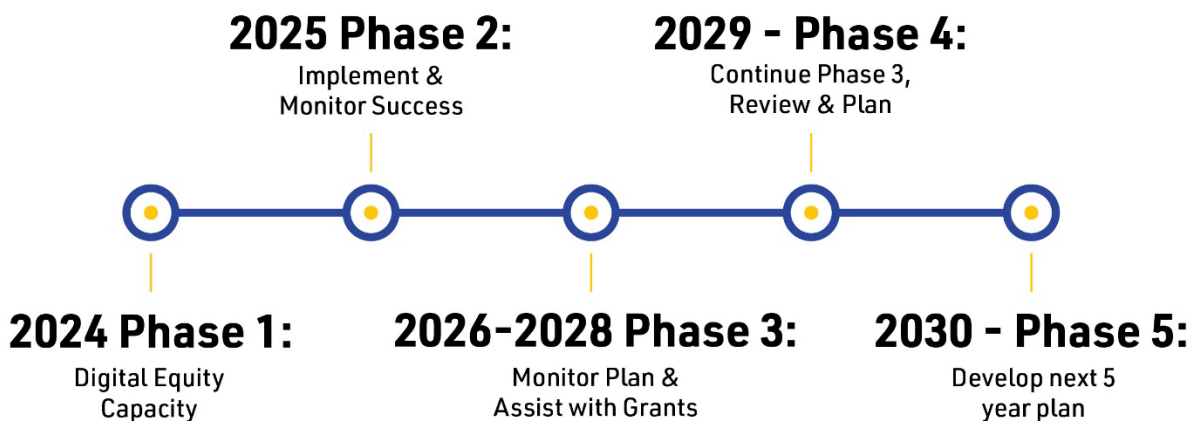
### Development of the Plan

The timing of Governor Kelly’s foresight in calling for action on broadband access in Kansas and in creating KOBD aligned perfectly with the unprecedented BEAD and DEA funding opportunities created by Congress. The foundational work conducted by KOBD—the Roadshow, needs assessment, asset inventory, and partner conversations—has laid the foundation for Kansas’ digital equity vision, a set of strategies and objectives, and this plan to close the digital divide. It is thanks to the involvement of committed partners, Advisory Council Members, and Kansans from across the state that the plan to achieve true digital equity for all now exists.

### Implementation

Kansas will continue implementation of this Digital Equity Plan. After the initial planning phase, the first implementation phase will commence in 2024 with continued work in broadband ready counties, convening of the Advisory Council, the building of the digital equity asset mapping tool, and applications for the next round of federal funding. The next three phases will involve the distribution of funds, implementation of plan activities, outreach to the philanthropic sector, and continued work on asset mapping. During the last phase, KOBD and its partners will begin planning to ensure sustainability of the initial Digital Equity Plan.

### 2023 – 2030 Digital Equity Plan Timeline



## Measuring Success

While each of the objectives above is important, KOBD recognizes Kansas stakeholders require greater specificity and clarity. Therefore, each of these objectives contains refined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to each covered population. These KPIs are derived from various sources for different populations where meaningful distinctions and specific data exist. Some measures apply across multiple populations as well. Those KPIs, along with baseline measurements, near-term targets, and long-term targets are in section 2.3.2 Objectives below.

In addition, KOBD recognizes that different regions of the state will feel objective's impact differently and have different priorities. The key to effectively measuring success is working with regional and local leaders and advocates to identify the specific impact on each area and each covered population within that area. KOBD will support this work with statewide data tools and resources including sophisticated GIS mapping platforms.

## Moving Forward

KOBD and its partners believe the success of this plan means greater success for Kansas and all its residents. Creating opportunities for access to the digital world for those who do not currently have it means creating opportunities for economic development, education, jobs, healthcare, and more. The Digital Equity Plan says to all Kansans that everyone has an equal right to access opportunity and thrive in our state.

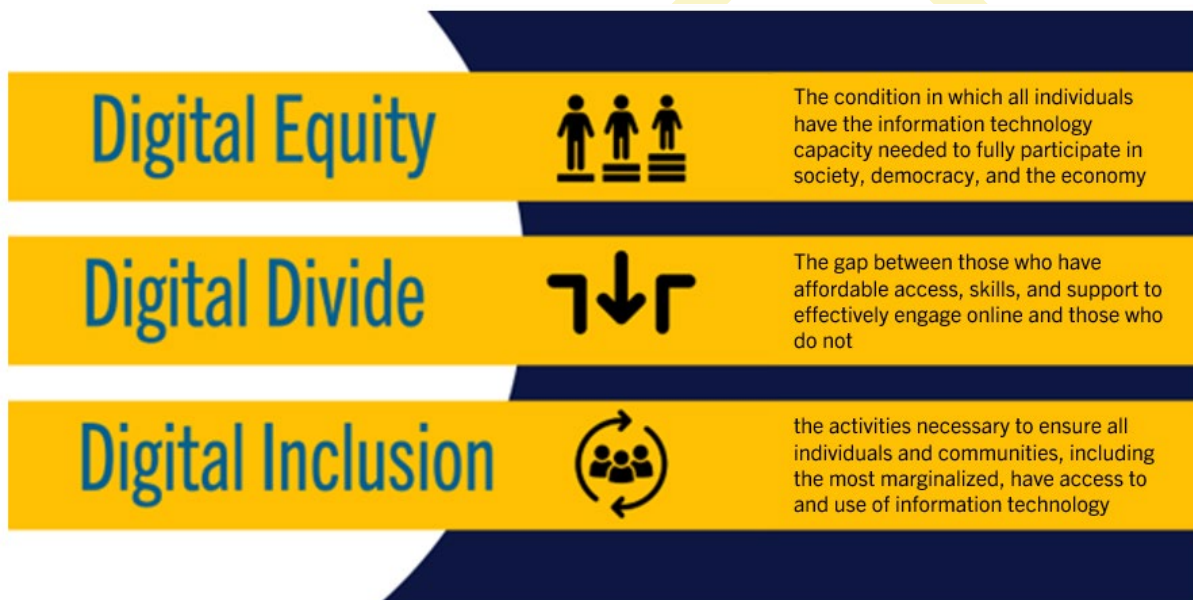




## 2. Introduction

We live in challenging times, but Kansans are born to meet challenges. Today, Kansas faces obstacles in health outcomes, education, employment, and civic engagement that impact different Kansans in unique ways. These obstacles have complicated roots and create many obstacles that can frustrate progress. However, technology and our digital reality can reshape intractable problems to make and create the solutions of tomorrow, today. For example, healthcare enabled by telemedicine can improve health outcomes in every corner of the state. Education augmented by online and around-the-clock resources can help build the skills and knowledge base of every Kansan. In fact, technology is the key to unlocking progress in most sectors.

However, the digital divide stands in the way of that progress. To close that divide, every Kansan requires the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Moreover, it is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. Digital inclusion is the work required to close the digital divide, beyond access and our state's infrastructure needs.



This digital equity plan, developed by Kansans for Kansas, outlines how our state intends to realize the goal of digital inclusion and close the digital divide. That achievement will make real impacts and improvements in employment, health, and beyond.

### 2.1 Vision

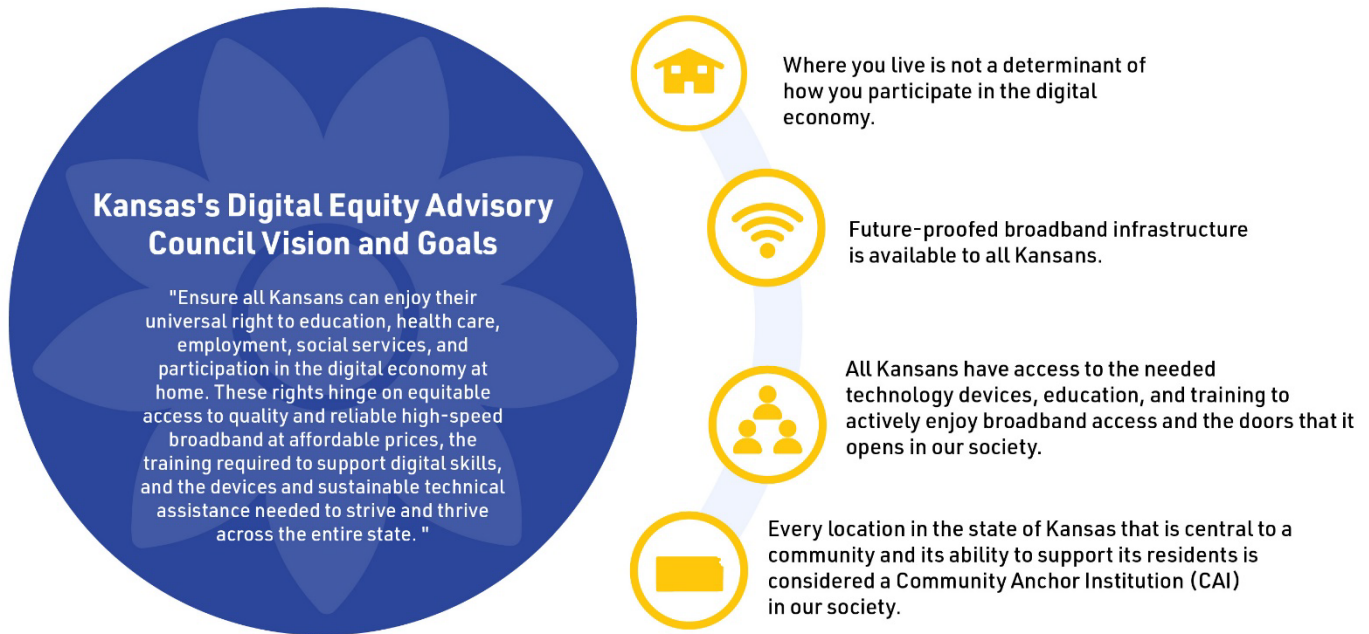
From its inception, KOBD partnered with leaders and community representatives to understand the lived experiences of Kansans, especially as they face barriers to accessing and adopting broadband services. During the height of the COVID pandemic, KOBD programs such as Broadband Partnership Adoption (BPAG) program supported digital inclusion efforts. KOBD also formed the Digital Equity Advisory Council (Advisory Council) to represent Kansans from all covered populations from around the state.



## 2. Introduction

The Advisory Council plays a critical role in the digital inclusion and equity space. The expertise found on the Advisory Council, along with the invaluable assistance of KU and WSU, provides KOBD with perspective, research, successful models, and data. Beyond the numbers, however, these partners act as the primary resource guiding this work and an effective conduit to the lived experience of Kansans in their own words.

KOBD, along with the Advisory Council, defined the vision for digital equity, and set four high-level goals to measure our progress. The vision and goals are as follows:



The vision laid out for digital equity will require the collaboration of the Advisory Council and various partners, thoughtful and effective planning, and responsiveness to change. Moreover, digital inclusion ensures all Kansans will have access to one of the most important tools for individual, economic, and community success: the internet.

### 2.2 Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes

Aligning existing efforts to overcome the challenges of digital equity helps produce the best possible outcomes. KOBD will utilize existing funding opportunities and partnerships to maximize available resources to address the digital divide. To close the digital gap requires coordination among the many perspectives of Kansas. Thus, the plan must be collaborative, iterative, and inclusive.

#### 2.2.1 Funding Partners and Recipients

KOBD's work of funding digital equity and broadband related efforts will continue through several funding streams. Programs to fund broadband deployment in unserved and underserved communities is essential to close the digital divide. Yet, funding critical digital inclusion programs, like distribution of devices, digital navigators, and outreach on affordability and adoption, is an appropriate concurrent step.

KOBD will collaborate with funding partners and recipients to support the state's digital equity efforts. Among the current and near-term sources of funding support are the following programs:

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**TABLE 1: FUNDING PARTNERS AND RECIPIENTS**

Source	Funding Source
<b>Capital Project Fund Digital Connectivity Technology (CPF-DCT)</b>	<b>Federal (U.S. Department of Treasury)</b>
<p>In February 2023, Kansas was the first state to receive DCT funds (\$15.5 million). The CPF-DCT program will support equal access to high-speed internet and provide devices to unserved and underserved Kansans. The program will be competitively allocated to eligible entities to bring free devices to income-qualifying households, free Wi-Fi to CAIs, and free Wi-Fi to low-income multi-dwelling units (MDU).</p>	
<b>Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure (EMMBI)</b>	<b>Federal (NTIA)</b>
<p>KOBD partnered with the Kansas Department of Transportation, the Kansas Research and Education Network (KanREN), and private providers, with input from the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Division of Emergency Management, to submit a middle mile application in September 2022.</p> <p>On June 16, 2023, KOBD and our partners were awarded \$42.5 million.</p> <p>The awarded project plan is designed to create a 682-mile open-access, middle mile fiber optic network to create connection to new internet exchange points throughout the state. Together with private and nonprofit partners, this open-access network will reduce the total cost of buildout to rural communities, which will enable and encourage last mile providers to connect to this network and serve Kansas residents, farms, businesses, CAIs, and communities surrounding this network. Benefits of providing connectivity between local internet networks and to rural communities include increasing the capabilities of CAIs, enabling connections to unserved and underserved households, and increasing competition within local markets by creating more affordable service options.</p> <p>The middle-mile network of 682 miles passes through 28 counties: Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Butler, Cherokee, Clark, Coffey, Crawford, Finney, Franklin, Greenwood, Haskell, Jackson, Johnson, Kingman, Labette, Linn, Lyon, Meade, Miami, Montgomery, Neosho, Osage, Pratt, Sedgwick, Seward, Wilson, and Wyandotte.</p>	
<b>Connectivity Emergency Response Grant (CERG) and Broadband Partnership Adoption Grant (BPAG)</b>	<b>Federal (Treasury)</b>
<p>In 2020, the Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansas (SPARK) committee allocated \$60 million in Coronavirus Relief Funding (CRF) to KOBD to increase connectivity in Kansas in response to needs precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic which forced many to stay at home.</p> <p>As a result, KOBD launched two pandemic response programs. The Connectivity Emergency Response Grant (CERG) program and the Broadband Partnership Adoption Grant (BPAG) program were created to drive immediate access and long-term impact.</p>	
<b>Broadband Acceleration Grant Program (BAG)</b>	<b>State (KDOT)</b>
<p>In 2020, KDOT, through its Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program (IKE), partnered with KOBD to fund BAG. The program will invest \$85 million over 10 years toward bridging the digital divide in Kansas. BAG will invest \$5 million per year in grant awards for years one through three, and \$10 million per year in grant awards for years four through ten. BAG prioritizes access to unserved and underserved areas through the construction of broadband infrastructure across Kansas. Total investment, including matching funds, over the first two years exceeds \$20 million and delivered broadband access to more than 5,700 locations. The third funding year process launched July 2023.</p>	

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Source	Funding Source
<b>Capital Project Fund (CPF) Program – ARPA</b>	<b>Federal (Treasury)</b>
<p>The CPF program provided funding to deploy broadband infrastructure that delivers 100/100 Mbps to unserved and critical areas of the state that lacked access. CPF is intended to address the following priorities: 1) broadband infrastructure deployment designed to directly enable work, education, and healthcare monitoring; 2) critical connectivity needs that resulted from or was made apparent or exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency; and 3) a critical need of the community to be served.</p>	
<b>Lasting Infrastructure and Network Connectivity Program (LINC)</b>	<b>State/Federal (Kansas Department of Commerce / ARPA)</b>
<p>Kansas allocated \$30 million in ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds (SFRF) to LINC for broadband infrastructure expansion. LINC is a multi-faceted effort to improve broadband infrastructure, middle mile connectivity, and Internet Exchange Point capabilities throughout Kansas.</p>	
<b>Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)</b>	<b>Federal (FCC)</b>
<p>ACP is a federal affordability program for broadband subscription. For eligible households, ACP provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Sovereign Tribal Nation lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 for the purchase of a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet.</p> <p>KOBD partners with Education Superhighway to promote ACP. Education Superhighway provided training and resources to community partners, local governments, and ISPs. As a result, 69 organizations and four representatives have signed up to provide training on how to enroll interested households. As of May 2023, Kansas has 105,575 ACP subscribers in Kansas.</p>	
<b>Affordable Connectivity Outreach Grant Program</b>	<b>Federal (FCC)</b>
<p>The ACP Outreach Grant Program provides funding and resources to promote ACP and increase enrollment. Activities to promote ACP include a robust marketing and advertising campaign, social media, traditional media, flyers, infographics, standing banners, mailers, a video, and community education events in partnership with the FCC.</p> <p>Three organizations/municipal entities will be participating in this program, offering ACP outreach services throughout Kansas: KC Digital Drive (KCDD), Wichita State University (WSU), and the City of Topeka. The Roadshow revealed that ACP awareness among covered populations is low, demonstrating the importance of this outreach.</p>	
<b>Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Grant</b>	<b>Federal (USDA)</b>
<p>BTA provides funds to receive or provide broadband technical assistance and training, while also supporting the development and expansion of broadband cooperatives. On June 20, 2023, Kansas submitted a BTA application to provide broadband technical assistance to six of the most rural and economically distressed counties in the state. If received, the counties covered are Linn, Kiowa, Gove, Wilson, Kearny, and Rawlins.</p>	
<b>Digital Equity for Connecting Kansans (DECK)</b>	<b>Federal (ARPA/CPF- SLFRF)</b>
<p>Kansas allocated \$5 Million to facilitate the development of digital literacy skills and adoption of broadband service in historically disconnected communities and programs with a goal to increase the rate of adoption in Kansas for the federal ACP. This program is currently under development with plans to launch in late 2023 or early 2024.</p>	

## 2. Introduction

Source	Funding Source
Universal Service Fund (USF) Program for Schools and Libraries (E-rate)	Federal (FCC)
The E-rate program helps over 1,500 schools and over 370 libraries to obtain affordable broadband service. The E-rate program in Kansas is managed by the Kansas Corporation Commission, which distributed \$30.6 million in FY 2022.	

In addition to existing funding programs that support and enhance KOBD’s digital equity efforts, KOBD recognizes the critical role the private and nonprofit sectors will play in achieving digital equity goals. Facilitating sustainable, productive partnerships with all types of organizations from schools, foundations, libraries, and public-private partners to labor unions, associations, and other non-traditional entities is a key function KOBD will perform.

### 2.2.2 Economic Development

In the state’s strategic economic development plan, the Kansas Framework for Growth (the Framework), states that projected growth relies on four key areas: talent, innovation, community assets, and policy.<sup>1</sup> The success of every Kansan, collaboration with community assets, and the respect for regionality align with the overall goals of KOBD’s broadband efforts.



The Framework’s priority initiatives and investments, particularly in the talent portion, dovetail nicely with our digital inclusion efforts. Many of the elements of the “Potential and Future Initiatives and Investments” section mirror key workforce development initiatives KOBD will support for members of the covered population. Additionally, KOBD partners with the Department of Commerce (KDC), the Kansas Board of Regents’ community colleges and other higher education institutions, K-12 institutions, broadband providers, and industry partners to build workforce development programs that meet the rapid need anticipated with the once-in-a-generation investment in broadband. KOBD will focus attention on ensuring members of the covered populations are aware of opportunities, including scholarships, employer match participation, stipends for childcare and transportation, and others.



**Broadband Promotes Growth**

*From three original founders to 125 employees, Surepoint Ag has grown very quickly in their 16-year span. Part of their growth is due to their early selection of fiber broadband services from a startup ISP.*

*With 90% of their employees working remotely, Surepoint Ag relies on broadband to support new VOIP phone systems, customer service tickets, and more.*

*Surepoint Ag’s CEO has now partnered with 14 other investors to support the growing population of their town by building quality workforce housing for new professionals moving to the area and building out fiber connectivity to support those residents.*



<sup>1</sup> Kansas Department of Commerce. (February 2021). Kansas Framework for Growth. pp. 22-28. [https://issuu.com/kdcmarketing/docs/framework\\_report-pageview?fr=sNjcyNDI5NDgzODM](https://issuu.com/kdcmarketing/docs/framework_report-pageview?fr=sNjcyNDI5NDgzODM)

## 2. Introduction

The Framework highlights the importance of community assets and critical organizations within our local communities. Often these organizations perform digital equity work in both rural communities and urban neighborhoods. KOBD supports local leaders and advocates who are actively addressing digital equity issues due to the importance of these organizations in the local ecosphere.

Given the expansive agricultural footprint across Kansas, its existence as a major economic driver for the state is obvious. Corn, wheat, and soybean wholesaling is the #2 economic impact category with \$17.6 billion in revenue. Meat, beef, and poultry is #7 with \$8.9 billion in revenue. Combined, they surpass the top industry of Kansas, aircraft engines and parts, which brought in \$23.1 billion in revenue.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is critical for KOBD to align digital equity efforts with the needs of the farming and ranching communities, a group represented by the Kansas Farm Bureau. In their “Resolutions for 2023,” the Farm Bureau states,

*[W]e support every home, business and agricultural operation in Kansas having access to a high-speed communication infrastructure at a reasonable cost. We support a vibrant high-speed broadband network that delivers telemedicine applications, distance learning applications for K-12, higher education and continuing education, emergency services, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship endeavors, and gives broadband champions, community anchor institutions, and libraries the ability to provide interactive content for rural citizens.*

KOBD understands how the economic stability and growth offered by our agricultural sector are critical to the Kansas economy.

For higher education, the Kansas Board of Regents developed the Kansas Science + Technology Plan (S&T plan). This plan includes all six state universities, 19 community colleges, six technical colleges, and Washburn University and aligns the entities’ other related strategic plans, including KDC’s Framework for Growth and the KBOR “Building a Future” plan.

The S&T plan clarified the need for economic investments, grant and research support, and the alignment between initiatives to achieve the following outcomes<sup>3</sup>:

1. Elevating the role of science and technology in improving the lives of Kansans and their communities
2. Stimulating discovery and innovation through education, partnerships, and infrastructure investments
3. Growing the economy by applying new technologies and expanding access to IT
4. Translating research results to address societal challenges

The S&T plan acknowledged the need for rural connectivity and digital upskilling to effectively build the research and development capacity of the state. Moreover, it highlighted how basic education of broadband users leads into the capacity growth needed for the cybersecurity sector.

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<sup>2</sup> IBISWorld. “Kansas State Economic Profile”- Industry Market Research Report-. [www.ibisworld.com/united-states/economic-profiles/kansas/](http://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/economic-profiles/kansas/) (accessed July 31, 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Kansas Board of Regents. (August 1, 2021). *Kansas Science + Technology Plan*. pp. 7-8. [www.kansasregents.org/resources/PDF/Kansas\\_Science\\_Technology\\_Plan\\_2021\\_Effective.pdf](http://www.kansasregents.org/resources/PDF/Kansas_Science_Technology_Plan_2021_Effective.pdf). (15,085 MB).

### 2.2.3 Educational Outcomes

K-12, higher education, and workforce development programs deliver classes and coursework to students online. At a time when elementary and high school students participate in virtual schools and programs under the oversight of the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), efforts to improve the level of digital literacy and competency in all populations is critical. In many cases, K-12 institutions are the first resource addressing affordability for covered population members. As schools continue to expand hybrid and complete virtual learning through K12-Powered Learning, offering these personalized educational approaches require reliable, affordable broadband access and devices.<sup>4</sup> With KSDE's presence on the Digital Equity Advisory Board, KOBD will align its efforts with this important statewide resource.



Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) oversees the state universities, community colleges, and technical colleges. These higher education institutions play a key role in KOBD's work, from WSU's digital equity survey and Roadshow efforts to Kansas State University's (KSU) research and extension offerings in all 105 Kansas counties. In 2020, KBOR developed clear targets for individual and community success in their strategic plan named "Building a Future." This plan highlights the economic prosperity of individuals by preparing students for career pathways that lead to a livable wage. It also calls out the deepening of partnerships with local and state leaders to understand the high-demand job opportunities to fulfill the needs of the business sector.<sup>5</sup> As KOBD focuses on the growth of digital literacy skills, education partners like KBOR who are already invested in this work will play a significant role. KOBD will concentrate on these opportunities for members of the covered populations, especially for those careers that are adjacent to the needs of the rapidly expanding broadband field.

The Kansas Library Association (KLA) is a large provider of digital inclusion activities across the state. Libraries offer public access to computers, the internet, Wi-Fi, and printing. Furthermore, libraries offer digital training and workshops, as well as other online services and resources to community members, generally free of charge.

In their strategic plan, KLA's top goal is to continue to address diversity, equity, and inclusion needs through local libraries and provide more services for community members with special needs. KOBD will coordinate efforts with KLA as they address this goal. As an immensely important anchor institution for so many communities, libraries are central to KOBD's coordination and alignment efforts.

Another goal from the KLA's strategic plan is bring continued technological enhancements to communities. Libraries are often the primary technology gateway for community members, which makes KOBD's relationship and alignment with KLA and its member libraries a key part of KOBD's strategy to leverage the work of existing partners to work efficiently and effectively.

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<sup>4</sup> K12. *K12-Powered Online Schools in Kansas*. K12: Online Public School Programs. [www.k12.com/kansas-online-schools.html?st=ks&grades=ALL](http://www.k12.com/kansas-online-schools.html?st=ks&grades=ALL).

<sup>5</sup> Kansas Board of Regents. (June 2020). *Building a Future Strategic Plan for Kansas*. [www.kansasregents.org/resources/Building\\_a\\_Future/Building\\_a\\_Future.pdf](http://www.kansasregents.org/resources/Building_a_Future/Building_a_Future.pdf). (10,553 MB).

## 2. Introduction

The work of nonprofit organizations and informal education institutions, such as museums and after-school programs, provide an added opportunity to reach members of covered populations with information about digital equity resources and support. For example, the Kansas Health Foundation is in year two of a three-year plan where \$1.1 million was awarded to support multi-sector community collaboratives that develop and advocate for policies, programs, and services. This plan promotes greater digital access, adoption, literacy, and inclusion among families of color, low-wage workers, and others experiencing systemic barriers. Awardees and their missions are as follows:

- The City of Topeka Digital Equity Inclusion Partnership Program for its plan to create part-time technical and digital navigator positions to collect and share community-based resources and supply digital literacy skills training, equipment, and basic technical support for minority and low-to-moderate income communities.
- Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group, for an effort to launch a hotspot library and digital equity taskforce, supported by a coordinator, to create a channel for grassroots advocacy and co-learning around digital inclusion.
- KC Digital Drive, for a collaborative network of community-based organizations and other stakeholders to develop projects, programs, and advocacy efforts in partnership with Kansans from low-income households, distressed neighborhoods, disproportionately underserved racial and ethnic minority groups.
- KU Center for Research for collaborative, evidence-based technology education to women transitioning from justice involvement in support of their reintegration into society.

Another powerful example of a rich ecosystem encouraging education and collaboration is the KC STEM Alliance. Their vision is to create a vibrant ‘STEM-literate’ community that understands and uses science, technology, engineering, and math in meaningful ways to improve lives. STEM learning ecosystems shift the focus to the learner and where learning happens, like museums, libraries, afterschool programs, and at home.

### 2.2.4 Health Outcomes

Access to broadband resources is a cornerstone of health equity, better known as a social determinant of health (SDOH). SDOHs refer to the conditions and factors in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that significantly influence their overall health and well-being.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s (KDHE) 2021-2023 strategic plan identifies three priority areas impacted by broadband access.<sup>6</sup>

1. Improve the health status of Kansans through innovative public health practice
2. Optimize Medicaid
3. Achieve organizational excellence

These goals align well with KOBBD’s identified objectives to improve affordable access to devices and expansion of digital literacy skills training, which is crucial to the state’s ongoing digital equity work.

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<sup>6</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment Strategic Plan. (2021- 2023). [www.kdhe.ks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/347/KDHE-Strategic-Plan-2021-to-2023-PDF](http://www.kdhe.ks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/347/KDHE-Strategic-Plan-2021-to-2023-PDF) (6,567 MB)



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KDHE also mentions their need for alignment with other state agencies, including the Department of Children and Families and Kansas Department of Aging and Disabilities.<sup>8</sup> Efforts to align communication among state agencies reinforces KOBD’s strategy to work across multiple agencies to effectively serve our covered populations. With KDHE, DCF, and other state agencies participating in the Advisory Council and other ongoing efforts, KOBD is tightly aligned with their work.

*“Internet access is increasingly recognized as a “super determinant” of health. It plays a role in health care outcomes and influences more traditionally recognized social determinants of health, such as education, employment, and healthcare access.”<sup>7</sup>*

*Yosselin Turcios, M.P.H.,  
Office of Behavioral Health Equity Fellow*

In the Governor’s Commission on Racial Equity & Justice’s Social Determinants of Health-First Report (2021)<sup>9</sup>, recommendations to improve SDOHs specifically recommended legislative, policy, and state agency changes in early childhood and childcare, federal funding maximization, post-secondary education, maternal and child health, universal equity policies, housing and the unhoused, workforce, access to healthcare, and behavioral health—all of which are influenced by access to and adoption of broadband as a resource.

In Kansas, multiple funders lead investments to support health equity, including the Health Forward Foundation, REACH Healthcare Foundation, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, Prime Health Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation (KHF), and others. Likewise, local and regional providers of telehealth services help level the playing field for rural populations, and KOBD will continue to recognize and support their efforts. For example, the Community Care Network of Kansas focuses on achieving equitable access to high-quality healthcare for all Kansans. Similarly, the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund supports research and advocacy for telehealth within Kansas.

Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) serves the public by prioritizing the health and wellness of older Kansans and those with different ability levels. The Kansas State Plan on Aging says the mission of KDADS has “evolved to protect Kansans, promote recovery, and support self-sufficiency.”<sup>10</sup> Digital Equity efforts align with this plan closely, fitting perfectly with four out of the five stated goals:

1. Coordinate efforts to support older Kansas
2. Inform aging Kansans of systems and supports that encourage self-sufficiency, with emphasis on those with the greatest economic or social need
3. Engage with the aging network and community partners to advance Older Americans Act programs
4. Ensure maximum service utilization for home and community-based services, as well as Medicare

KDADS is an important partner in coordinating state agency efforts and leveraging these existing programs for the good of their constituents. They will be partners in achieving multiple objectives in digital equity work, including

<sup>7</sup> U.S Department of Health and Human Services. (March 22, 2023) “Digital Access - A Super Determinant of Health”. [www.samhsa.gov/blog/digital-access-super-determinant-health#1](https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/digital-access-super-determinant-health#1). (Accessed July 29, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment Strategic Plan. (2021- 2023). [www.kdhe.ks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/347/KDHE-Strategic-Plan-2021-to-2023-PDF](https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/347/KDHE-Strategic-Plan-2021-to-2023-PDF) (6,567 MB)

<sup>9</sup> Governor’s Commission on Racial Equity and Justice. (2021). *Social Determinants of Health –First Report*. <https://governor.kansas.gov/governors-commission-on-racial-equity-and-justice/>

<sup>10</sup> Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services. (2022 – 2025). *State Plan on Aging*. [https://kdads.ks.gov/docs/librariesprovider17/commissions/oa/state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025/kansas-state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=d2e84690\\_0](https://kdads.ks.gov/docs/librariesprovider17/commissions/oa/state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025/kansas-state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=d2e84690_0) (3,970 MB)

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increasing access to affordable broadband services, the growth of digital education and knowledge, and expanded access to devices with the importance of technical support.

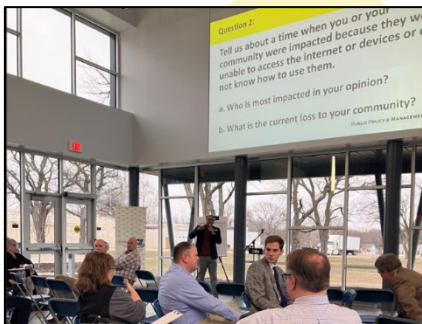
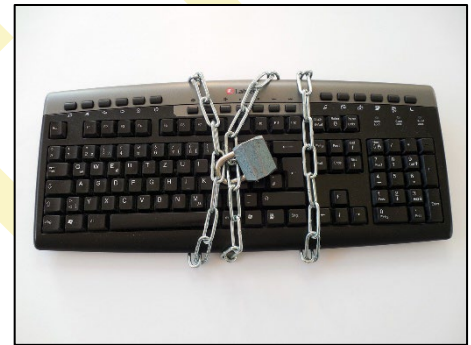
### 2.2.5 Delivery of Other Essential Services

Poor broadband access often hampers emergency services for rural residents disproportionately and for members of additional covered populations who lack access to basic resources. The Adjutant General's five-year departmental plan calls for better coordination and synchronization of emergency services. The plan's goals focus on community readiness, supported by KOBD's broadband and digital equity efforts.

As an example, Adjutant General's Goal 3.4 to "[d]evelop and maintain Incident Management Support Capabilities" mandates better coordination of mutual-aid services. Thus, critical CAIs that conduct digital equity work and expand broadband directly enhance the capability of incident management teams across the state. KOBD's efforts support Goal 3.5 as well, which focuses on "achieving timely two-way information flow and processing" and seeks identification of community resources and a stronger network of organizations to ensure prompt responses and resources that keep more individuals safe across our state.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.2.6 Cybersecurity

The Kansas Office of Information Technology Services (OITS) is currently writing its own Cybersecurity Plan related to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The State of Kansas is committed to the online security and privacy of an individual and their information. OITS will continue to enhance their cybersecurity posture as well as partner with local communities to bolster their cybersecurity and privacy protections. OITS is working with the university system to bring digital life skills curriculum to our various school districts to raise awareness for the next generation. OITS is also building partnerships with the various internet service providers to create common privacy objectives to ensure safe and secure access to critical and personal information.



### 2.2.7 Civic and Social Engagement

Important applications and processes are turning toward online portals. The Advisory Council stressed that many state and local government resources have moved online with fewer printed options. This is a barrier to those without reliable broadband access or devices who need to access important resources like applying for unemployment, paying taxes, receiving monthly benefits, registering to vote, requesting an absentee ballot, receiving important weather emergency updates, or communicating with local municipalities about local initiatives.

### 2.2.8 Municipal, Regional, and Sovereign Tribal Nations Digital Equity Plans

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to digital equity work. While every region and community share the common goal of digital equity and inclusion, local approaches will vary depending on local, cultural, and environmental factors. As Kansas communities begin to tackle their broadband accessibility, affordability, and adoption issues,

<sup>11</sup> Kansas Adjutant Generals Department TAG Strategic Plan. (2019-2024). [www.kansastag.gov/405/TAG-Strategic-Plan-2019-2024](http://www.kansastag.gov/405/TAG-Strategic-Plan-2019-2024)

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many have already begun digital equity planning, including:

- Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) created a “Kansas City Regional Digital Equity Plan” for the Kansas City metropolitan area.<sup>12</sup> MARC completed the plan in May of 2023
- The City of Topeka began the two-year process of creating a digital equity plan, with completion expected by 2024.
- Wyandotte and Johnson Counties are working to develop Digital Equity plans as well. The work is in process and represents some of the first digital equity planning efforts in Kansas.

KOBD will continue its strategy of direct engagement with local communities, consultations with Sovereign Tribal Nations, and serving as a hub for digital equity planning and implementation. Through these partnerships, KOBD will collaborate with local planning teams to identify and support programs unique to those areas, while also sharing best practices from across the state.

**TABLE 2: ALIGNMENT OF STATE AGENCY PLANS WITH OBJECTIVES**

Agency	Plan	Related Components	Aligned KOBD Objectives
Kansas Department of Commerce	Kansas Framework for Growth (2021)	Workforce skills; affordability options building on the success of current partners & programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Affordability</li> <li>• Public Services</li> </ul>
Kansas Department of Corrections	Kansas Department of Corrections Pathways to Success Action Plan 2022-2023	Workforce skills; Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> <li>• Devices</li> </ul>
Kansas Board of Regents	Building a Future Strategic Plan (2020)	Community building; workforce skills; high-demand job opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> </ul>
	Kansas Science + Technology Plan (S&T) (2021)	Digital literacy skills; data access to enable research; rural broadband and business development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> <li>• Public Resources</li> </ul>
Kansas Office of Information Technology	Cybersecurity Plan in IJA	Digital literacy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cybersecurity</li> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> </ul>
Kansas Department of Health and Environment	KDHE 2021-2023 strategic plan	Devices; digital literacy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> <li>• Public Services</li> </ul>
	State Plan on Aging 2022-2025		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> Mid-America Regional Council (MARC). (May 2023). *Kansas City Regional Digital Equity Action Plan*. <https://www.marc.org/document/kansas-city-regional-digital-equity-plan>. (8,860 MB).

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Agency	Plan	Related Components	Aligned KOBD Objectives
Kansas Department of Aging and Disabilities Services <sup>13</sup>		Devices; digital literacy skills; connecting older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> <li>• Public Services</li> <li>• Devices</li> </ul>
Kansas Adjutant General's Department <sup>14</sup>	Strategic Plan 2019-2024	Community building; readiness and emergency services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Digital Literacy Skills</li> </ul>

### 2.3 Strategy and Objectives

KOBD recognizes intentional planning, collaboration, and evaluation are keys to achieving digital equity throughout Kansas. While informed by the vision, KOBD must ground its work in clearly defined achievement and in strategic action that yields the greatest impact for Kansas.

This plan addresses that reality by identifying key strategies designed to support the long-term development and impact of digital equity. These strategies drive tactical work toward measurable objectives. Measuring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will provide transparency and data-driven decision-making to ensure the plan adjusts appropriately to reality while remaining aligned to the vision.

Each strategy in this plan comprises multiple activities. Those tactical activities are presented in detail in section 5.1 of this document, along with a high-level implementation timeline in section 5.2.



<sup>13</sup> Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services. (2022 – 2025). *State Plan on Aging*.

[https://kdads.ks.gov/docs/librariesprovider17/commissions/oa/state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025/kansas-state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=d2e84690\\_0](https://kdads.ks.gov/docs/librariesprovider17/commissions/oa/state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025/kansas-state-plan-on-aging-2022-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=d2e84690_0) (3,970 MB)

<sup>14</sup> Kansas Adjutant Generals Department TAG Strategic Plan. (2019-2024). [www.kansastag.gov/405/TAG-Strategic-Plan-2019-2024](http://www.kansastag.gov/405/TAG-Strategic-Plan-2019-2024)

### 2.3.1 Strategies

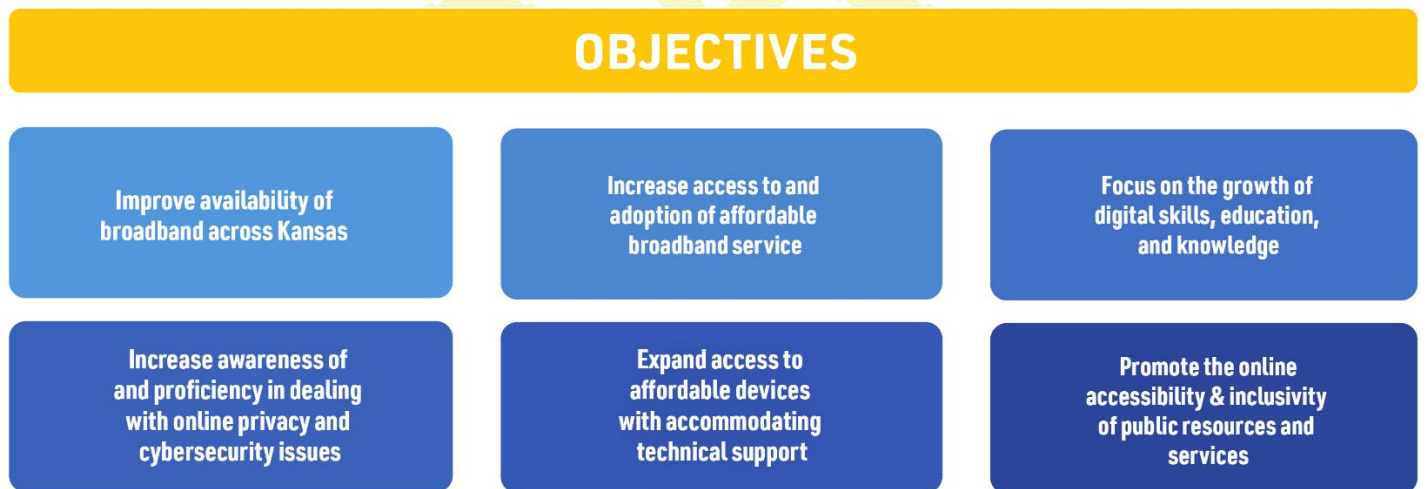
Deliberate strategies will focus our resources to achieve our goals. Thus, the five key strategies for KOBD are:



Expanded strategies are in Section 5 of this plan.

### 2.3.2 Objectives

To address Kansas' digital equity concerns, KOBD set out key objectives for the Digital Equity Plan, which are:



#### 1. Availability: Improve availability of broadband across Kansas.

More than 70,000 Kansas households lack broadband access and over 50,000 additional households' existing service options render them "underserved." In addition, many of Kansas' 8,500 CAIs lack gigabit-level broadband service that would better allow them to provide full levels of support to their communities. The Kansans impacted by these service gaps are disproportionately members of covered populations. While the primary purpose of BEAD funds is to expand broadband access, KOBD's Digital Equity team must ensure the needs of covered populations are an integral part of BEAD planning, implementation, and follow-up. This approach will ensure all Kansans have

broadband service and the accompanying tools, knowledge, service, and support to fully participate in today's increasingly technology-drive society.

KOBD will use the percentage of members within each covered population who have adopted broadband service as a key measure for this objective.

### **2. Affordability: Increase access to and adoption of affordable broadband service**

While ACP is a key factor in subsidizing the bills of eligible Kansans, the FCC has not guaranteed the program's long-term funding. Kansas supports sustainable affordability options, which may be established by working with providers to encourage more options, continuing device and discount programs, supporting innovation, and identifying additional funding sources to incentivize affordability programs or supplement subsidy programs. KOBD will also foster partnerships and relationships to increase enrollment in ACP and other affordability programs by making them available, accessible, and inclusive to covered populations to maximize their effectiveness.

KOBD will measure success for this objective by enrollment in ACP or a subsequent affordability program by members of the covered populations.

### **3. Digital Literacy Skills: Focus on the growth of digital literacy skills, education, and knowledge.**

Full participation in healthcare, education, civic engagement, and public services requires basic digital literacy skills. In addition, many employers require more advanced skills for job applications, remote working, and in-office roles. On-ramps into high-demand technology-driven jobs, including jobs supporting the expansion of broadband services, also require these skills. A highly skilled population is a factor for new employers who may bring new jobs and opportunities to Kansas.

KOBD will track digital literacy skills growth by continuing to collect data on the availability of basic digital literacy skills training (including cybersecurity essentials) available to covered population members.

### **4. Cybersecurity: Increase awareness of and proficiency in dealing with online privacy and cybersecurity issues.**

Basic digital literacy skills must include essential cybersecurity topics like password management, fraud awareness, data privacy, and misleading advertising to fully prepare Kansans for online participation. Cybersecurity is a major barrier to adoption with stakeholder groups, particularly among the aging, the justice-involved, and those with language barriers. Cybersecurity issues also threaten the hard work and proprietary data of Kansas businesses, the state's physical infrastructure, and the privacy and finances of individual Kansans. Necessary conditions for protecting our data include an increase in cybersecurity awareness among all populations, training programs across the state for vulnerable residents and covered populations, and a cybersecurity strategy coordinated with the Department of Commerce, OITS, and Kansas Information Security Office (KISO).

KOBD will utilize the same measure for cybersecurity as that proposed for "increase digital literacy skills, education, and knowledge" as it includes cybersecurity essentials as a critical component of basic digital literacy skills.

### 5. Devices: Expand access to affordable devices with accommodating technical support.

Broadband-enabled devices are in far greater supply than they were a decade ago, yet a gap persists among covered population members who may not have access to a computer, tablet, or a smartphone. Some CAIs offer publicly available devices, but proximity, transportation, and operating hours can limit their effectiveness. While Kansas features many innovative device distribution programs, these are unevenly distributed across geographies and populations, with fewer options in rural areas and heavier demand in urban areas. Awareness also remains low. A coordinated network of device distribution organizations is a major step to equitably dispersed broadband-enabled devices throughout the state.

The percentage of covered population members with access to broadband-enabled devices is the best measure for this objective. KOBD will note the availability of support for devices as the data and integrated systems are developed to support such tracking.

### 6. Public Services: Promote the online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services

Improving and expanding Kansans' digital literacy skills through training and education programs is a key step, but the onus for skill development cannot rest solely on learners and educators. Agencies and organizations must meet our residents where they are when offering these digital upskilling services. Awareness campaigns, increased translation options, increased data portability, consideration for assistive technology, and accommodating technical support are tools to build digital literacy skills from the organization out.

KOBD will measure the availability of digital navigator services to members of covered populations for this objective.

#### Key Measures Considerations

The key to effectively measuring success is working with regional and local leaders to identify the specific impact of each objective and KPI on each area as well as each covered population. KOBD will support this work with statewide data tools and resources including GIS mapping platforms.

While each of the six objectives is important, KOBD recognizes Kansas stakeholders require greater specificity and clarity. Therefore, each of these objectives contains refined KPIs related to each covered population. These KPIs are derived from various sources for different populations where meaningful distinctions and specific data exist. Some measures apply across multiple populations as well.

Note that while some KPIs in this plan are aspirational, none have a long-term (2030) target of 100%, per the direction of NTIA staff. KOBD generally calculated long-term targets instead as 80% of the gap between the current baseline and 100%. This is not to say that 100% is not achievable, but that conservative estimates may be preferable during initial planning. KPIs and measures can and should be modified as needed when circumstances change, new data becomes available, or new guidance is provided.

Another important note is that this plan addresses barriers and needs for justice-involved individuals using the NTIA's definition of the incarcerated covered population, "Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility." KOBD recognizes that the justice-involved population extends well beyond individuals housed in correctional facilities. As the Digital Equity Plan evolves, KOBD will explore expanding the definition of the covered population to include all justice-involved individuals.

Additional considerations for each of the plan objectives follow.

### **Availability**

Improved infrastructure throughout Kansas will no doubt reduce the number of unserved and underserved households. This is a critical measure for KOBD's BEAD planning. For the purposes of this plan, KOBD extends the success measure to the actual adoption of broadband. Access to high-speed services is a starting point, but statewide efforts to promote the benefits of broadband, strengthen device and support programs, build digital navigator capacity, and support affordability efforts are keys to the actual use of broadband and subsequent deliver of benefits to Kansans.

For most covered populations, KOBD will measure adoption of broadband as indicated by the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). In the case of justice-involved individuals—a population not identified by the ACS—KOBD will evaluate the availability of Gigabit-level service for each state facility housing this population. However, current reports indicate there are no facilities with this level of service. For rural Kansans, KOBD will measure adoption by BSLs, as rurality is not specified in the ACS.

### **Affordability**

The most readily available data for tracking affordability is enrollment in ACP. This data is not available by covered population, so KOBD will use total population enrollment figures as a proxy for each covered population. The exception is for justice-involved individuals, for whom affordability is not relevant or measured while they are housed in a state facility.

The general measure also anticipates that ACP may not receive funding on a long-term basis, so KOBD is conducting outreach to explore existing or subsequent state or federal affordability programs.

### **Digital Literacy Skills**

Digital literacy skills training is a continuous need even for digital veterans. It should be available ubiquitously to ensure no Kansan is left behind simply because they do not have access to learn, sustain, or improve the digital literacy skills necessary to remain current. While digital literacy skills training is widely available online, this assumes individuals have the connectivity and the base level skills required to access and benefit from it. It is KOBD's position this training should be available in person to those who learn best in that manner, so training should be available within a reasonable commute or at least at the nearest CAI for extremely rural residents.

For these reasons, the proposed KPI for covered populations is a geographic measure of how far in-person digital literacy skills training programs are from every resident. As justice-involved individuals are generally unable to commute, the measure for this population is constrained to digital literacy skills training availability within those state facilities, reported by DOC to be 100% available.

As KOBD adds mapping data and layers, including a comprehensive statewide inventory of digital equity assets, the baseline for this measure will be available, as will the ability to track this measure over time.

### **Cybersecurity**

KOBD's position is that basic cybersecurity awareness is a required component of digital literacy skills. This includes personal digital security, identity protection, fraud awareness, and related topics. For this reason, the KPIs for this category mirror those of the digital literacy skills category.



## 2. Introduction

### Devices

The KPIs for this category are specific, relying on ACS data related to ownership of laptop or desktop computers as the measure for most populations. KOBD does not include tablets or smartphones in this measure because these mobile devices do not provide users with the full digital experience allowed by personal computing devices. It is significantly more challenging to, for example, develop a resumé in office software, interact with a fully featured website, or receive the full benefit from assistive web technology on a mobile device. Therefore, the measure KOBD has identified aspires to a future where these more robust broadband-ready devices are the expected norm for full participation in the digital world from the comfort of one's home.

An exception here is the justice-involved population, for whom device ownership is irrelevant while housed in a state or federal facility and for whom devices and support are offered at a 100% rate, according to the DOC.

### Public Services

KOBD's research indicates that Kansas currently has no statewide initiative to ensure public services are available online or that they are supported by translation, technical support, and subject matter support for individuals who require it. The exception here is the OITS directive and federal statutes that require all state web properties be accessible to individuals with disabilities. KOBD will work with state agencies to develop a comprehensive inventory of Kansas public services and their online presence and support characteristics. The selected KPI, however, seeks to measure the availability of support for users of these services.

As is the case with broadband generally, access is a starting point, but adoption and support are required for full effectiveness.

As with digital literacy skills and cybersecurity KPIs, baseline and continuing measures for this category will be in place as additional data, mapping layers, and asset inventories are developed.



## 2. Introduction

### Measurable Objectives

#### Key Performance Indicators by Population

**TABLE 3: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, PERSONS IN LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the American Community Survey (ACS)	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	64.1%	25.3% (total average)		TBD	69.0%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	71.3%	40.2%		TBD	75.2%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.8%	85.1%		80.0%	93.8%	65.0%

**TABLE 4: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, AGING INDIVIDUALS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	64.6%	25.3% (total average)		TBD	73.1%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	71.7%	40.2%		TBD	78.5%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.9%	85.1%		80.0%	94.7%	65.0%

## 2. Introduction

### Measurable Objectives

**TABLE 5: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of facilities with Gigabit-level broadband service	N/A	Percentage of facilities with formal basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available for residents		N/A	N/A
<b>Baseline</b>	0%		TBD			
<b>2026 Target</b>	50%		TBD			
<b>2030 Target</b>	87.5%		80.0%			

**TABLE 6: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, VETERANS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	70.5%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		80.0%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	76.4%	40.2%	TBD		84.0%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	94.1%	85.1%	80.0%		96.0%	65.0%

## 2. Introduction

### Measurable Objectives

**TABLE 7: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	59.8%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		67.2%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	67.8%	40.2%	TBD		73.8%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.0%	85.1%	80.0%		93.4%	65.0%

**TABLE 8: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, INDIVIDUALS WITH A LANGUAGE BARRIER**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of people with a broadband connection who speak English "not well" or "not at all" on the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	61.7%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		53.0%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	69.4%	40.2%	TBD		62.4%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.3%	85.1%	80.0%		90.6%	65.0%

## 2. Introduction

### Measurable Objectives

**TABLE 9: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, MEMBERS OF A RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITY**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	72.7%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		77.6%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	78.2%	40.2%	TBD		82.1%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	94.5%	85.1%	80.0%		95.5%	80.0%

**TABLE 10: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, RURAL INHABITANTS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of broadband serviceable locations (residential) with broadband service in areas defined as rural by NTIA	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer)	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	TBD	25.3% (total average)	TBD		TBD	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	TBD	40.2%	TBD		TBD	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	90.0%	85.1%	80.0%		80.0%	80.0%

Notes: These measures reflect available data and are not intended to prescribe specific actions. Initial measures will be refined as additional tools and data become available. KOBD is taking steps to develop measures for those items in a TBD or NA status.

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1 Asset Inventory

To close the digital equity gap requires asset-rich partnerships that will provide resources to help bridge the digital divide. This asset inventory provides information on the partners that support digital equity efforts throughout Kansas.

#### 3.1.1 Statewide Digital Equity Assets

KOBD utilized a variety of avenues of information to accomplish this asset inventory. KOBD partnered with KU to survey Kansas digital equity leaders, based on the National Digital Inclusion Alliance's (NDIA) asset map template (see Appendix 2—Digital Equity Asset Inventory). The Advisory Council was an invaluable resource in that each member introduced more digital inclusion connections as our efforts progressed around the state. KOBD held dozens of conversations with state agencies to understand the state's network of existing digital equity programs. The local leaders and advocates who attended the Roadshow provided significant additional information. These efforts and various other informal discussions highlighted the following statewide digital equity assets for Kansas:

##### **Kansas Department of Commerce**

In addition to the leadership and support provided to KOBD, the eight Economic Development Districts (EDD) and their staff are important partners in local and regional broadband outreach and planning. Raising the awareness about BEAD related activities while educating local leadership on the importance of engaging their digital equity partners will be critical. As the digital equity asset mapping progresses, the EDDs can help identify partners who might be providing digital inclusion support but not necessarily as a core objective.

##### **Kansas Library Association and the local library system**

More than 350 libraries across the state, along with the support of the KLA, emerge as a critical resource. Continually responding to the needs of their communities, libraries are important CAIs with a long tradition of making computer access available to those without connectivity at their home, training those who need to build digital literacy skills, and providing technical and content support to those learning to navigate these resources.

##### **Kansas Board of Regents**

The KBOR administers “Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas” in 17 community and technical colleges as part of their WIOA commitment to the Department of Commerce. This program offers access to job training for individuals who qualify for WIOA benefits.<sup>15</sup> As part of their training and assessment of individuals in this program, Northstar, a digital literacy skills software that assesses individuals and their digital skill levels, is a tool worth exploring and expanding throughout the state.

##### **Kansas State Department of Education and the local school districts**

KSDE responds to the education needs of our K-12 student population. For many families, KSDE and their school-based educational partners are a primary resource in answering any device or affordability question. During the COVID pandemic, assessing and addressing students' broadband access became a critical focus of KSDE. Because the standard student curriculum includes literacy and skills development, schools are the central

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<sup>15</sup> Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—Is the responsibility of the Kansas Board of Regents, which maintain 50 locations for Adult Education.

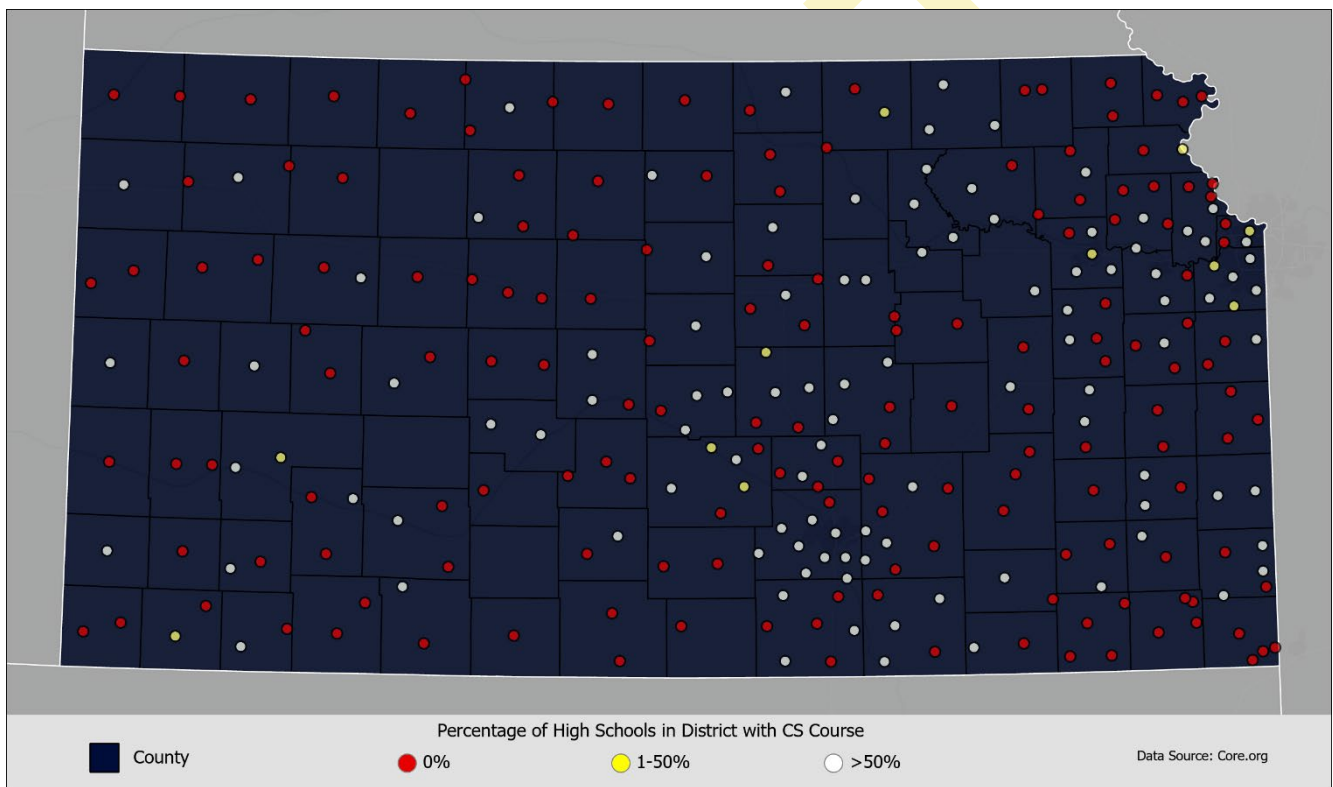
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

resource for career readiness. For instance, the state adopted Career Standards and Assessment Services (CSAS) ensures students have access to career pathways that lead to meaningful employment with technology-centric jobs. Students may also participate in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) that allows learning beyond a classroom by giving students the opportunity to expand their knowledge, skills, and overall development, specifically for students enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses.

Moreover, the Kansas state legislature established a curriculum requirement mandating that all high schools offer at least one computer science course, starting in the 2023-2024 school year. The map below from KOBID's geospatial mapping system details the rates of high schools in each district offering a foundational computer science class.

**SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPUTER SCIENCE COURSES BY COUNTY**



### Kansas Health Funders and Kansas Association of Community Foundations

Kansas Health Foundation, Community Care Network of Kansas, Sunflower Foundation, Thrive Kansas, the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, and Prime Health Foundation are some of the philanthropic partners who work to improve health outcomes, expand telehealth, and reduce inequity for individuals and organizations across the state.

Community foundations, supported by the Kansas Association of Community Foundations, works to address the growing need for digital equity in Kansas.

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Kansas Farm Bureau

Acting as the voice of agriculture in the state, the Kansas Farm Bureau is an important ally to advocate for better broadband service in our rural communities. The Farm Bureau encouraged members to attend the Roadshow, created a broadband survey, and has been a constant and tireless resource on digital equity issues. KOBD will continue to work with the Farm Bureau as our efforts continue and develop.

### Kansas Department of Children and Families

Kansas Department of Children and Families (DCF) is a primary resource for families seeking supportive services. DCF helps families access Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs.<sup>16</sup> Enrollment in these programs qualifies residents for ACP, other affordability programs, and digital literacy skills trainings. Thus, continuous engagement with these organizations will be crucial to the state's digital equity efforts, particularly with awareness and enrollment campaigns.

### Collective Efforts by Dedicated State Departments

State departments and agencies serve the covered populations of Kansas. DCF, the Department of Aging and Disability Services, Department of Corrections (DOC), the Kansas Native American Affairs Office, the Kansas African American Affairs Commission, and the KDHE expand digital equity resources and address the digital equity needs of our communities, despite their varying missions and scopes.

### Individual Programs Developed within Nonprofit, State, and Other Organizations

An existing network of services, organizations, and support for covered populations is starting to include digital equity offerings, while pointing to a need for improved coordination and support statewide.

Many digital inclusion activities, including digital navigation, upskilling, and cybersecurity training, were developed to address the needs of their service communities. For example, AARP offers programs to help their members understand digital resources, cybercrime threats, and telehealth while learning new skills for employment opportunities.

### Selected Assets and Programs in Support of Covered Populations

There are digital equity practitioners throughout Kansas who deliver vital services to their communities. Some organizations focus on specific covered populations. A sampling of those organizations is presented in the following pages. A more comprehensive list of organizations is in Appendix 3— Existing Digital Equity Programs.

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<sup>16</sup> Title I, III and IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) — Is the responsibility of Department of Children and Family Services.



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Individuals Who Live in Low-income Households

Broadband Affordability	Digital Equity Program	Device Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills
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#### KC Digital Drive

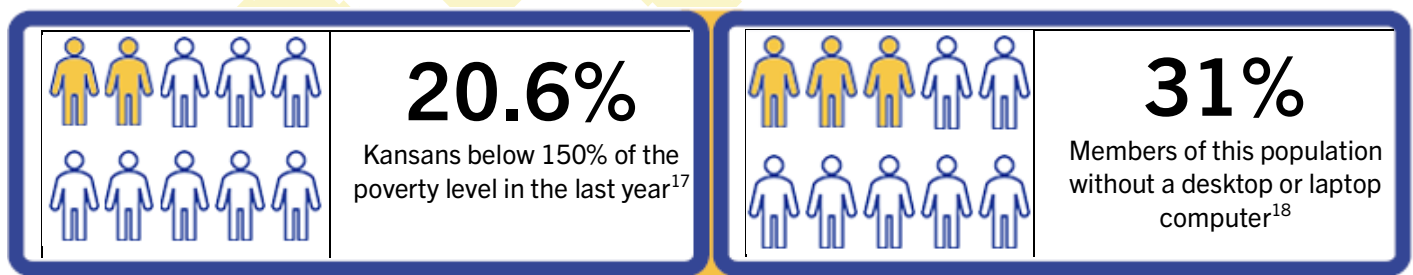
KC Digital Drive is a Kansas City nonprofit whose mission is to bridge the digital divide by giving and creating resources through technology so that no one is left behind.

<b>KC Goes Tech</b>		<i>Provides grants of \$2,000 to partner organizations to support trainers who can deliver digital literacy skills education to the organization's clients and to support the organization's overall mission</i>
<b>Internet Access Support Program</b>		<i>Helps households secure internet access and pay their internet bill through affordability plans while providing support for understanding internet service bills and cost-reduction ideas</i>
<b>Digital Equity Planning</b>		<i>Provides support for digital equity planning efforts around Kansas City and the surrounding areas by leading efforts, including Wyandotte County and Johnson County</i>

#### City of Topeka and Shawnee County (TSC) – Get Digital Coalition

The city of Topeka supports a coalition of community members and stakeholders who want to close the digital divide in Topeka.

<b>TSC - Get Digital</b>		<i>Provides affordable and equitable access to computer and internet equipment and services, along with technical support, training opportunities, and digital literacy skills services for low and moderate-income individuals, families, and aging individuals</i>
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**NTIA Definition:** A household, the income of which for the most recently completed year is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>18</sup> Microsoft Airband (2021). Digital Equity Map. <https://aka.ms/DigitalEquityMaps>

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

**Aging Individuals**

<p>Broadband Affordability</p>	<p>Digital Equity Program</p>	<p>Device Affordability</p>	<p>Digital Literacy Skills</p>
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**American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)**

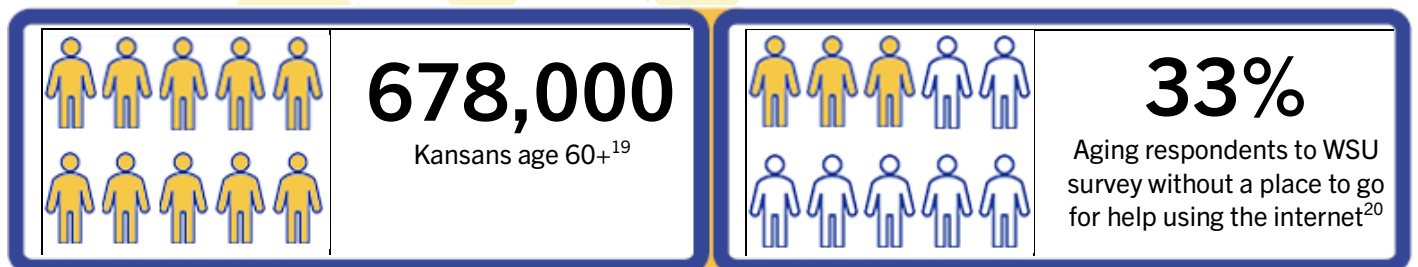
Available across the state of Kansas, AARP is the nation’s largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age.

<b>BACKTOWORK50</b>		Provides resources, training (including computer-based skills training), and information for adults 50 and over who are getting back into the workforce
<b>Older Adults Technology Services (OATS)</b>		Delivers free online courses through partner organization, OATS, and through AARP’s Virtual Learning Center to help older adults learn digital skills like how to use food delivery apps, social media, and podcasts
<b>Fraud Watch Network</b>		Offers a hotline and online resources to seniors on how to spot scams, use online resources safely, sign up for free peer support groups, and more

**Kansas Area Agency on Aging**

The Area Agencies on Aging in Kansas are located around Kansas and are part of a national network of organizations designated as the leaders on aging issues at the local level. AAAs are the “boots-on-the-ground” organizations charged with helping vulnerable older adults live with independence and dignity in their homes and communities.

<b>OKEP</b>		The Older Kansans Employment Program serves the four trade areas of Manhattan, Junction City, Salina, and Emporia with employment-related services including digital literacy skills development for Kansans 55+
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**NTIA Definition:** An individual who is 60 years of age or older

<sup>19</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample.

<https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>20</sup> Kansas Office of Broadband Development. (May 2023). *Digital Equity in Kansas – Kansas Broadband Roadshow*.(Wichita State University) [www.kansascommerce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/digital-equity-roadshow-report-06.09.23v14.pdf](http://www.kansascommerce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/digital-equity-roadshow-report-06.09.23v14.pdf) (1,777 MB)

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Justice-involved Individuals

Broadband Affordability	Digital Equity Program	Device Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills
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### KU Center for Digital Inclusion

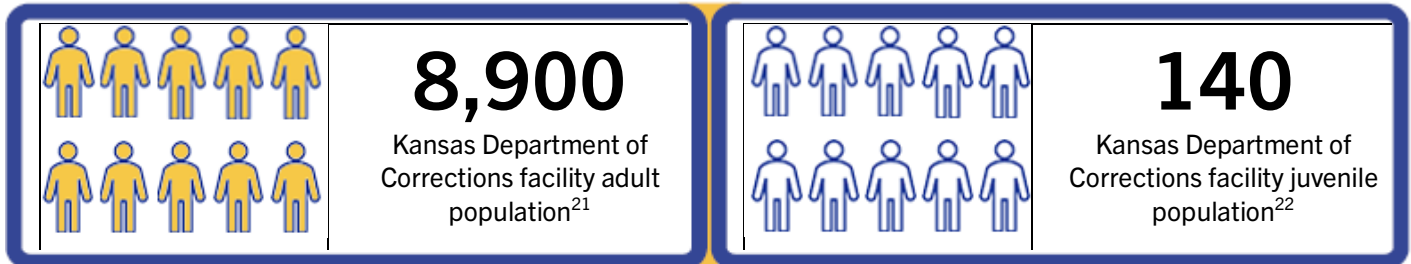
The Center for Digital Inclusion facilitates scholarship, education, and collaborative partnerships aimed at enhancing citizens' digital access and information literacy, especially among underserved populations

<b>The Technology Education Program</b>		<i>Offers digital skills training for justice-involved women transitioning back to society to give these women an opportunity to contribute to society and participate in the economy</i>
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### American Prison Data Systems (APDS)

APDS' mission is to prepare every justice-impacted individual for a living wage job through its career readiness platform.

<b>APDS</b>		<i>Provides a virtual platform, tablets, and support for justice-involved individuals to offer career readiness education</i>
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**NTIA Definition:** Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility

<sup>21</sup> Kansas Department of Corrections. (July 26, 2023). Population Report. [www.doc.ks.gov/publications/pop/POP%2007-25-2023.pdf/view](http://www.doc.ks.gov/publications/pop/POP%2007-25-2023.pdf/view) (53 MB)

<sup>22</sup> Kansas Department of Correction. (July 26, 2023). Juvenile Population Report. [www.doc.ks.gov/publications/juvenile/population](http://www.doc.ks.gov/publications/juvenile/population)

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Veterans

<p>Broadband Affordability</p>	<p>Digital Equity Program</p>	<p>Device Affordability</p>	<p>Digital Literacy Skills</p>
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### Veterans Affairs

The U.S Department of Veterans Affairs is a nationwide resource where Kansas service members being active military, service members with disabilities and veterans go to get assistance

<p><b>Readiness and Employment (VR&amp;E)</b></p>		<p><i>Offers services to help with job training, education, employment accommodations, resume development, and coaching for job seekers</i></p>
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### Galvanize

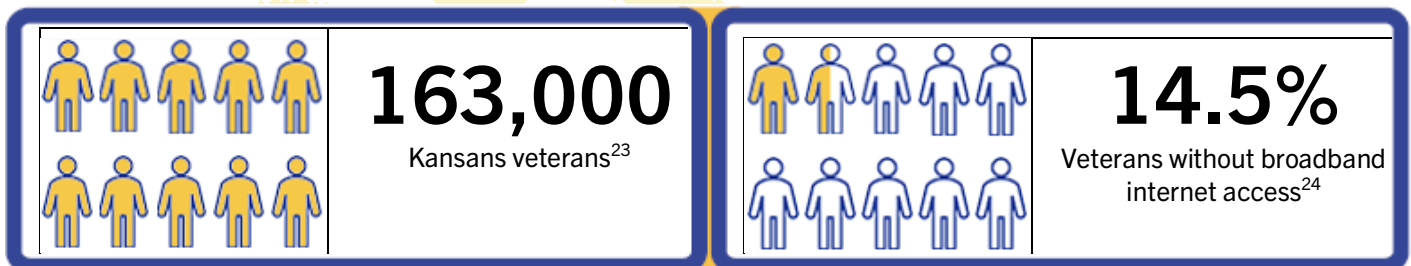
Galvanize transforms veterans, transitioning and active-duty service members into skilled software developers through technology training programs.

<p><b>Coding Bootcamps for Veterans</b></p>		<p><i>Conducts a coding bootcamp through the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) program for full-time, high-tech training</i></p>
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### Kansas Works

Kansas Workforce Centers operate to provide a number of employment resources and services for job seekers, employers, and veterans.

<p><b>VETS</b></p>		<p><i>Offers a local Veterans Representative to assist in employment services, training and education, and referrals to other veteran services</i></p>
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**NTIA Definition:** A person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable

<sup>23</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity


## Barriers and Assets

**Individuals with Disabilities**

 <p>Broadband Affordability</p>	 <p>Digital Equity Program</p>	 <p>Device Affordability</p>	 <p>Digital Literacy Skills</p>
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**Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation (CPRF)**

This foundation helps those who have disabilities with a number of services and programs to ensure employment and daily task are achieved.

<p><b>School of Adaptive Computer Training (SACT)</b></p>		<p><i>Offers in-person learning for adults and children with disabilities in Wichita or online for students located throughout Kansas covering basic employer-ready training skills</i></p>
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**Goodwill Industries of Kansas**

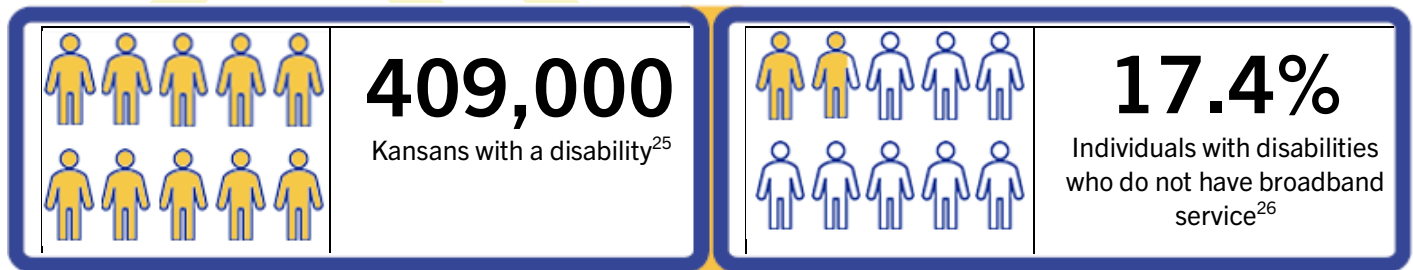
Goodwill provides job training and education programs for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment through a wide range of programs.

<p><b>LearnIT Digital Skills Classroom</b></p>		<p><i>Offers digital literacy skills training through virtual classrooms and training, including basic computer skills, computer support, programming, digital marketing, and cybersecurity</i></p>
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**University of Kansas Assistive Technology for Kansans**

Assistive Technology for Kansans (ATK) is the Kansas statewide program providing the tools needed to learn, work, play and participate in community-life, safely and independently

<p><b>Assistive Technology for Kansans (ATK)</b></p>		<p><i>Connects people with disabilities to assistive technology</i></p>
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**NTIA Definition:** *With respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment*

<sup>25</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Individuals with a Language Barrier

<p>Broadband Affordability</p>	<p>Digital Equity Program</p>	<p>Device Affordability</p>	<p>Digital Literacy Skills</p>
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### Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas

A ministry of the Archdiocese of Kansas City, KS, Catholic Charities offers a wide range of specialized programs, services, guidance, and resources that will result in long-term change.

<b>Refugee Employment Services</b>		<p><i>Provides services designed to help connect refugees with jobs and train them to be strong employees</i></p>
<b>Refugee Learning Center</b>		<p><i>Offers essential education and life skills to refugees of all ages.</i></p>

### The International Rescue Committee (IRC)

The IRC, located in Wichita, helps rebuild lives by working with government, organizations, and volunteers to help refugees, asylees, and survivors adapt their experience to their new communities.

<b>Digital Navigators</b>		<p><i>Offers Digital Navigators to assist with ACP enrollment, digital literacy skills classes, and assistance with device purchasing and troubleshooting</i></p>
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**NTIA Definition:** Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy

<sup>27</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

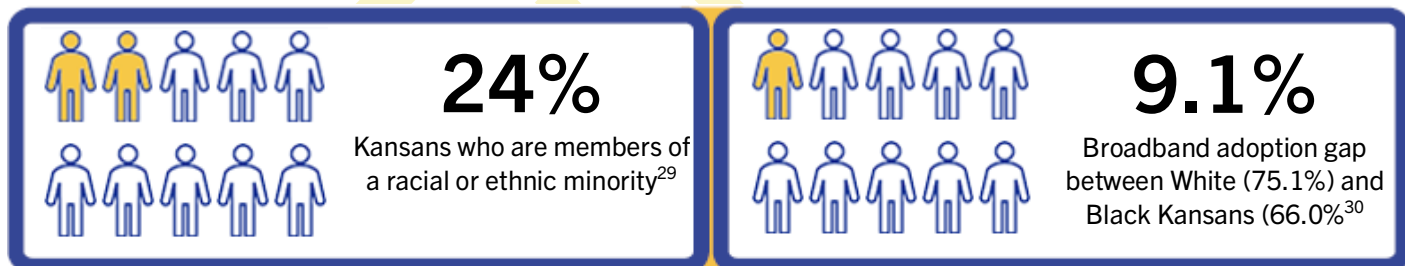
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

Individuals Who are Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group			
Broadband Affordability	Digital Equity Program	Device Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills

Black or African American 5%		Kansas Population: 146,900
<b>IBSA</b> IBSA is a Topeka based 501c3 that assists low- and moderate-income individuals with self-sufficiency programs and services.		
<b>Streets University</b>		<i>Partners with agencies to build the technological skills of young people, including the use of WordPress for website development</i>
<b>Device Program</b>		<i>Sells low-cost devices such as desktops, laptops, and internet hotspots in partnership with PCs for People</i>

<b>NAACP Kansas Chapter</b>		
NAACP is a membership-based, volunteer advocacy organization committed to civil rights and social justice whose mission is to achieve equity, political rights, and social inclusion.		
<b>Empowerment Program</b>		<i>Advances the NAACP's mission through high-impact programs and initiatives tackling complex challenges with community leaders and providing technical assistance to members</i>
<b>Multiple Programs</b>		<i>Supports students' education and skills development while advocating for African American entrepreneurs and workers and offering workshops and classes</i>



**NTIA Definition:** Members of a racial or ethnic minority; members of any Indian tribe... or other organized group... eligible for the special programs and services provided by the US to Indians because of their status as Indians

<sup>29</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

<b>Hispanic/Latino 12.7%</b>		<b>Kansas Population: 373,500</b>
<u><b>El Centro Inc.</b></u>		
El Centro Inc. supports and empowers the lives of Hispanic and Latino communities by education, health, and economic possibilities.		
<b>Enrichment Program</b>		<i>Provides after-school and summer educational opportunities from Pre-K through sixth grade, including technology training</i>

<u><b>Revolucion Educativa</b></u>		
Revolucion Educativa builds sustained collective power for the Latinx community by coming together to provide tools, resources and supports needed to build sustained collective power in KC and beyond.		
<b>EducaTec</b>		<i>Provides Spanish-language digital literacy skills training in partnership with Latinx Education Collaborative, along with child watch facilities and computers for participants without a device</i>

<b>Asian &amp; Pacific Islander 3.1%</b>		<b>Kansas Population: 90,164</b>
<u><b>National Association of Asian American Professionals – Kansas City Chapter</b></u>		
NAAAP is a national organization advocating for leadership, education, accountability, and diversity for Asian American and Pacific Islanders.		
<b>Chapter Events</b>		<i>Holds events for members including workshops on leadership, professional development, and community outreach</i>

<u><b>Wichita Indochinese Center (WIC)</b></u>		
Originally founded in 1985 as a nonprofit corporation to assist refugees from the countries of Indochina, the Center serves people of all nationalities by assisting with the resettlement process.		
<b>Multiple Programs</b>		<i>Offers employment specialists, on-site ESL classes for employers, digital skills development, testing, and a computer lab for students</i>




# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

**Sovereign Tribale Nations 0.4%** **Kansas Population: 11,800**


**Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska**

The Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska provides the Adult Education Program to assist unemployed and/or underemployed members through services to support, literacy, basic education, job training, and continuing education.

<b>Adult Education Program</b>		<i>Provides members literacy skills, assistance with training programs, and support services for continuing education</i>
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**Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation**

The Prairie Band Potawatomi Education Department strives to achieve an increase in leadership qualities through supporting all students in grades K-12.

<b>Education Department</b>		<i>Provides financial assistance and employment support, including the enhancement of job and technical skills through training</i>
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**Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska**

The Sac & Fox nation provides a multitude of services to members, including education, housing, library services, and youth programs

<b>Social Services/ICW</b>		<i>Provides computer access for job searches and staff assistance with resumes.</i>
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**Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas**

The Kickapoo Tribe staff members manage operations including issues with environmental, health, road maintenance, compliance, financial, legal, gaming, and community planning.

<b>Education Department</b>		<i>Aids members wanting to expand their education</i>
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# 3. Current State of Digital Equity


## Barriers and Assets

**Individuals Who Reside in a Rural Area**

 <p>Broadband Affordability</p>	 <p>Digital Equity Program</p>	 <p>Device Affordability</p>	 <p>Digital Literacy Skills</p>
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**South Central Kansas Library System**

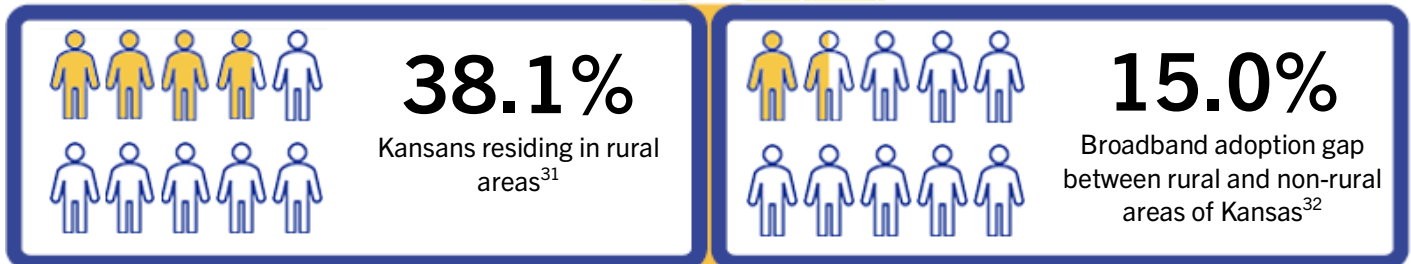
The mission of the South Central Kansas Library System is to assist member libraries to provide excellent service to their communities through grants, consulting, and continuing education.

<b>Technology Consulting Services</b>		<p><i>Provides support in the areas of automation, planning, policies, Internet, website development, digitization, basic computer and network troubleshooting, and electronic information services including e-readers, hardware, and software</i></p>
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**K-State Research and Extension**

K-State Research and Extension provides statewide information and services related to adult development and aging, community development, and crop production.

<b>Community Development</b>		<p><i>Provides technical assistance and evidence-based programs and acts as an important partner in addressing broadband infrastructure support and digital equity efforts</i></p>
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**NTIA Definition:** *Inhabitants of any area other than a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000, any urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a... population of greater than 50,000... or incorporated area... of greater than 20,000.*

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2021) Digital Equity Act Population Viewer. [www.census.gov/data/data-tools/digital-equity-act-population.html](http://www.census.gov/data/data-tools/digital-equity-act-population.html)  
<sup>32</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. QuickFacts – Kansas. [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/KS/PST045222](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/KS/PST045222) (accessed August 15, 2023).

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1.2 Existing Digital Equity Plans

As Kansas communities begin to tackle their broadband accessibility, affordability, and adoption issues, many will begin their digital equity planning efforts now. Some entities are already actively developing digital equity plans. Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) created a “Kansas City Regional Digital Equity Plan” for the Kansas City metropolitan area in 2023.<sup>33</sup> The City of Topeka began the two-year process of creating a digital equity plan, with completion expected by 2024. KC Digital Drive is working with Wyandotte and Johnson Counties to develop Digital Equity plans as well. The work is in process and represents some of the first digital equity planning efforts in Kansas.

As these communities further their digital equity work and others begin their own processes, KOBD will work alongside them to provide the support, resources, and coordination needed for comprehensive and sustainable community digital equity plans.

### 3.1.3 Existing Digital Equity Programs

The following is a sampling of additional Kansas organizations throughout the state offering digital equity programs. A complete list of organizations is in Appendix 3— Existing Digital Equity Programs.

Kansas Digital Equity Programs			
Broadband Affordability	Digital Equity Program	Device Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills

Angels in the Attic, Inc.		
Angels in the Attic, Kansas serves the Arkansas City community by networking with other area groups, business, churches, and organizations to better assist individuals who are struggling.		
<b>Computer Access Center</b>		<i>Provides technical assistance and evidence-based programs and acts as an important partner in addressing broadband infrastructure support and digital equity efforts</i>

Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group		
As a digital connector for their community, Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group’s local mission is to revitalize Northeast Kansas and Kansas City communities through forward-looking, inclusive action		
<b>Technology Library</b>		<i>Provides a wi-fi hotspot and laptop lending library</i>
<b>Learn to Earn Program</b>		<i>Provides a means for young people ages 12-16 in the northeast and east-midtown areas of Kansas City to receive environmental and conservation training, workforce development, and career preparation</i>

<sup>33</sup> Mid-America Regional Council (MARC). (May 2023). Kansas City Regional Digital Equity Action Plan. [www.marc.org/document/kansas-city-regional-digital-equity-plan](http://www.marc.org/document/kansas-city-regional-digital-equity-plan). (8,860 MB)

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Future Leaders Outreach Network (FLON)

Future Leaders Outreach Network provides youth and young adults skills to set goals, become effective leaders, and pursue economic well-being by developing age-appropriate initiatives.

<b>Educational Virtual Reality(E-VR) Technology</b>		<i>Offers an E-VR headset program for students to complete a career exploration assessment or engage in real life career pathway immersive learning modules such as cybersecurity or robotics</i>
<b>Job Readiness &amp; Career Exploration Simulation Trailer</b>		<i>Offers VR learning in technology and digital skills via hands-on learning in the 48-foot Leaders and Entrepreneurs Academy of Dreamers Initiative's (YouLEAD) 48ft. Job Readiness &amp; Career Exploration Simulation Trailer</i>

### Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce

Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce is committed to developing and strengthening African American entrepreneur-led businesses in the State of Kansas.

<b>Multiple Programs</b>		<i>Provides support for launching, developing, promoting, sustaining, and growth of the African American community by advocating and lobbying on behalf of members by establishing programs and partnership opportunities including higher education scholarships</i>
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### Human-I-T

Human-I-T helps create equitable access to opportunity for Kansans by providing devices, internet access, digital skills training, and tech support for communities on the wrong side of the digital divide

<b>Computer and Internet Training</b>		<i>Offers a 24/7 multi-lingual course on basic digital skills like operating a computer, using common programs like email, and navigating the internet, as well as offering orientation, office hours, and continuing education in cybersecurity, data analytics, and more</i>
<b>Tech Support</b>		<i>Offers one year of free, on-demand tech support to everyone who has received a donated device or bought a low-cost computer or low-cost hotspot</i>
<b>Human-I-T Online Store</b>		<i>Offers low-cost devices like laptops and tablets</i>
<b>Internet Access Support Program</b>		<i>Provides discounted Chromebooks and enrollment support for ACP participants</i>

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

<u>Kansas Department of Children and Families</u>		
<p>The Kansas Department for Children and Families, established in 1973 as an umbrella agency to oversee the delivery of social services and the provision of care to the vulnerable, today serves more than 500,000 Kansans.</p>		
<b>Work Program</b>		<i>Offers a work program for families providing support for GED or ESL education and cash assistance, along with digital skills training, device procurement, and access to ACP</i>
<b>Accelerating Opportunity Kansas Career Pathway Program</b>		<i>Provides career training through nine technical and community colleges offering AO-K pathways like Computer Support Technology including digital literacy skills assessment and training via a partnership with Commerce and the Kansas Board of Regents</i>

<u>NCircle</u>		
<p>NCircle encircles families and individuals impacted by the criminal justice system by bringing together resources and offering certification opportunities and youth discovery programs.</p>		
<b>Certification Training</b>		<i>In partnership with Johnson County Community College and College of Trades, NCircle offers a 12-week program that includes up to 75 hours of essential skills training and a trade certification, giving opportunity for adults at the Johnson County Adult Residential Center to learn essential professional, technical, and digital skills</i>

<u>Northeast Kansas Community Action Partnership</u>		
<p>Community Action programs throughout Kansas change lives by helping people help themselves and each other. This is an example of one of the Community Action Partners throughout the state serving members of the covered populations in their areas.</p>		
<b>Digital Literacy &amp; Work Skills Summer Class</b>		<i>Part of the Roadmap to Success Project classes will teach computer skills, online safety, and soft skills geared toward youth aged 16-19 completely free</i>

<u>PCs for People</u>		
<p>PCs for People is a national nonprofit social enterprise working throughout Kansas to get low-cost quality computers, internet, and digital skills into the homes of low-income individuals and families.</p>		
<b>Learning Center</b>		<i>Provides free digital skills training through classes and workshops offered in-person or virtually, including essential computer skills, essential software skills, and technology tasks</i>
<b>Device Program</b>		<i>Offers eligible customers and nonprofits quality refurbished computers including desktops, laptops, and hotspots at a reduced rate</i>
<b>Affordable Repair</b>		<i>Provides a one-year hardware warranty along with basic repair services starting at \$25</i>

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### Smoky Hill Education Service Center

Smoky Hill Education Service Center serves nonprofit organizations and more than 50 school districts in 25 counties of North Central Kansas to promote success for learners

<b>Digital Citizenship and Technology Program</b>		<i>Offers a program for students, teachers, and community members focused on learning safety and vigilance related to scam awareness, spam, phishing, and predators</i>
<b>Learn360</b>		<i>Provides an educational platform for students, teachers, and parents with a wide variety of educational content correlated to Kansas College and Career Ready Standards</i>

### Workforce Partnership (Johnson, Leavenworth, Wyandotte)

Workforce Partnership is committed to a workforce development system that meets the needs of both job seekers and employers through a network of career centers, higher education institutions, and other quality training providers to deliver training courses in Johnson, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte counties.

<b>JOCO KS Works 3.0</b>	 	<i>Helps with job search, placement, and training including skills assessments, job search support, agency referrals, tuition assistance, GED and ESL support, textbooks, computers, and internet access</i>
<b>Skill Up WYCO</b>		<i>Offers classroom and on-the-job training with an emphasis on credential-bearing programs or those programs preparing individuals to earn a certificate, certifications, or pass a licensure exam, or that will provide upskilling for job seekers</i>

### United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) is a labor union and nonprofit organization (501c3) located in Dodge City, Kansas that believes in the power of ordinary people coming together to improve their lives and make a lasting difference for all working people.

<b>Workforce Essential Courses</b>		<i>Offers basic courses like Computer Essentials to build union members' expertise and increase their career options</i>
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### University of Kansas Assistive Technology for Kansans

The Kansas Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) is an equipment distribution program providing specialized telephones and other telecommunications devices to Kansans with disabilities who cannot use traditional home telephones.

<b>Telecommunications Access Program (TAP)</b>		<i>Provides a free specialized device to support Kansas residents with disabilities that cause physical impairment</i>
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# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1.4 Broadband Adoption Assets

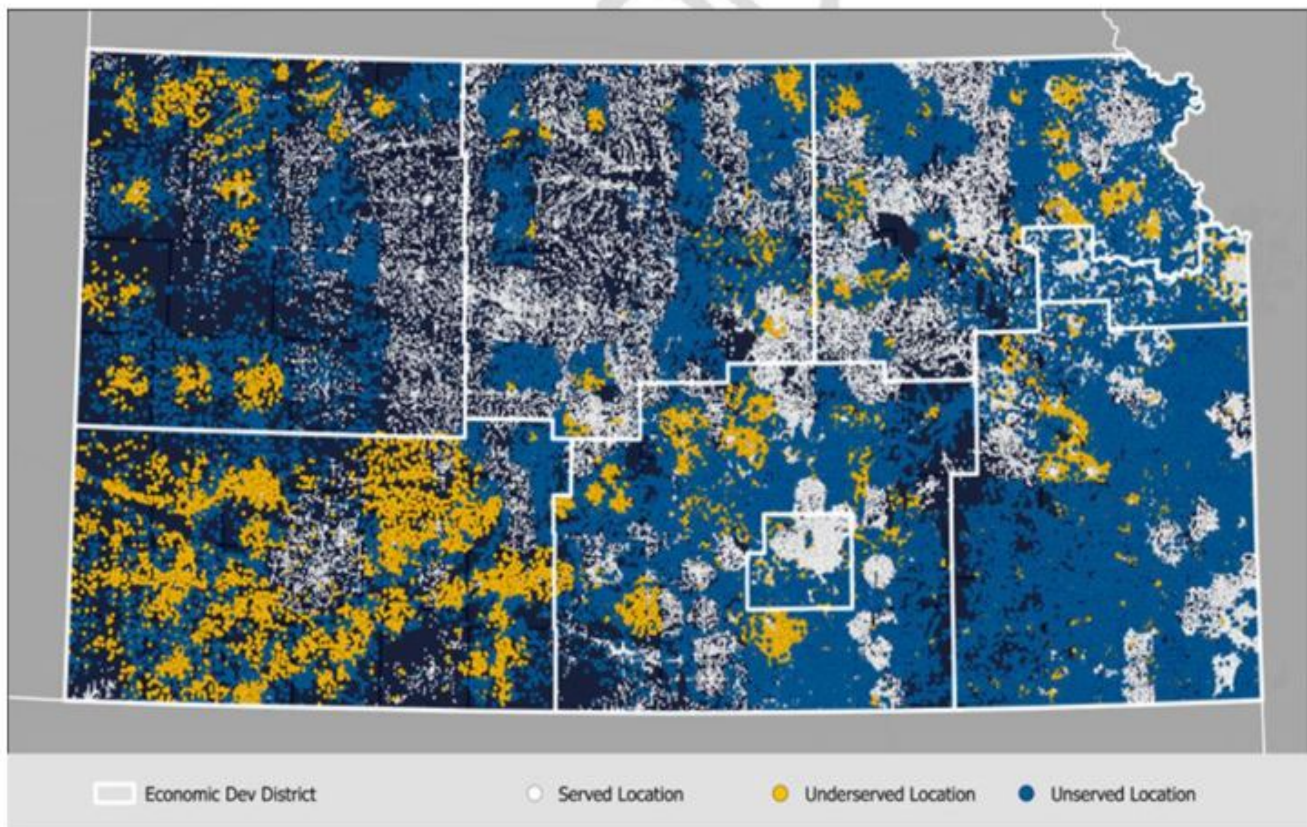
This section provides information about available assets for broadband adoption within Kansas.

#### 3.1.4.1 Percentage of Residents Within Kansas Who Have Adopted Broadband

The US Census data states 95.2% (1,103,327) of Kansas' population has one or more types of computing device at home, while 78.8% (912,773) have a laptop or desktop as the device. Ten percent (115,885) of Kansans do not have a broadband subscription.<sup>34</sup>

Adoption relies on the availability of infrastructure. Thus, KOBD identified locations across the state where broadband is not available. Determining the synergies between locations without infrastructure access and where members of the covered populations reside will pinpoint clear opportunities to develop regional partnerships for digital equity and broadband adoption.

**SERVED, UNDERSERVED, AND UNSERVED LOCATIONS**



<sup>34</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2021). S2801 - Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions. American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=broadband&g=040XX00US20>

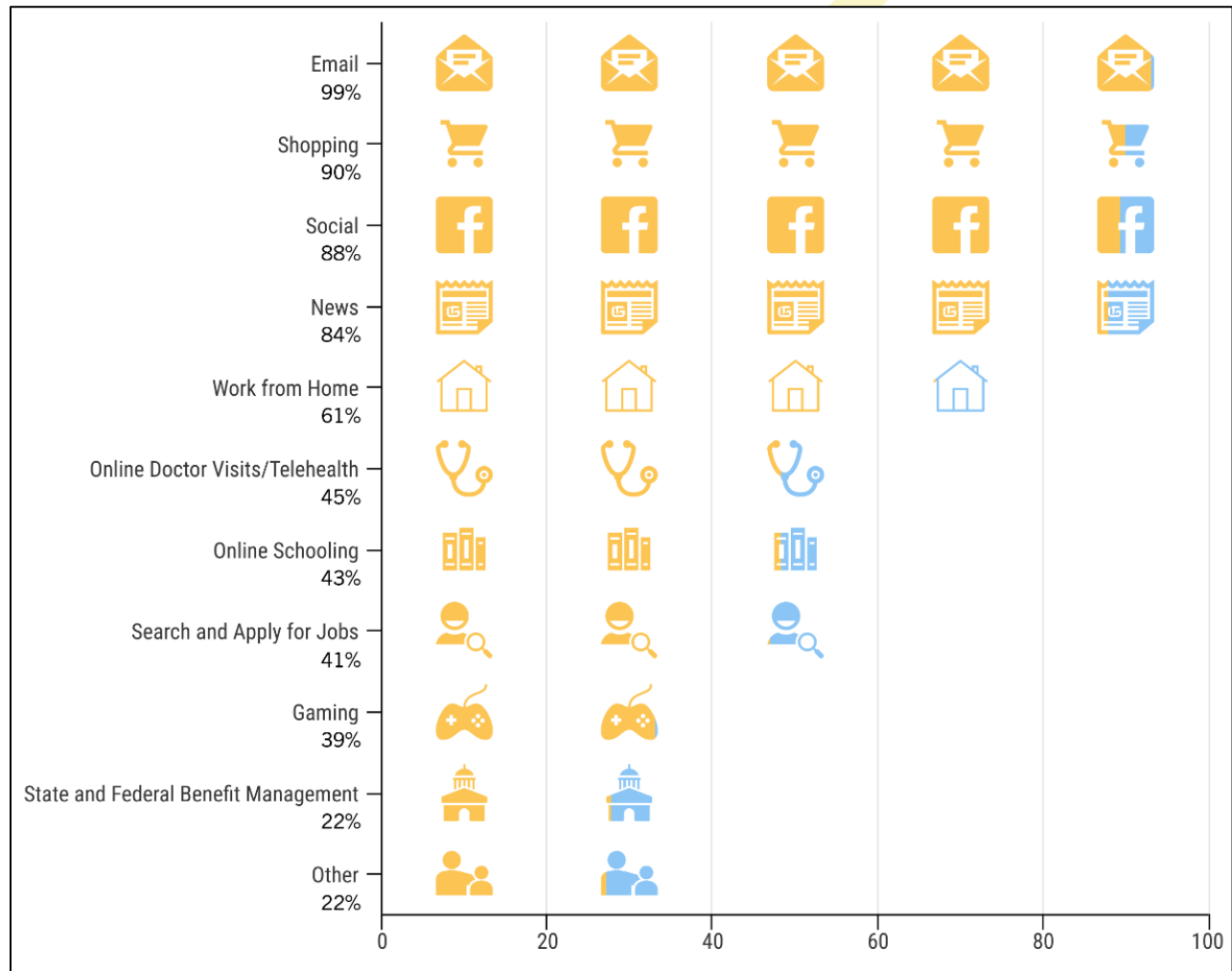
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1.4.2 Meaningful Use

Through the results of the WSU survey, Kansans use broadband access to stay informed, work (or find work), obtain home deliveries, pay bills, manage finances, arrange transportation, manage benefits or healthcare, learn, and find entertainment. While the internet became the primary access point for many Kansans for work or school during the pandemic, it remains critical to participate in all aspects of the digital economy.

**WSU SURVEY RESULTS: MEANINGFUL USE OF THE INTERNET**





# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

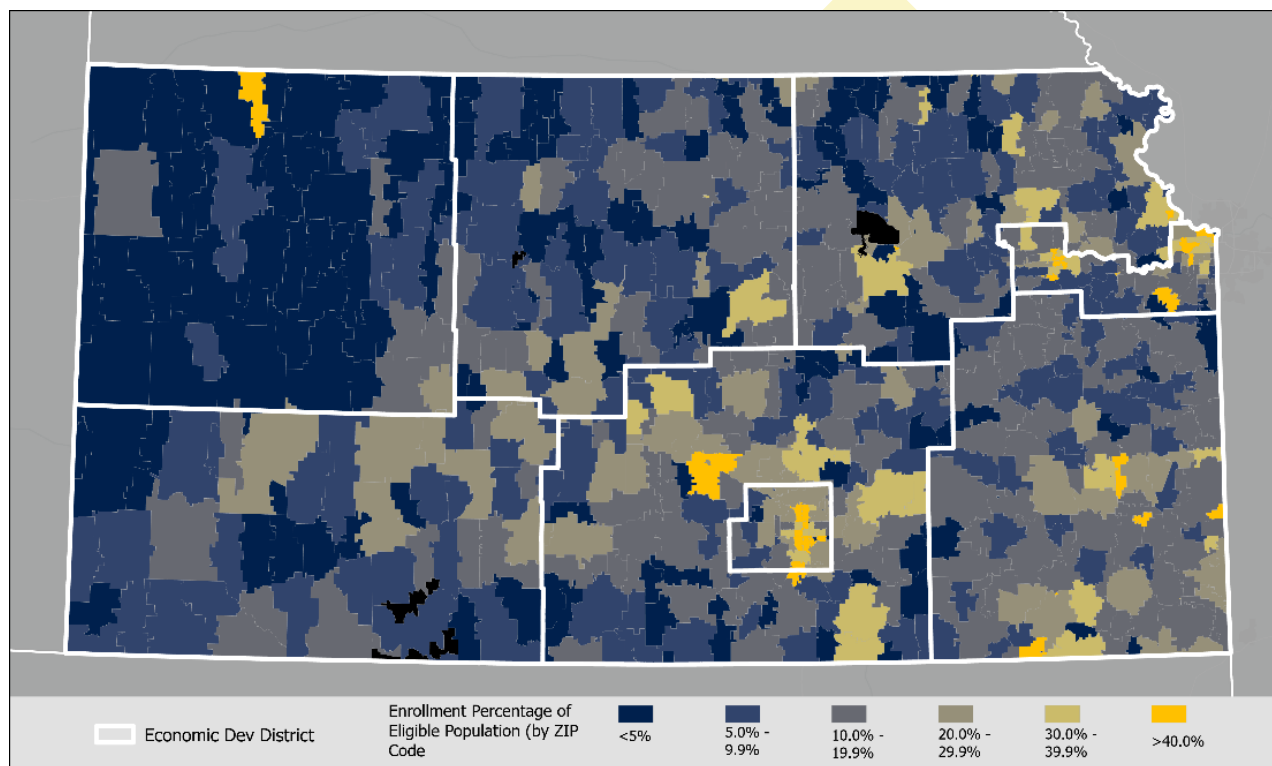
## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1.5 Broadband Affordability Assets

#### 3.1.5.1 Affordable Connectivity Program

The ACP is the primary source for broadband subsidization today. According to the August 2023 ACP report, 114,159 enrolled households are in Kansas. This is an increase from the 70,000 reported in the December 2022 report and is directly attributable to focused efforts by KOBD and nonprofit groups throughout the state. However, the 114,159 households account for only 26.0% of total eligible households. While a great start, there is much more work to do.

**KANSAS ACP ADOPTION RATES**



The data indicates several counties have more than doubled their ACP enrollment month-over-month for several recent quarters. Outreach to understand how these counties created programs and processes to increase ACP enrollment is underway. Moreover, KOBD will map ACP adoption to monitor counties that are exhibiting growth in outreach efforts and identify the counties who may need additional support or resources to reach additional households eligible for ACP.

#### 3.1.5.2 Kansas Lifeline

Kansas offers Lifeline to provide discounted phone service, residential or wireless. This state-level program works in concert with the FCC's Lifeline Support for Affordable Communications, allowing participants to combine the federal and state Lifeline discounts for up to \$17.02 in monthly savings. Eleven percent (29,675) of eligible households in Kansas participate.

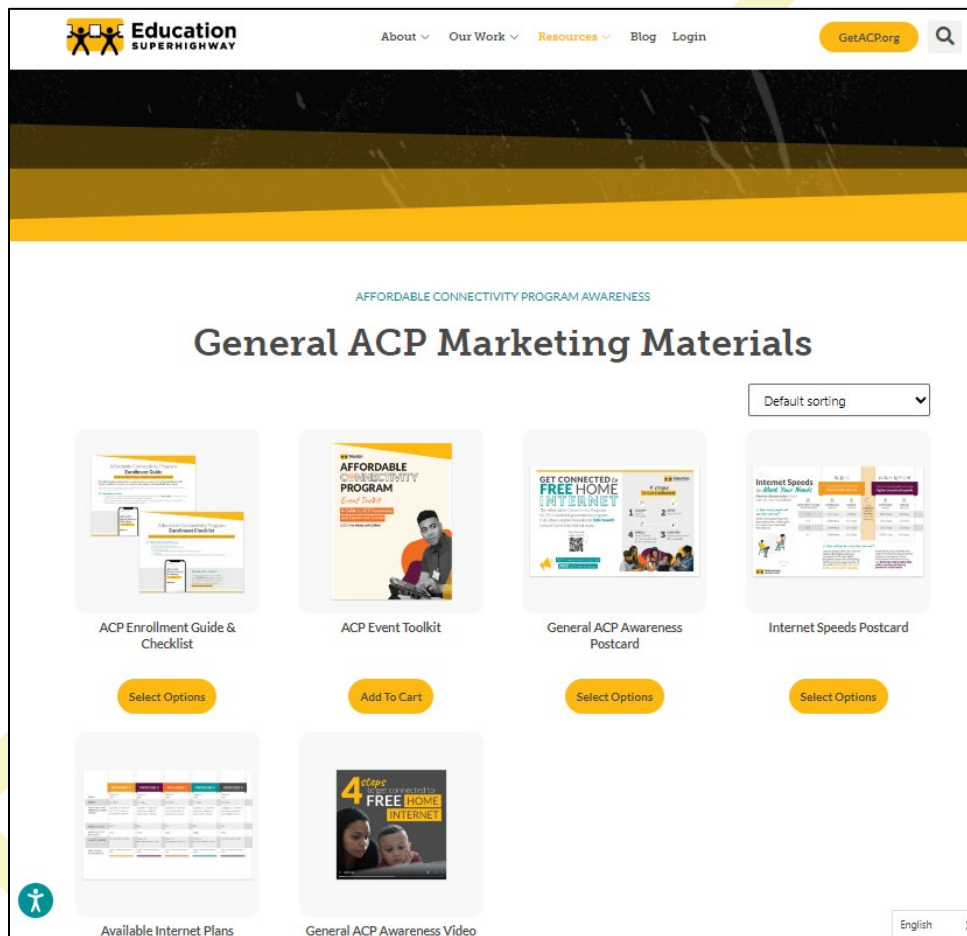
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1.5.3 Education Superhighway

KOBD partners with Education Superhighway to provide awareness and increased enrollment in the ACP program. Education Superhighway created a dashboard to assist with the ACP application process and developed resources to train community partners, local governments, and Internet Service Providers (ISP). As a result of this partnership, more than 60 organizations and 90 designated representatives are partners and are participating in training on how to sign customers up for this subsidy.

#### EDUCATION SUPERHIGHWAY WEBSITE



### 3.1.5.4 FCC ACP Outreach Program

Kansas is fortunate to have three grantees selected to the FCC ACP Outreach grant funding program:

- The City of Topeka will provide ACP outreach support to its residents.
- Wichita State University' will provide ACP outreach support to the Wichita area.
- KC Digital Drive will provide ACP outreach to the remaining footprint of Kansas.

KOBD will stay engaged as a partner to these organizations to assist where possible.

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.1.5.5 ISP Support

**TABLE 11: PROVIDERS THAT ACCEPT ACP**

Several ISPs accept ACP, including:

Blackdragon Networks	Blue Valley Technologies	Cascade Communications
Clearwave Fiber	Consolidated Communications Enterprise Services	EARTHLINK
Frontier	Giant Communications	Google Fiber Kansas
H & B Communications	Kansas Wireless	KwiKom Communications
Lingo	Mercury Broadband	Mutual Telephone Company
Nex-Tech	North Central Kansas Community Network	Pioneer Communications
Rainbow Communications	S&T Communications	The Junction Internet
TOAST.net Internet Service	Twin Valley Communications	ValuNet Fiber
Velocity	Vyve Broadband	Zito West Holdings

**TABLE 12: PROVIDERS THAT ACCEPT ACP AND HAVE \$0 PROGRAMS**

Several ISPs offer plans, when coupled with ACP benefits, that cost consumers \$0 per month, including:

AT&T	Comcast Xfinity	Cox Communication
IdeaTek	Integrated Path Communications	Mediacom
Midcontinent Communications	Moundridge Telephone Company	Optimum
Spectrum Charter	T-Mobile	Twin Valley Communications
United Wireless Communications	Verizon	VOLT MOBILE
	WTC	

**TABLE 13: PROVIDERS THAT OFFER DISCOUNTED DEVICE PROGRAMS**

Many ISPs offer discounted devices programs, including:

Cathect Communications	Clear Wireless	Culture Wireless
Figgers Communication	Golden Belt Telephone Association	Human-I-T
Nextlink Internet	PCs for People	SWA Connect
Tone Communication Services	T-Mobile	Wisper ISP

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.2 Needs Assessment

To fully address digital equity needs in Kansas, KOBD utilized a needs assessment to understand the covered populations, the barriers to broadband adoption, and concerns surrounding broadband affordability. The Roadshow offered listening sessions with organizations serving at-risk populations and dedicated conversations with members of covered populations to help KOBD and its partners identify barriers to close the digital gap.

While covered populations are disproportionately impacted by the digital divide, KOBD believes it is important to take a holistic view of the state to identify widespread or systemic barriers for Kansans as a whole.

#### Accessibility

Of the 1.1 million locations in Kansas, 87,489 remain unserved (8.2%) and 57,316 remain underserved for a total of 144,805 (12.0% of Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs)) without qualifying broadband service. These BSLs exist in all 105 counties, four Sovereign Tribal Nations, and every one of the 1,890 cities, towns, and villages that make up the state of Kansas. Complications with delivering broadband to the most rural parts of the state and with expected workforce shortages in broadband deployment roles in Kansas are additional challenges the state will face. KOBD's BEAD plan details an approach for attaining universal service so that the first hurdle—accessibility—is cleared for all residents.

#### Affordability

As mentioned previously, the August 2023 ACP report indicates 114,159 Kansas households are enrolled. This is 26.0% of the estimated 464,000 eligible households. See the "Broadband Affordability" section of this plan for further discussion of affordability challenges and approaches.

#### Devices

US Census data from the American Community Survey indicates that as many as 15.8% of Kansans lack a laptop or desktop computer, emphasizing the need for statewide device programs and support for CAIs who provide public computing access.

#### Digital Literacy Skills and Cybersecurity

There is no comprehensive inventory of digital literacy skill accessibility or participation yet available for Kansas, so an accurate baseline cannot be determined currently. However, by utilizing KOBD's geospatial mapping capabilities in concert with the planned development of a publicly accessible digital equity asset map, it will be possible to identify the availability of digital literacy skills and cybersecurity support for all Kansans by geography. This approach will also make it possible to identify gaps in access to these services. As noted elsewhere, the mandatory availability of computer classes in all public high schools and coordination with OITS on their developing cybersecurity plan will add dimension and data to measurements in this area.

#### Public Services

While working with state agencies to develop this plan, KOBD learned that there is a need for a statewide inventory of online public services and a strategy for modernizing online services, providing translation and targeted accessibility resources, and delivering technical or navigator support for public services. In KOBD's planned role as a convener, KOBD will act as an advocate and resource within state government for improved accessibility and service for all Kansans. KOBD's goal is to inventory public resources to identify those with challenges moving online or meeting accessibility, resource, and support services as mentioned above.

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

### 3.2.1 Covered Population Needs Assessment

Members of covered populations helped KOBD identify their needs and barriers to participation in the digital economy. Specifically, people voiced how the internet helps achieve personal and community objectives:

- It relieves isolation due to lack of connectivity
- It provides an even playing field for small, local businesses to participate in the global economy, increasing retention and sustainability
- It provides a reduction in crime (i.e., security services, Ring, SMART equipment for video cameras)
- It allows access to advanced education through remote means
- It attracts business possibilities for small towns
- It allows younger generations to remain in communities with competitive employment opportunities
- It provides remote work opportunities across the state.
- It is important for transmitting and downloading/uploading documents
- It creates telehealth opportunities that require reliable, suitable speeds to have video consultations and send large digital medical records
- It provides public safety and real-time alerts for emergencies and weather-related events
- It allows commerce, education, and emergency services to continue in the event of inclement weather, holidays, and unforeseeable circumstances

#### 3.2.1.1 Individuals Who Live in Low-Income Households

In Kansas, 20.6% of residents are living below 150% of poverty level.<sup>35</sup> Of this population, 31% do not have a desktop or laptop computer.<sup>36</sup> Broadband adoption rates for low-income households tend to be lower than that of the general population due to the prioritization of funds for other essential needs. KOBD heard repeatedly in Roadshow stops, Advisory Council Meetings, and Focus Group meetings that despite the availability of adoption and affordability programs like ACP, many individuals do not know about these programs or fully realize the benefits of having access to the internet.

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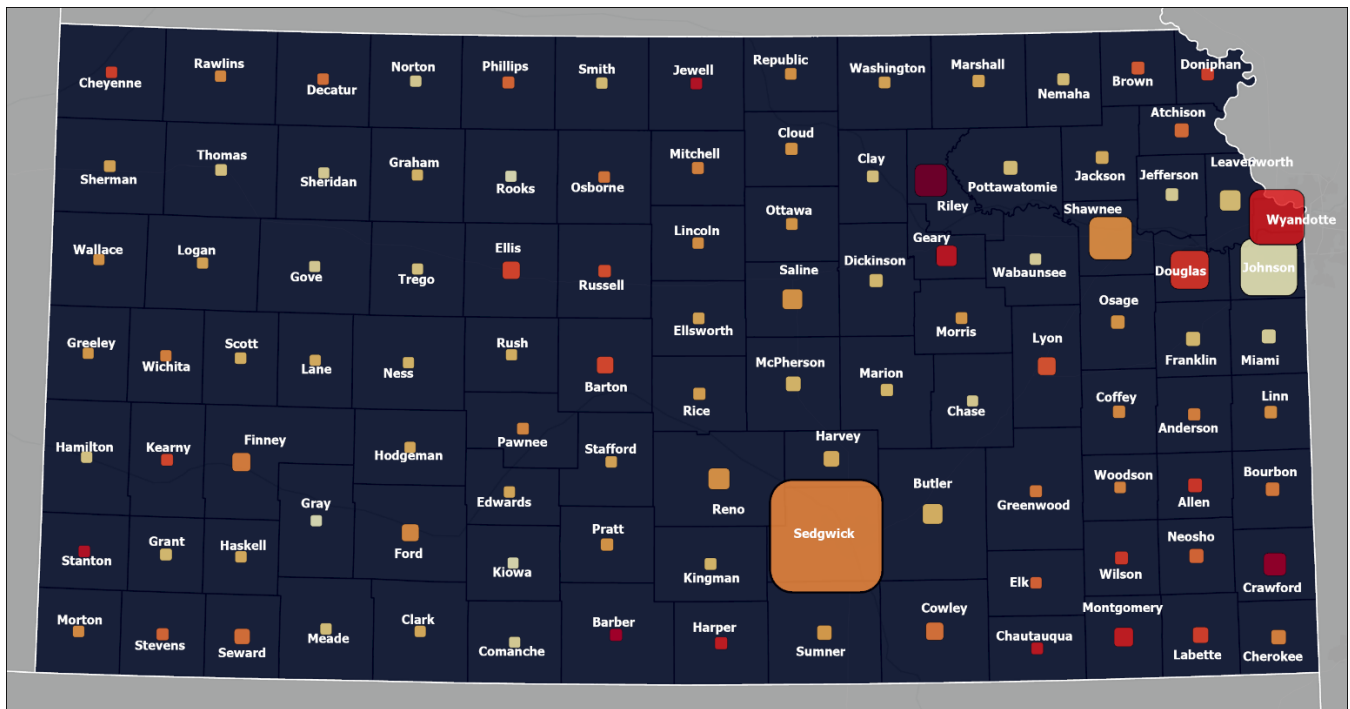
<sup>35</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates – Public Use Microdata Sample. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/>

<sup>36</sup> Microsoft Airband (2021). Digital Equity Map. <https://aka.ms/DigitalEquityMaps>

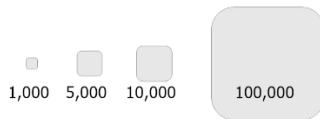
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

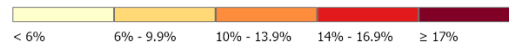
POPULATION WHOSE INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS IS BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL



Population whose income in the past 12 months is below federal poverty level



Percent of Population whose income in the past 12 months is below poverty level



Data Source: 2020 U.S. Census

Members of this population and organizations serving them alike informed KOBD that major barriers for low-income households include affordability of broadband-capable devices, lack of digital literacy skills, and a cybersecurity gap that arises from the absence of using the internet and these devices. Members of the Advisory Council noted that even if a household qualifies for other supportive subsidies (e.g., WIC, SNAP, Lifeline), they may still be unaware of ACP or a local device purchasing program. The challenge is complicated by inconsistent support from county to county. For instance, some counties have higher rates in purchasing devices than others. This may be a function of low program awareness in some counties and could be due to the lack of retail outlets, libraries, or other support institutions in these locations. This varying level of awareness extends statewide, emphasizing the need for KOBD to coordinate with agencies like DCF and other client-facing entities to ensure equitable awareness of affordability and skills development programs.

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

**TABLE 13: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, PERSONS IN LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the American Community Survey (ACS)	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	64.1%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		69.0%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	71.3%	40.2%	TBD		75.2%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.8%	85.1%	80.0%		93.8%	65.0%

### 3.2.1.2 Individuals who reside in a rural area

Using Kansas Congressional Districts to illustrate rural vs more urban populations and needs provides additional context for understanding the challenges for rural residents.<sup>37</sup>

**Congressional District One:** The Big First includes 285,452 households with a population density of 11.7 individuals per square mile. The district is 57,373 square miles (or the size of Illinois). Approximately 20% of the eligible population for ACP have enrolled.

**Congressional District Two:** Topeka and surrounding areas include 289,073 residents with a population density of 47.6 individuals per square mile, and the area covers 14,133 square miles. Of the eligible population, 22% have enrolled in ACP.

**Congressional District Three:** There are 282, 937 households in Kansas City and surrounding suburbs with a population density of 864.4 individuals per square mile. It is Kansas’ smallest district geographically at 778 square miles. In this area, 24% of eligible households are enrolled in ACP.

**Congressional District Four:** Wichita and its metro area include 285,451 households with a population density of 70.5 individuals per square mile. The district covers 9,531 square miles. For the ACP program, 20% of the eligible households are enrolled.

<sup>37</sup> Institute for Local Self-Reliance. “ACP Dashboard.” <https://acpdashboard.com/> (accessed September 12, 2023).

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

Given the size of Congressional District One in comparison to District Three and Four, the low population density is a barrier for internet providers who may struggle to justify building infrastructure due to concerns about insufficient return on their investment. This challenge explains at least in part the 15% difference in the broadband adoption gap between rural and non-rural areas of Kansas.<sup>38</sup>

Multiple Roadshow conversations centered on the fact that regional ISPs and local cooperatives have historically led deployment of broadband infrastructure in rural areas. This has created areas of inconsistent and unreliable broadband service and inaccurate depictions of coverage in rural communities. In the Farm Bureau survey, rural partners acknowledged public resources and services are miles away from many rural residents, especially in the western portion of the state. The University of Kansas Center for Telemedicine & Telehealth (KUCTT) noted that reliable broadband connection is important as telemedicine becomes a more accepted mode of healthcare delivery, especially for emotional wellbeing services, chronic health conditions, and overall emergency services. Their relationships with counties only cover 72 of the 105 counties in Kansas. This is only one example of need, but the same concept applies to education and employment opportunities. These gaps point to the need for expanded infrastructure in those areas that are normally difficult to reach.

Agriculture is a predominant force in Kansas' rural communities and is a key industry for the state. Moreover, agriculture is becoming more technology dependent, which makes connectivity to farmland—which in some cases can be thousands of acres—more necessary than ever. In WSU's report from the Roadshow, agricultural partners stressed the importance of broadband access through the last acre, not just the last mile. In addition, agriculture is an area in which upload speeds are just as critical as download speeds. Minimal upload speeds preclude working or learning from home but also may prevent farmers from transmitting performance data from their digitally connected equipment. These equipment innovations allow farmers to manage their crops more efficiently, but poor connectivity hampers these efforts. Another concern for the agricultural community is the need for reliable, safe, and robust infrastructure that is secure. From WSU's report, rural partners stated "everything from livestock auctions, sales, marketing, market trading, invoicing, and other basic business activities rely on a secure network. Business financials should not become prey for cybersecurity threats."<sup>39</sup>

Rural Roadshow attendees also stated that satellite service has been one of the only options for some highly rural areas. Satellite upload speeds are insufficient and may be susceptible to interference from weather and seasonal foliage, given Kansas' landscape. The FCC does not recognize this service as reliable broadband for the purposes of universal service. Given that Federal Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) data only identifies structures that are unserved or underserved without including farmland, extending broadband access beyond physical structures must also be part of the planning process.

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<sup>38</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. QuickFacts – Kansas. [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/KS/PST045222](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/KS/PST045222) (accessed August 15, 2023).

<sup>39</sup> Kansas Department of Commerce, Office of Broadband Development. (May 2023). *Digital Equity in Kansas – Kansas Broadband Roadshow*. [www.kansascommerce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/digital-equity-roadshow-report-06.09.23v14.pdf](https://www.kansascommerce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/digital-equity-roadshow-report-06.09.23v14.pdf) (1,777 MB)



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

**TABLE 14: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, RURAL INHABITANTS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of broadband serviceable locations (residential) with broadband service in areas defined as rural by NTIA	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer)	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	TBD	25.3% (total average)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	TBD	40.2%	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	90.0%	85.1%	80.0%		80.0%	80.0%

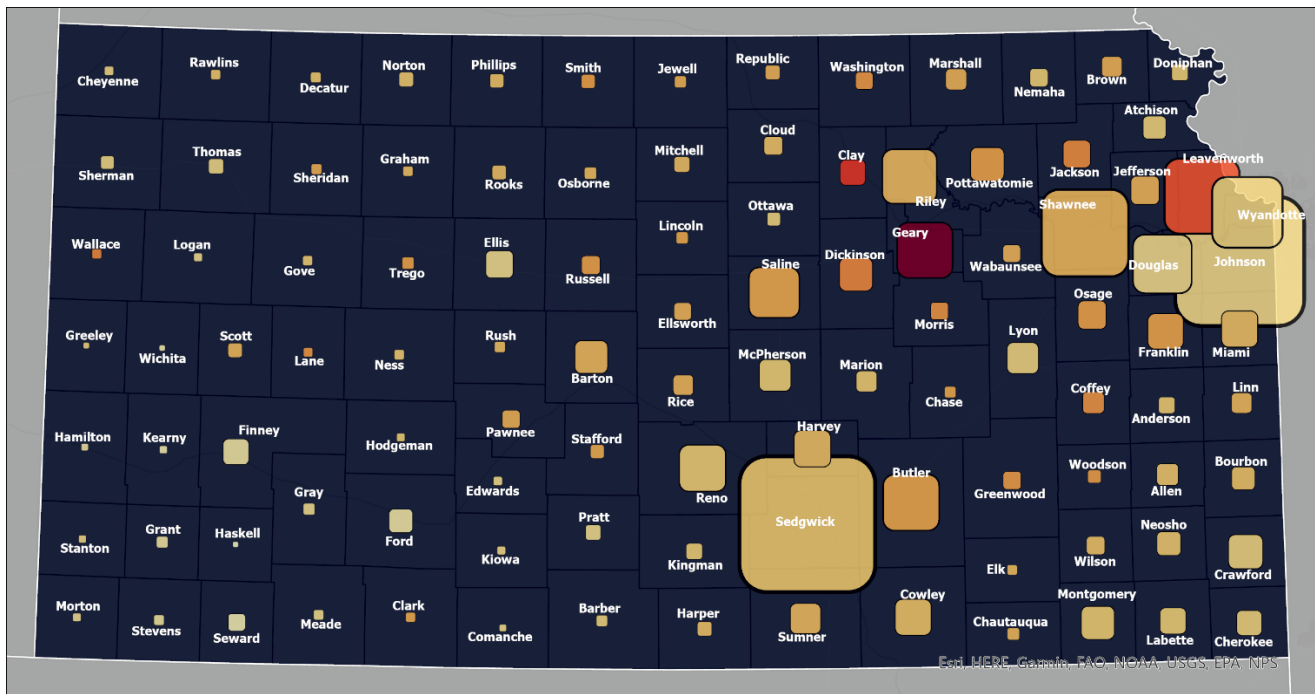
### 3.2.1.3 Veterans

There are 163,000 Veterans, or 5.5% of the population, residing in Kansas today. The Census shows that 14.5% of Veterans are without broadband access. The Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs identified two common barriers for veterans: affordability of broadband connectivity and awareness of ACP or device programs. First, there is evidence to suggest not all veteran service points of contact are familiar with or adequately trained in these affordability and device programs. Second, access to employment training and opportunities often relies on digital literacy skills, which presents a significant barrier for many veterans, especially for those who are unhoused.

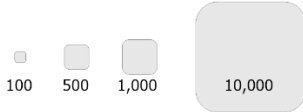
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

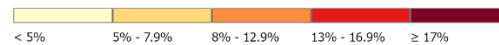
### TOTAL VETERANS 18 YEARS AND OVER



#### Total Veterans 18 Years and Over



#### Percent of Civilian Population 18 Years and Over who are Veterans



Data Source:  
2020 U.S. Census

Older veterans have specific barriers to using technology because of a lack of digital education, training, and adoption. Those in this group tend to be on limited or fixed income with little computer knowledge and limited access to technology.

The health of veterans and the need to access telehealth was of specific concern and highlighted often in focused conversations. In WSU's survey, of those who identified themselves as a veteran, 26.1% believed training would help them utilize online doctor visits and 29.8% answered they did not know where to go for help with digital literacy skills.<sup>40</sup>

The western portion of the state lacks a veterans' affairs location, which increases the importance of online access for veterans in this portion of the state. Without broadband infrastructure, critical services become non-existent, and veterans may not receive needed services. To fill this need, Kansas Workforce Centers offer a Local Veteran Representative who can offer referrals to other veteran programs and assist with employment services, training, and education.

<sup>40</sup> Kansas Department of Commerce, Office of Broadband Development. (May 2023). *Digital Equity in Kansas – Kansas Broadband Roadshow*. [www.kansascommerce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/digital-equity-roadshow-report-06.09.23v14.pdf](http://www.kansascommerce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/digital-equity-roadshow-report-06.09.23v14.pdf) (1,777 MB)

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

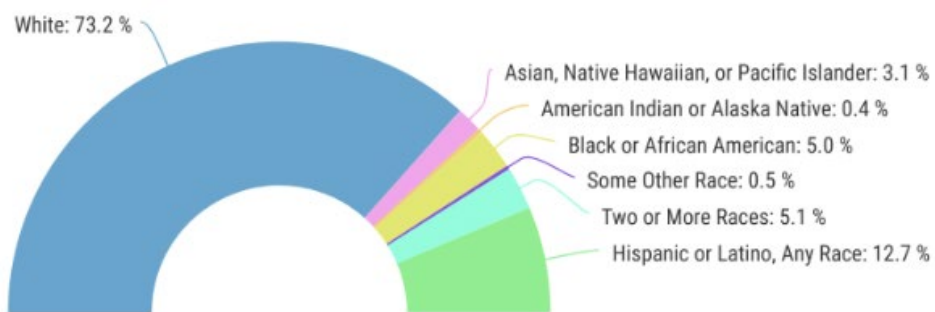
TABLE 15: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, VETERANS

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	70.5%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		80.0%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	76.4%	40.2%	TBD		84.0%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	94.1%	85.1%	80.0%		96.0%	65.0%

### 3.2.1.4 Individuals Who are Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority

Broadband disparities impact racial and ethnic minority populations disproportionately, and Kansas must address their needs during this moment of opportunity. In Kansas 24% of the overall population, or 382,603 individuals, identify as a member of a racial or ethnic minority. To better understand their unique needs, KOBD worked with members of African American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Sovereign Tribal Nation communities to identify barriers and needs specific to each population.

KANSAS POPULATION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

Wichita, Kansas City, and Garden City are all home to refugee communities. Dodge City, Liberal, and Great Bend are also highly diverse communities (though many perceive them to be homogeneous) that involve migrant labor for meat packing, farming, the dairy industry, and other endeavors that impact the state’s agriculturally driven economy. Liberal has the highest free/reduced-price lunch population in the state. Kansas City, Wichita, and Garden City are communities where residents speak a total of 40-80 languages. Highlighting these diverse needs will help draw a clearer picture of the challenges especially related to digital equity, where education and foundational literacy are at play.

Looking at minority populations with more specificity, the African American population includes 5% of Kansans, most residing in or near densely populated urban locations. Affordability is a notable barrier, but not the only significant one. A review of the BSL data and conversations with Advisory Council members and key community leaders revealed that another key barrier is the presence of unserved areas despite their proximity to densely populated areas with broadband service. This is particularly true for those who reside in multi-dwelling units (MDUs) and who encounter accessibility issues when the building needs equipment upgrades to improve unit access. KOBD found evidence of this when layering speed test data with demographic information. As a result, KOBD is working with ISPs to develop solutions like discounted rates and shared access points for MDU residents.

In some cases, neighborhoods with higher percentages of African American residents had speeds that registered as underserved in the speed test data, compared to neighborhoods with a different demographic make-up. The census block group highlighted below, which includes 66% African American residents, depicts one block as underserved despite proximity to served areas. KOBD validated these observations by investigating urban BSL locations like the one below using KOBD GIS and mapping platforms.

### UNDERSERVED CENSUS BLOCK NEAR SERVED AREAS



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

Furthermore, a visual check of the block via Google Map Street View shows this block comprises MDUs to consider for equipment upgrades, potentially through BEAD funding.



KOBD heard from Roadshow stakeholders who mentioned affordability of broadband services and the devices needed to participate in virtual services as issues, along with a need to increase digital literacy skills training. African American leaders and advocates stressed the need to make programs like nonprofits that specialize in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Manufacturing (STEAM) training available to members of these communities. These organizations find it difficult to source funding despite being dependent on grants. In addition, some of these programs are small and serve their populations well, but they struggle to scale up resources. Larger collaborations and coalitions to expand the reach across the entire state are necessary.

Members of the Hispanic (12% of Kansans), Asian/Pacific Islander (3%), and other ethnic minority populations (including 0.5% identifying as “other” and 5.1% as “two or more races”) may have issues accessing resources due to language barriers. There are also inter-generational needs related to family communication and connections that are part of their native cultures.

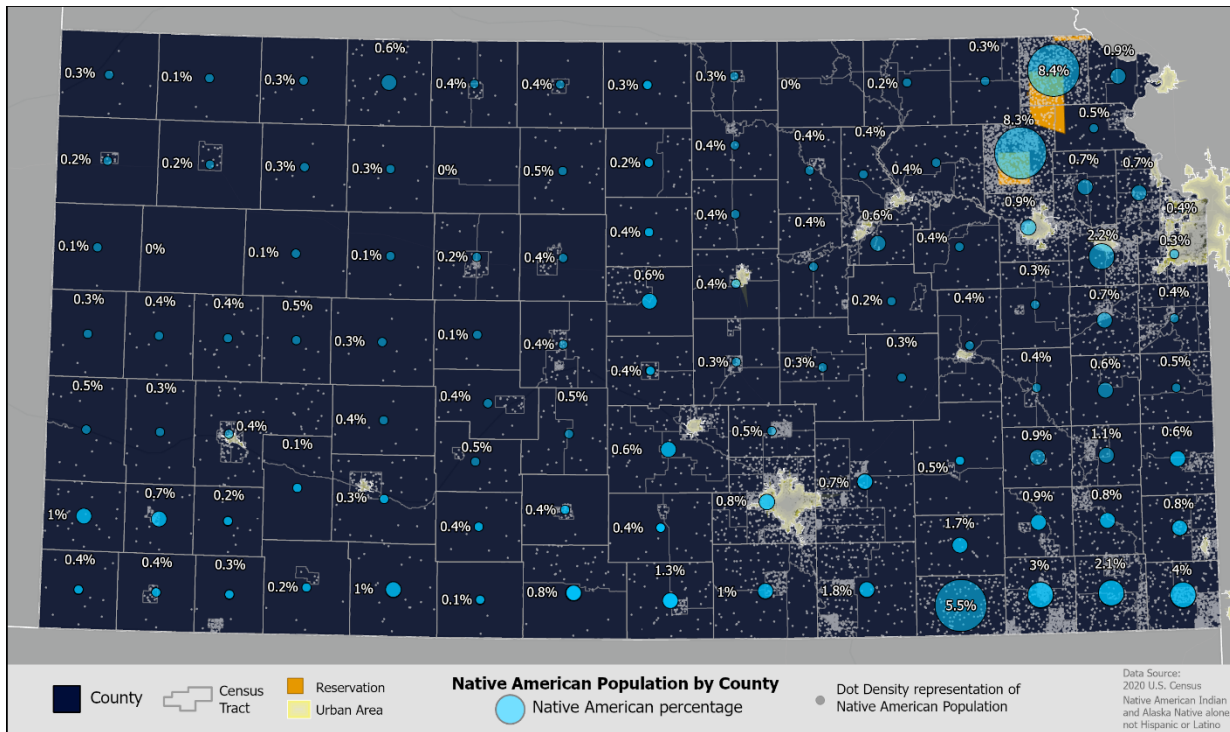
For instance, in a specific focus group conversation with the Hispanic population located in Dodge County, many in attendance held jobs at the local meat packing facility. The lack of a reliable and quality internet connection was a critical point, as participants noted that this can limit communications with family members, especially children, during emergencies. Focus group attendees mentioned they would welcome digital literacy skills training and find it helpful as part of the onboarding or continuing education of their jobs. Moreover, important work-related documents are online, such as paystubs, benefits or payroll forms, and access codes. Thus, training in digital literacy skills would be beneficial, but there was specific mention it must be the right amount of training at a rate learners can absorb.



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION BY COUNTY<sup>41</sup>



KOBD will continue to build trust and effective relationships with representatives of the tribes. Resources like the Kansas Native American Affairs Office, the NTIA, and urban tribal associations will help meet the digital equity needs of Sovereign Tribal Nation members. KOBD will promote a coordinated approach both on and off Sovereign Tribal Nation lands, as access to programs varies depending on residence in or outside of Tribal lands.

**TABLE 16: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, MEMBERS OF A RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITY**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	72.7%	25.3%		TBD	77.6%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	78.2%	40.2%		TBD	82.1%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	94.5%	85.1%		80.0%	95.5%	80.0%

<sup>41</sup> U.S Census Bureau. (2020). Kansas Population Change - Race and Ethnicity by County. [www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/kansas-population-change-between-census-decade.html](http://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/kansas-population-change-between-census-decade.html)

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

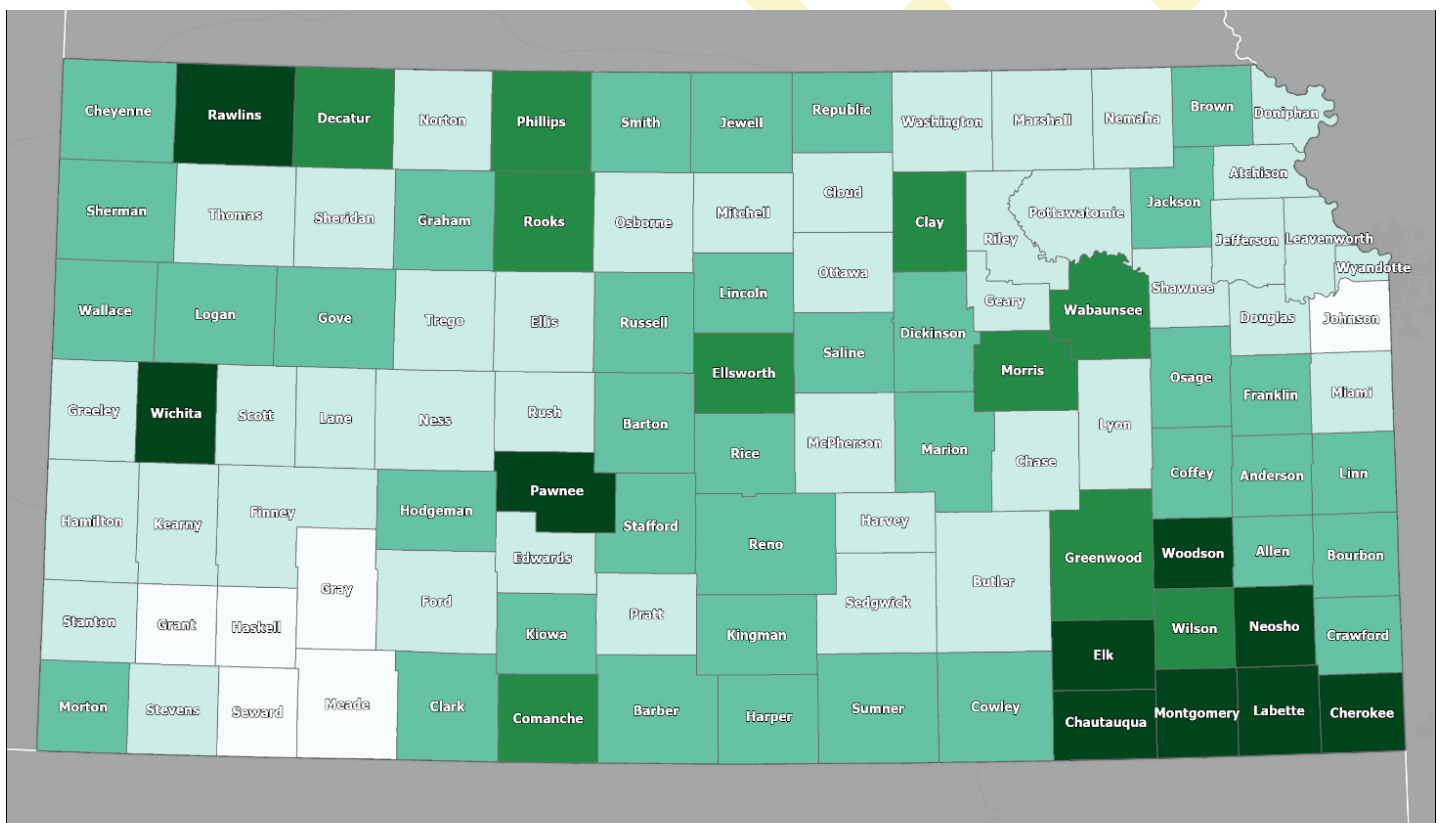
## Barriers and Assets

### 3.2.1.5 Individuals with Disabilities

In Kansas, 14% of Kansans (409,000 people) live with at least one disability. Up to 71,000 Kansans with disabilities find themselves without a reliable broadband connection, creating additional barriers to participation in social and economic situations that others in their communities can participate in. KOBd held various listening sessions with key agencies that support individuals with disabilities, including the Assistive Technology for Kansans program, and citizens who identify or support someone with a disability. These first-hand experiences highlighted how the broadband needs of individuals with disabilities intertwine with their health-related needs. Participants specifically mentioned telehealth and mental health services. Phone support is of limited value without a reliable, quality broadband connection. Most of the programs that provide the appropriate services for disability support are online, and many assistive technologies require broadband to operate most effectively.

Participants also mentioned the cost of training on special equipment designed with specific needs and sustainable funding as significant issues. Access to supportive additional services like instruments that can translate into braille or other necessary supportive services needs to be more robust in the state.

PERCENT OF POPULATION WITH A DISABILITY



Percent of Population with a Disability



Data Source:  
American Community Survey



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

TABLE 17: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES


	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	59.8%	25.3% (total average)		TBD	67.2%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	67.8%	40.2%		TBD	73.8%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.0%	85.1%		80.0%	93.4%	65.0%

### 3.2.1.6 Justice-Involved Individuals

Kansas has approximately 8,900 individuals (0.03% of the population) serving in the DOC system, including nearly 140 juveniles. Including those who are in the parole system adds 5,310 individuals. The DOC works to support the needs of justice-involved populations despite some of the connectivity firewalls that are necessary while one serves a sentence. Direct conversations with DOC, corrections officers, and justice-involved individuals focused on those people nearing the end of a sentence and about to re-enter society. The conversation revealed that not all corrections facilities have access to robust broadband services, which hinders digital literacy skills and creates security risks during outages. Redundant, robust broadband access is a security need.

This focus group related how unstable, unreliable broadband access affects their daily life. When service goes down, the lack of reliable broadband prevents connection with loved ones who act as a source of emotional support and hampers access to resources. One focus group member explained how the inability can increase stress on facilities.

Probation officers for the DOC explained that many of those re-entering society start their post-incarceration cycle with a government-issued cell phone. This limited-in-utility cell phone does not allow for two-factor authentication, which is often a necessity to access governmental assistance programs and job application sites. The affordability of



**Devices and Training  
Contribute to Employment**

*New to Wichita, Roger was re-entering society. Looking for a fresh start, he was quickly faced with the need for broadband to access online services.*

*While trying to apply for jobs from his residence, Roger missed several opportunities due to lack of broadband.*

*With help from the Wichita Work Release Facility, Roger accessed internet and a computer, plus referrals to community resources. He learned how to research jobs, create a resume, and apply for work, helping him adjust.*

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

broadband service is the next barrier, given that many recently released individuals are financially constrained when re-entering society. Deciding between core necessities and a broadband connection is a difficult decision as one tries to begin a new life in the digital economy.

This population also mentioned applying online for jobs and social services as issues, with training and support in these areas as points of emphasis. For many who are re-entering society, ongoing technical support and training are necessary. Continuity of job training and skills training also relates to recidivism, and DOC pointed toward a need to build more programs that develop job certification prior to re-entry.

**TABLE 18: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS**


	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of facilities with Gigabit-level broadband service	N/A	Percentage of facilities with formal basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available for residents		N/A	N/A
<b>Baseline</b>	0%		TBD			
<b>2026 Target</b>	50%		TBD			
<b>2030 Target</b>	87.5%		80%			

### 3.2.1.7 Aging Individuals

There are 382,603 people (23% of the population) over 60 residing in Kansas. Roadshow participants explained that “aging in place” is a major concern for older adults who reside in areas that currently do not have reliable or quality internet service. In counties with higher populations of citizens aged 60 and older, the ability to access online telehealth and medical services such as telemedicine visits and long-term care monitoring is critical. Conversations with medical professionals revealed that medical device monitoring is a critical component in seniors’ ability to age in place. Devices that monitor vital information and deliver it to care providers in real-time require affordable, reliable broadband. Disruptions in connectivity due to slow and unreliable internet can jeopardize aging individuals’ independence and health outcomes.

From WSU’s broadband survey, 44.7% of older adults in Kansas use the internet for online doctor visits and 74.5% spend more than four hours a day online. Yet 28.9% do not know where to go for internet help and 10% disagree or strongly disagree they know how to use the internet (compared to 5% of the general population).

In KOBD’s digital equity surveys and listening sessions across the state, older adults mentioned how connecting with loved ones utilizing broadband connections is important. Those who live in rural areas with little to no broadband infrastructure experience periods of isolation when




**Digital Literacy Skills Build Confidence**

*Many adults lack basic computer skills, experience, or devices. This is the case for many Johnson County Adult Education students, including Pilar, an English learner in her 50s, who had never used a computer and was fearful of using a laptop in class.*

*A JCAE volunteer taught Pilar basics like turning on the computer and using the mouse and keyboard. The first time Pilar logged in by herself, she was so excited, she jumped out of her chair!*

*Pilar’s new digital literacy skills have opened up a new world for her, and she looks forward to learning even more.*



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

video chats with loved ones are not an option. In addition, many aging Kansans without broadband are unable to obtain critical information or deliveries when needed. This leaves them disconnected from society and what is happening in their community and the world.

Organizations like the Kansas Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC) chapters in Kansas explained in conversations with KOBD that digital literacy skills like understanding how to use the internet also present a barrier for older people across Kansas. The speed at which devices are changing and upgrading is a challenge for individuals who are not familiar with or native to technology. Organizations like ADRC address these issues with programs and would benefit from expanded funds for digital training resources. Another important concern is safety when using devices and technology. Security precautions, criminal activity, scams, and misleading advertising are concerns and present ongoing risks for the older population, especially for those on a fixed income who may be targets of cybercrime or phone scams.

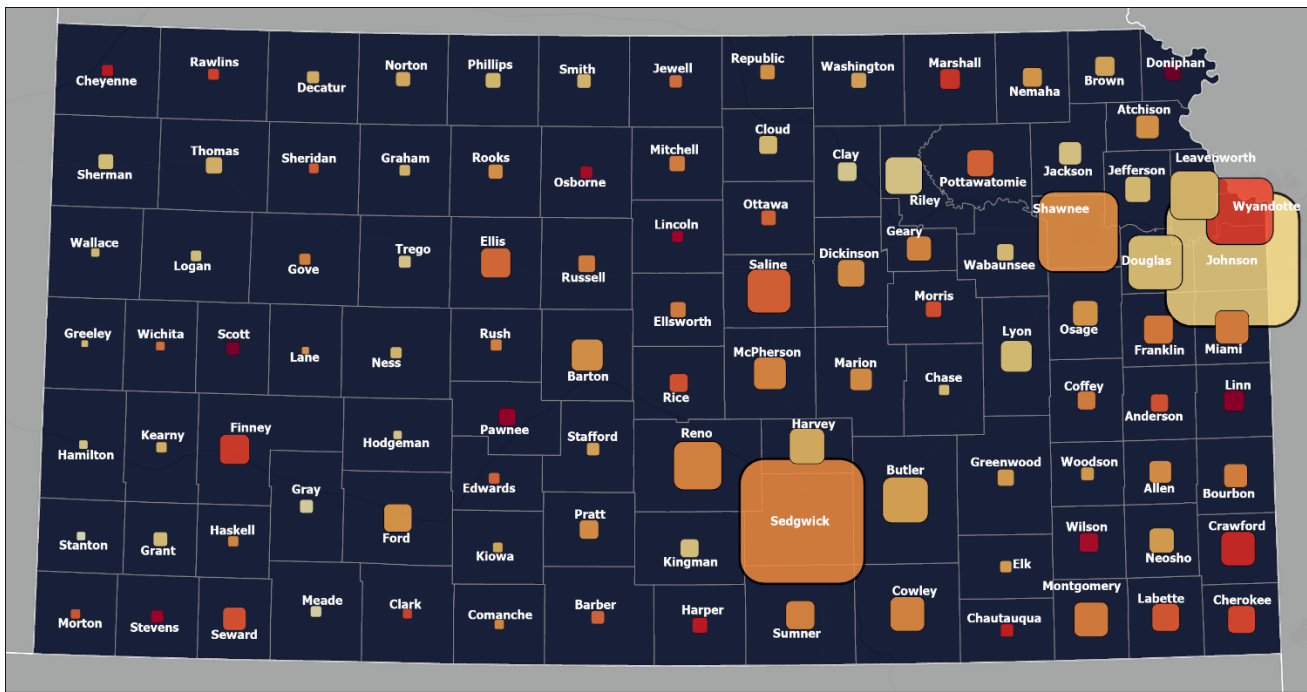
**TABLE 19: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, AGING INDIVIDUALS**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of covered population with broadband service according to the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	64.6%	25.3% (total average)		TBD	73.1%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	71.7%	40.2%		TBD	78.5%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.9%	85.1%		80.0%	94.7%	65.0%

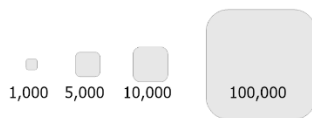
# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

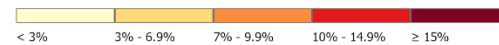
### SENIOR POPULATION (60+) WHOSE INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS WAS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL



Senior Population (60+) whose income in the past 12 months is below poverty level



Percent of Seniors (60+) whose income in the past 12 months is below poverty level



Data Source:  
2020 U.S. Census

### 3.2.1.8 Individuals with a Language Barrier

61,800 individuals (2.1% of the population) responded to the Census that they speak English “not well” or “not at all.” 46.9% of this population does not own a desktop or laptop computer. Affordability is a major barrier.

Access to resources without translation or effective guidance creates an insurmountable challenge for members of this covered population. During a WSU listening session with organizations supporting refugees, staff explained the importance of digital navigators. Without one, a simple application can become an impossible task. Moreover, this obstacle can arise at any stage of the process. If there are issues during equipment installation at the home of a person with a language barrier, the installer may not be able to successfully complete the installation. Thus, providing digital navigation assistance is immensely important to this covered population.

Not all ISPs offer support in signing up for ACP or other affordability programs in languages other than English. This barrier is especially prevalent in refugee populations navigating resettlement. The WSU report states the International Rescue Commission (IRC) explains there are significant barriers because most job applications are only in English or Spanish, whereas IRC’s Wichita service center serves those who speak Swahili, Pashto, Dari, Arabic, and Ukrainian.

The language barrier is not the only barrier for this covered population. IRC also mentioned concerns over proper documentation. For instance, without guidance, information about what identification will allow an individual to

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

access ACP can be confusing. The program is flexible and requires various forms of identification. A digital navigator can support these applicants and eliminate that confusion.

The DCF representative on the Advisory Council shared that for parents, guardians, school-aged children, and independent youth who speak other languages, navigating online education can be difficult, frustrating, and harmful to the children if not successfully and effectively managed. During the COVID pandemic, families required to participate in school from home without the expertise to troubleshoot online software or equipment had additional hurdles to equitable schooling.

**TABLE 20: MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, INDIVIDUALS WITH A LANGUAGE BARRIER**

	Availability	Affordability	Digital Literacy Skills	Cybersecurity	Devices	Public Services
<b>Definition</b>	Percentage of people with a broadband connection who speak English "not well" or "not at all" on the ACS survey	Percentage of eligible covered population members enrolled in ACP or subsequent programs	Percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy skills training (including basic cybersecurity skills) available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI		Percentage of covered population with a broadband-enabled device (laptop or desktop computer) according to the ACS survey	Percentage of covered population with support from digital navigators trained in the use of online public services available within a 30-minute commute or at the nearest CAI
<b>Baseline</b>	61.7%	25.3% (total average)	TBD		53.0%	TBD
<b>2026 Target</b>	69.4%	40.2%	TBD		62.4%	TBD
<b>2030 Target</b>	92.3%	85.1%	80.0%		90.6%	65.0%

### 3.2.2 Broadband Adoption

The barriers that affect broadband adoption for all Kansans amplify the issues for covered populations. The stacking of barriers upon one another creates substantial roadblocks to the use of broadband resources. The Advisory Council mentioned the negative impact of these issues working in concert, regardless of which covered population they were primarily serving.

#### 3.2.2.1 Telehealth and Telemedicine

Telemedicine and telehealth are important components to modern day medical care. The lack of reliable, affordable, and quality broadband service and how it negatively impacts the usefulness of these services was raised as a key issue in every Roadshow around the state.

Knowing that telehealth is a growing resource requirement for the state, the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund and REACH Healthcare Foundation, in collaboration with KU’s Medical Center, interviewed providers, administrators, and the public to identify their needs in the growing sector. Both patients and providers believed there is benefit in telehealth, as it allows access to care which would otherwise be difficult to access, particularly in a rural state such as Kansas. The state must encourage standardization of telehealth care to ensure that the public

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

can have confidence that they know how to use the resource well and free of security concerns.<sup>42</sup>

Kansas will need to establish public policy and statewide resources as telehealth becomes a more trusted option. Currently, the leading resource is the KU Center for Telemedicine & Telehealth (KUCCT). It is an excellent partner to guide member healthcare facilities through the process of establishing telehealth and telemedicine programs. KUCCT serves 72 of 105 counties in the state but lacks the appropriate resources to expand. With funding, KUCCT could develop the staff and program implementation to do the necessary outreach, implementation, and administrative support to establish a full statewide initiative.

### 3.2.2.2 Housing Authorities and Broadband Adoption

Housing authorities act as a first line of support for many of the individuals in covered populations. Many housing authorities understand the programs their residents can access, including ACP or other affordability programs. MDUs also exist on the property of housing authorities, thus making them necessary partners in solving for the need to upgrade the wiring of MDUs without adequate and reliable broadband to each unit.

The Kansas Housing Authority, Topeka Housing Authority, and others have begun discussing the topic of internet access on housing properties. As ACP outreach coordination becomes a larger focus, bringing the housing authorities onboard will be beneficial. To make this a statewide effort, KOBD will invite the member organizations of the Kansas Community Action Agencies Association to become part of the affordable housing and broadband conversation. Where there is not a defined housing authority, Community Action Agencies are supporting individuals and families in their housing needs.

As the network of digital equity deepens across the state, and more federal programs and resources come online, like Connect Home USA for housing via HUD, KOBD will work to align efforts with these organizations.

### 3.2.2.3 Digital Navigation

Digital navigation and digital navigators are key pieces to the puzzle as we work to close the digital divide. Most rural communities have few or no organizations offering digital navigation support, and distance to resources limits participation. Rural organizations also have limited computer stations open to the public, and many lack rental device programs to develop skills and learn at home.

Digital navigation programs grow organically from the need of a localized population and a committed organization that gathers the resources and community to support them, but their growth and success are not accessible through a centralized service. This leads to uneven access to digital literacy skills training and digital navigation throughout the state.

Organizations such as the United Food and Commercial Workers Union that serve much of the Hispanic population in Dodge City and Liberal have been successful in building digital navigation programs as an extension of their core services. With funding, this program could develop the staff and program implementation to do the necessary outreach, implementation, and administrative support to establish a full statewide initiative.

Digital navigation is essential for adoption, with many organizations in the start-up phase of their organizational life. As this resource matures, Kansas can develop career pathways within digital navigation. Currently, the state's

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<sup>42</sup> United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, REACH Healthcare Foundation, and in collaboration with University of Kansas Medical Center. (May 25, 2022). *Telehealth in Kansas During COVID-19: A Status Report*. <https://healthfund.org/wp-content/uploads/09-08-22-UMHMF-Cross-Study-Report.pdf> (231 MB)

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

librarians are the pinnacle of digital navigation along with a few nonprofits and some local service providers.

KOBD will build digital navigator career tools and help grow the resources needed to adequately support these statewide programs. Leveraging the curriculum development resources of Kansas higher education institutions is one way to build a digital navigator pipeline and ensure it provides the training, multilingual support, and service to the communities who can most benefit from digital navigator support.

### 3.2.2.4 Digital Literacy Skills Education, Knowledge, and Skills Training

Strong digital literacy skills partners operate in Kansas, including K-State Research and Extension. K-State Research and Extension has a presence in every Kansas county and throughout the Kansas K-12 school system, acting as a resource for its students and guardians. In many cases, school-aged children may be bilingual and may have more digital literacy skills as a “digital native.” During COVID schools provided digital navigation resources to families as they had to troubleshoot technology problems for students. Schools are a front-line partner in ensuring students and families have affordable access to broadband.

Workforce Centers and Goodwill locations also incorporated digital literacy skills training into their program design. Digital literacy skills training partners offer resources in connection to workforce development and job readiness programs. The National Skills Coalition’s 2023 report, *Closing the Digital Skill Divide*, finds 92% of jobs require some level of digital literacy skills, including minimum wage positions.<sup>43</sup> Thus, there is an economic benefit to develop digital literacy skills both as the individual worker (i.e., ability to earn on average 23% more than a job requiring no digital literacy skills) and as the business owner (i.e., retaining workers and reducing turnover from mismatched skills needed).

Members of the Advisory Council, key nonprofits, and state agencies offer digital literacy skills training to their constituencies but have expressed a need for a “basket of tools.” Understanding and solving for the barriers of broadband access and adoption is complex and requires various tools like Northstar, DigitalLearn.org, and Human-I-T Selecting tools. These tools should include robust reporting features that will track and help achieve milestones needed to meet the objectives.

The ability of digital literacy skills organizations to scale statewide would increase if resources and tools were subsidized or provided at no cost to organizations. The Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank’s report, “Disconnected: Seven Lessons on Fixing the Digital Divide,” found in their survey of nonprofit organizations offering digital literacy skills that 47% use funding for more skills training offerings. Stipends are important to ensure participation. Stipends could compensate volunteers or support low-income participants as they pursue digital literacy skills training. As with digital navigators, ensuring enough instructors are available to meet the need will be important. Both digital navigation and digital literacy skills training need resources dedicated to train-the-trainer programs.

### 3.2.2.5 Philanthropic Support

A common concern shared by the Advisory Council is that federal funds remain insufficient to satisfy the digital equity needs of Kansas, signaling a need for state or philanthropic investments and support.

Community, family, and corporate foundations, along with other established philanthropies, support programs with digital inclusion efforts built into their offerings. The Health Forward Foundation participates on the advisory board

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<sup>43</sup> Bergson-Shilcock, A., & Taylor, R. (2023). *Closing the Digital Skill Divide*. National Skills Coalition. [https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/NSC-DigitalDivide\\_report\\_Feb2023.pdf](https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/NSC-DigitalDivide_report_Feb2023.pdf). (2,054 MB).

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

for the Kansas City Regional COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, which awarded \$850,000 toward digital equity initiatives aimed at closing digital equipment, accessibility, and literacy gaps in the Kansas City region.

The importance of this unprecedented federal funding for digital equity efforts can amplify the giving potential of philanthropic organizations and calls for extraordinary alignment of efforts.

### 3.2.2.6 Local and Regional Broadband and Digital Equity Planning

Local and regional participation in digital equity programs is necessary for the continued success of Kansas' digital equity mission. Many local and regional leaders are new to broadband infrastructure and the digital equity needs of their communities. By creating a "Broadband Ready Communities" (BRC) program, KOBD will engage local and regional leadership on broadband-facing topics, including digital equity. The aim of the BRC program is to increase community participation, technical assistance, and awareness of broadband access and adoption in preparation for the upcoming investment over the next few years. For instance, KOBD will incent interested communities to adopt favorable permitting and fee ordinances for efficient and effective buildouts. Communities who successfully implement these changes will more quickly implement grant-funded programs in support of this work.

When discussing the interplay between BEAD and DEA, the Advisory Council suggested digital equity resources such as a toolkit or training module integrate with local and regional broadband education and planning support.

### 3.2.2.7 Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)

Prior to BEAD and Digital Equity Act funding, Kansas had 1,626 identified CAIs. Applying the NTIA's definition of CAI (i.e., a school, library, health clinic, health center, hospital or other medical provider, public safety entity, institution of higher education, public housing organization, or community support organization that facilitates greater use of broadband connection), the number of CAIs in Kansas shot to over 8,500. KOBD plans to regularly review the CAI list alongside community partners and providers to help identify community locations that should qualify for inclusion. The goal is to ensure that every community has community anchors identified that provide access to public Wi-Fi to support their residents.

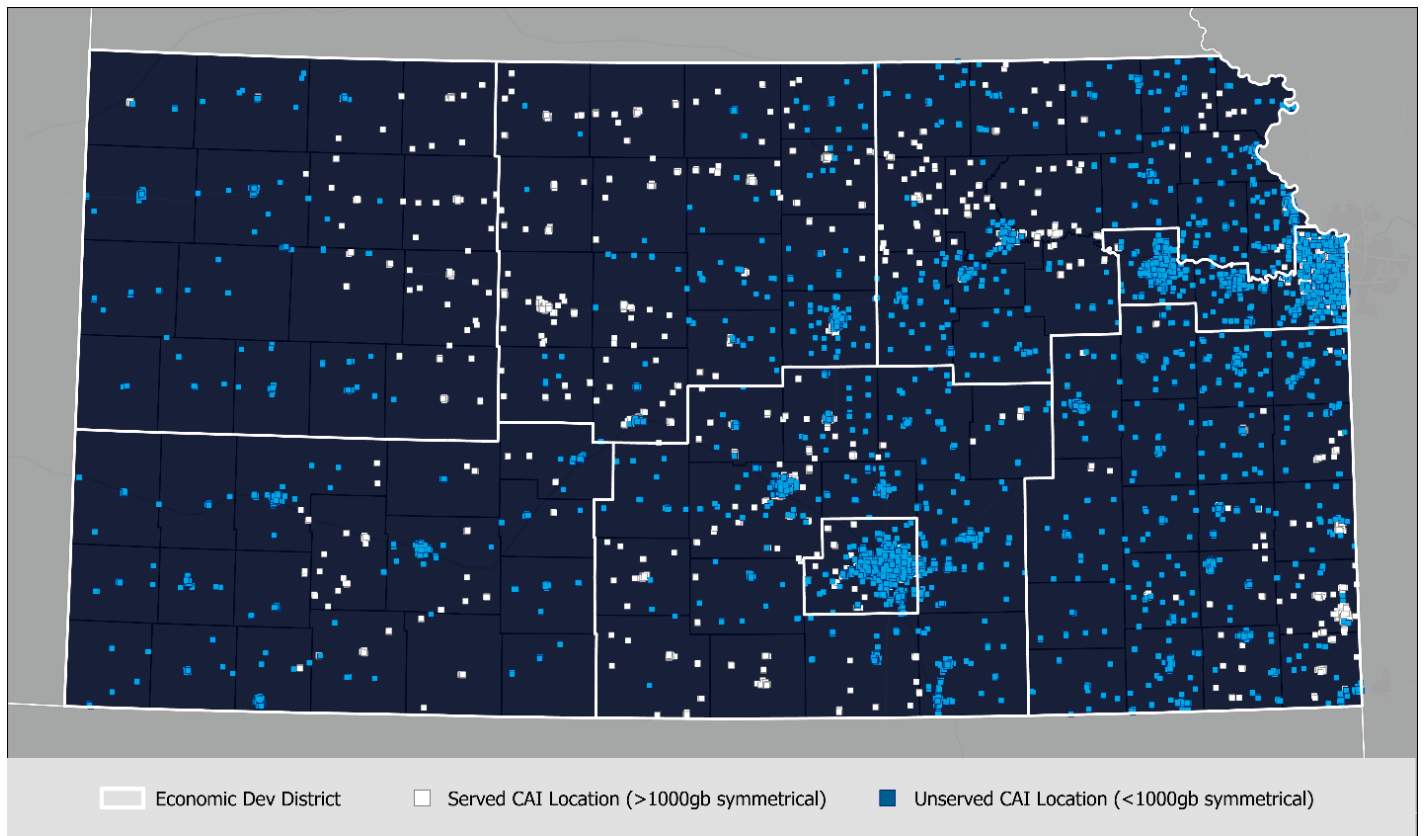
The provision of 1 Gbps symmetrical broadband will be dependent upon the CAIs themselves verifying the need for such a service in support of their communities. KOBD will conduct a survey to all CAIs after the Volume 1 public comment period to verify the demand at each location.



# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

COMMUNITY ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS (CAIs)<sup>44</sup>



### 3.2.3 Broadband Affordability

#### 3.2.3.1 Lower Costs

The cost of monthly broadband subscriptions remains a barrier to universal service in Kansas. In WSU's survey, KOBD found:

- Sixty-two percent of respondents paid between \$50.00 and \$99.99 per month for a broadband subscription.
- Eight percent paid between \$0-49.99 per month for a broadband subscription.
- Those who reported earning between \$20,000 and \$99,000 per year reported paying an average of \$86 per month for a broadband subscription.
- Those who reported earning over \$100,000 per year reported paying an average of \$132 per month for a broadband subscription.

<sup>44</sup> Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) Map from Kansas Office of Broadband Development (KOBD) Mapping System.

# 3. Current State of Digital Equity

## Barriers and Assets

KOBD meets with the ISP community in bi-weekly roundtable sessions. KOBD utilizes these opportunities and additional outreach to ISPs to encourage the creation and promotion of discount plans to sustain affordable prices for broadband service across all covered populations and Kansas as a whole.

### 3.2.3.2 Unbundled Services

The inconvenience of “bundling” of services (i.e., when providers offer discounts for subscribing to multiple services like cable, wireless connections, cell phones, and internet-of-things (IOT) home offerings) is an issue. Households who wish to pay for a broadband subscription face a different cost than someone who “bundles.” This disincentivizes those with financial constraints from subscribing to an internet service.

### 3.2.3.3 ACP Awareness, Enrollment, and Recertification

For those who qualify, ACP is the primary resource Kansans use for an affordable broadband connection. The current ACP enrollment rate for Kansas is 26.0%, which ranks us 37th in the country. Increasing communication and awareness to qualifying families is a priority of KOBD.

Specifically, KOBD will support three ACP Outreach grant recipients: the City of Topeka, Wichita State University, and KC Digital Drive. ISPs, with their own programs, can help by maintaining those programs, defining equitable eligibility thresholds, and collaborating on programs and standards to advance affordability and access.

While KOBD will focus on increased participation for ACP and other broadband benefit programs, it is equally important to nurture those who have taken advantage of these programs so that they continue to avail themselves of the benefits.



# 4. Stakeholder Engagement

This section identifies digital equity stakeholders and their contributions, as well as KOB D’s strategies to engage current and future stakeholders.

## 4.1 Coordination and Outreach Strategy

Connecting with Kansans about their broadband access, affordability, and adoption issues was an important and invaluable exercise for KOB D to develop this Digital Equity Plan. Starting in January 2023, KOB D conducted listening sessions, hosted focus groups, gave presentations, and listened directly to community leaders and advocates. Conversation and targeted outreach will continue, and KOB D offers a snapshot of that work below.

### 4.1.1 KOB D Roadshow

KOB D collaborated with the WSU Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) to facilitate a series of community meetings, lead listening sessions, and conduct a survey of Kansans to learn about their “lived experience” in the digital divide. As part of their efforts, WSU PPMC completed:

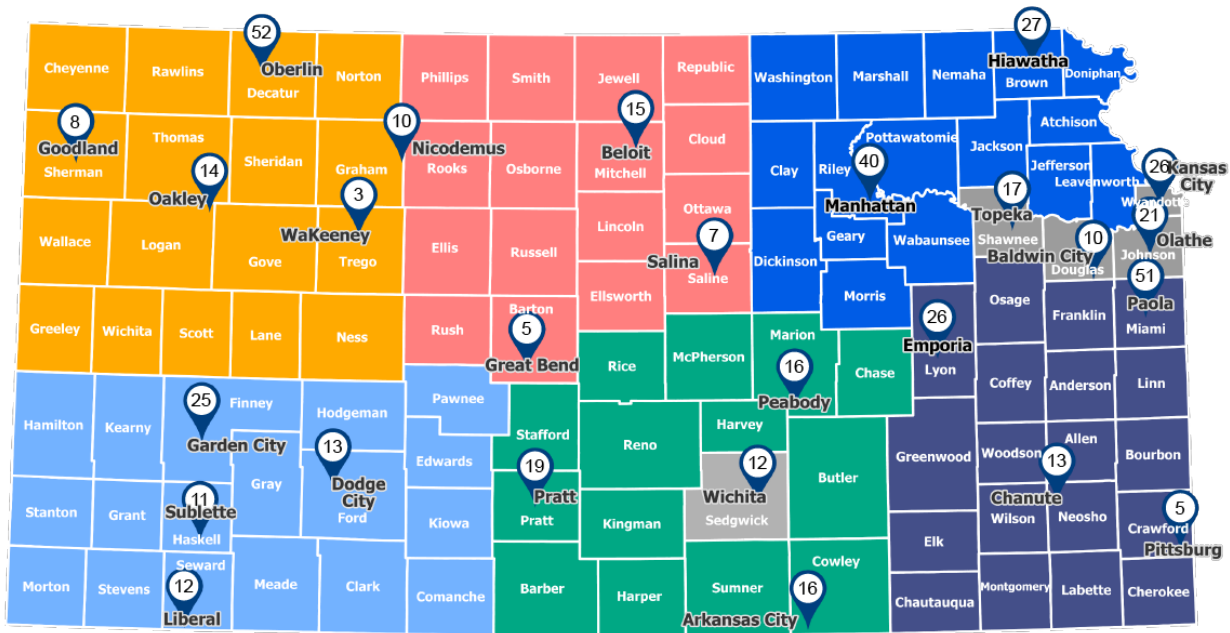
- **Facilitation of community listening sessions:** KOB D conducted a statewide “Broadband Roadshow” in the spring of 2023, with staff traveling over 50,000 miles and presenting events in more than 26 locations across the state. These meetings served as the initial introduction of KOB D to the residents, businesses, local officials, nonprofits, CAIs, and associations of Kansas with a goal to meet Kansans “where they live.” To collect as many voices as possible, PPMC provided translation services for eight events, identified for the density of primarily Spanish-speaking populations. These events also involved targeted outreach (i.e., radio ads, flyers, and video for social media) in Spanish. KOB D partnered with local leaders and advocates to advertise the events locally and employed local and grassroots marketing channels (i.e., press releases, local newspaper articles, and social media groups). For instance, KOB D interacted with local Facebook buy-sell-trade groups, local Vietnamese groups, and other locally suggested groups.
- **Statewide digital connectivity survey:** The survey, offered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, gathered 680 responses.
- **Virtual listening sessions with organizations representing covered populations:** PPMC conducted five virtual listening sessions with leaders from agencies who support aging individuals, individuals with disabilities, individuals who live in low-income households, justice-involved individuals, individuals with a language barrier, and veterans.



The full report is in Appendix 4— Kansas Office of Broadband Development and Wichita State University Roadshow Report – “Digital Equity in Kansas.”

# 4. Stakeholder Engagement

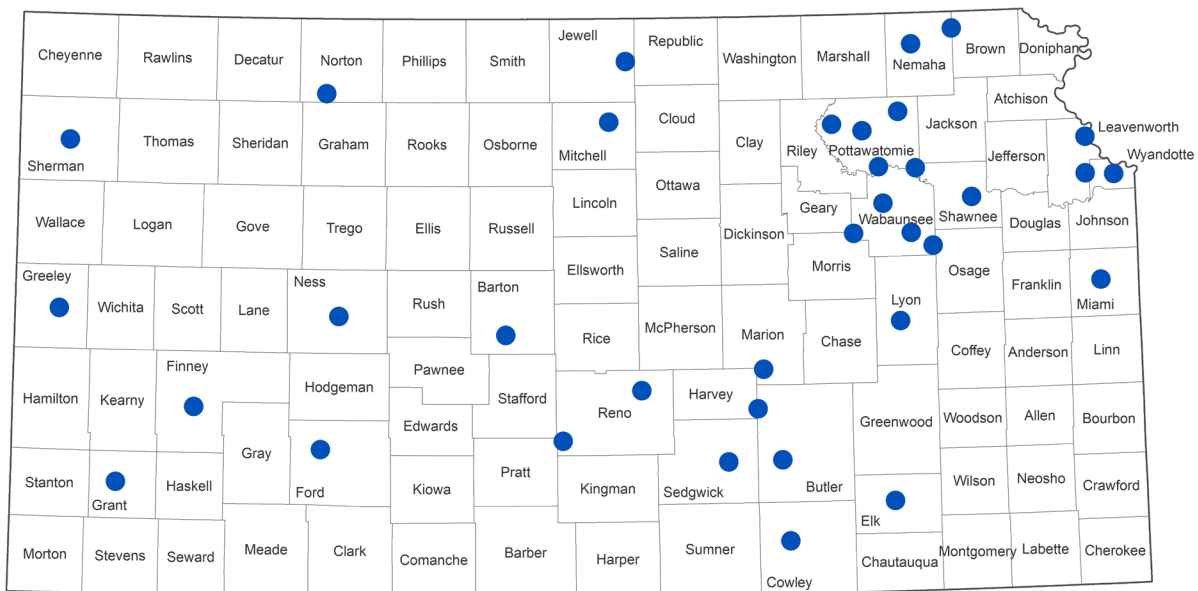
KANSAS ROADSHOW LOCATIONS



## 4.1.2 University of Kansas and Digital Equity Asset Map

KOBD engaged the KU Institute for Policy and Social Research to conduct an asset mapping exercise. Over 100 organizations that offer digital equity services to the community provided their information.

DIGITAL ACCESS ORGANIZATIONS RESPONDENTS BY LOCATION



The full report is in Appendix 5—University of Kansas Institute for Policy and Research Report – “Digital Inclusion Assets in Kansas.”

## 4.1.3 Additional Surveys

KOBD will continue to conduct surveys to measure progress on closing the digital divide. Inspired by their attendance at the Roadshow, the Kansas Department of Agriculture circulated a broadband survey based on questions asked at the Roadshow. The 179 responses added personal perspectives from rural inhabitants. The details of the survey are in Appendix 6—Agriculture Bureau Survey of Constituents.

## 4.1.4 Digital Equity Advisory Council

KOBD established a Digital Equity Advisory Council to support the development of a State Digital Equity Plan. The Advisory Council provided crucial input from practitioners of various backgrounds, experience, careers, and passion for this work. The Advisory Council meets twice monthly with exercises, homework, and discussions, providing information for every element of this Digital Equity Plan.



**TABLE 21: MEMBERS OF THE DIGITAL EQUITY ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Name	Title/Organization
Barbara Bichelmeyer	Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor, University of Kansas
Chan Brown	Program Officer, Kansas Health Foundation
Kenya Cox (With TJ Ingram)	President, Kansas State Conference of NAACP (State Legal Redress Chair, Kansas State Conference of NAACP)
Aaron Deacon (With Leslie Scott)	Managing Director, Kansas City Digital Drive (Program Manager, Kansas City Digital Drive)
Glenda DuBoise	State Director, AARP Kansas
William Duncan	Assist Research Professor of Data Science, Kansas Data Science Consortium
Cris Fanning	Executive Director - Programs and Risk Reduction, Kansas Department of Corrections
Jennifer Findley	Vice President Education & Special Projects, Kansas Hospital Association
Scott Gowan	Chief Information Officer, School District 501 Topeka Public Schools
Lazone Grays	President/CEO, IBSA
Kathi Grossenbacher	Director, Information Technology, Kansas State Department of Education
Nathan Harjo	Supervisory I.T., Haskell Indian Nations University
Jeremy Hegle	Assistant Vice President & Community Affairs Officer, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City
Amy Huffman	Policy Director, National Digital Inclusion Alliance
David Jordan	President & CEO, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
Stacey Knoell	Executive Director, Kansas African American Affairs Commission
Dana Ladner	Compliance, Education and Agency Support Program Manager, Kansas Department of Agriculture
Bryan Seamans	Chief of Telecommunications, Kansas Corporation Commission

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Name	Title/Organization
Scott Smathers (With Hector Martinez)	VP for Workforce Development, Kansas Board of Regents (Director, Adult Education, Kansas Board of Regents)
Shanna Smith-Ritterhouse (With Tabitha Hogan)	President, Kansas Library Association (Director, Winfield Public Library)
Wendi Stack	Research Associate, League of Kansas Municipalities
Melinda Stanley	Federal Program Officer, National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Monica Vargas-Huertas (With Carla Rivas-D'Amico)	Political & Community Outreach Director, UFCW2 (Executive Director, Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission)
Jancita Warrington	Executive Director/Tribal Liaison, Kansas Native American Affairs
Felicia Welch	Employment Services Program Administrator, Department of Children and Families

KOBD consulted with all four of the federally recognized Sovereign Tribal Nations in Kansas: The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, the Sac and Fox Tribe of Missouri, and the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas. Meetings focused on the broadband access, affordability, and adoption needs of each tribe’s members.

KOBD will continue outreach efforts to each tribal nation to establish trust and a true working relationship with regularly scheduled consultations.

### 4.1.6 Additional Covered Population Focus Groups

After analyzing information gathered by WSU and the Roadshow, KOBD assessed gaps in populations present and arranged for additional focus groups to target those missed by initial outreach activity, including:

- Dodge City to engage with individuals who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups, specifically the Hispanic population
- DOC facilities to engage with justice-involved individuals
- NAACP facilities to engage with individuals who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups, specifically the African American population
- The Kansas Silver Haired Legislature (KSHL) to explore issues that Kansans 60+ experience and to discuss the group’s priorities in the coming years

### 4.1.7 State Agency Information Sessions and Listening Sessions

KOBD held dozens of informational sessions with state department and agency leadership to detail the opportunities for digital equity work and BEAD programs. The sessions led to direct conversations with state

Slow Internet Hurts Small Businesses

*Gina is a 35-year professional career coach and folk artist who loves living and working remotely in rural Kansas. When she moved closer to family, she needed broadband to support her two online businesses. Available maps showed her new home had broadband options from multiple providers. But she soon learned that instead of five ISP options, none offered adequate broadband speeds.*

*The negative impact to her businesses has caused Gina significant mental and financial stress. She now has to drive 45 miles roundtrip just to get fast, reliable service.*

*To ensure her story will be one of the last of its kind, Gina has become a broadband advocate in her county, encouraging speed tests that lead to accurate mapping and stronger outcomes for businesses of all kinds.*

# 4. Stakeholder Engagement

agencies regarding current agency efforts that align with digital equity needs. These follow-up conversations included the following state agencies:

- Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office
- Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services
- Kansas Department of Agriculture
- Kansas Department for Children & Families Division of Medicaid and Children’s Mental Health
- Kansas Department of Commerce
- Kansas Department of Corrections
- Kansas Department of Education
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment Division of Health Care Finance
- Kansas Housing Resources Corporation
- KansasWORKS Office of Registered Apprenticeship

## 4.1.8 Public Comment

As required by the NTIA, this plan will first be presented for public comment prior to submission. That process and timing, as established in NTIA guidance, is as follows:

Step	Description	Timeline
1. State drafts digital equity plan	KOBD has utilized the support of their State Federal Program Officer (FPO) and NTIA staff for informal reviews and feedback before publishing their Digital Equity Plan for public comment. KOBD has utilized the provided template to make the Plan available for public comment prior to submission to NTIA.	Q1-Q3 2023
2. State posts draft digital equity plan for public comment	KOBD is required to make the draft Digital Equity Plan available for public comment, consider the comments made, and revise the digital equity plan as appropriate. KOBD must also provide a written response to each comment and describe any changes made to the plan as a result.	Q3-Q4 2023
3. State submits final digital equity plan and public comments	After incorporating feedback from public comments into the Digital Equity Plan, KOBD will use the NTIA Grants Portal to submit the final digital equity plan and a Record of Public Comments and Actions Taken and attest to meeting statutory and NOFO requirements.	Q4 2023

KOBD’s planned process for Step 2 above (collecting and incorporating public comment) is as follows:

- The digital equity plan in its entirety, along with any appendices, will be published to the KOBD website
- KOBD will notify the Advisory Council in advance of the submission to encourage communication to and participation from their constituents and will publicize the plan via press release, website notice, and social media

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- Governor Kelly will issue a proclamation for Digital Equity Week in late September
- KOBD will work with partners identified during outreach activities to extend the reach of the public comment notice to as many concerned Kansans as possible, especially those who are members of covered populations, utilizing the partners' existing channels where permitted
- These partners will include Sovereign Tribal Nations, local and regional assets, state agencies, and other willing supporters
- Commenters will visit the KOBD website, where a web form with the required fields will be accessible to accept comments
- As comments are submitted, KOBD will monitor the submissions and address and respond appropriately in writing
- KOBD will update the Digital Equity Plan as necessary based on public comments, weighing and logging the content, frequency, relevance, and disposition of each submission
- Upon completion of the public comment period, KOBD will export all submissions to the Public Comments Disclosure Tab on the Local Coordination Tracker provided by NTIA
- Upon addressing all public comments and finalizing the Digital Equity Plan, KOBD will submit the plan to NTIA as directed in Step 3 above

### 4.2 Obstacles and Challenges in Outreach

As the focus on digital equity concerns continues to deepen throughout the state, KOBD must “open the tent” and include not just the stakeholders reached during our initial efforts, but also those who have been missed in engagement efforts. KOBD welcomes current partners, organizations new to KOBD, leaders, and advocates who can help drive communications and education throughout the state.

#### 4.2.1 Digital Equity Asset Identification

Identifying and mapping the digital equity assets in Kansas has just begun and will be an ongoing effort. To effectively build a resource that is an accurate and useful tool for decision makers and the public, KOBD will work to support dedicated resources. A data-rich population and asset tool can serve as a crucial information source for decision-making by KOBD and partners. A related public online digital equity asset map can help individuals and organizations throughout the state connect for resources, shared connections, and planning. With this map as a user-friendly communications tool, KOBD can support digital equity stakeholders with more clarity, focus, and deliberateness.

#### 4.2.2 Rural Density, Distance, and Availability

Attracting community members to rural meetings was sometimes a challenge, though overall attendance was strong, and the Roadshow was an unqualified success. In some instances, Roadshow stops attracted over 40 attendees and garnered great feedback. KOBD also experienced Roadshow events in which there was little attendance despite communications with traditional and non-traditional media sources, but during which participants provided equally valuable feedback. Continually building the network of well-connected local champions who energize their communities to participate is essential to future engagements.



## 4.2.3 Trust Takes Time

KOBD's initial outreach efforts are typically the first interactions with covered population members, local leaders, and advocates regarding broadband access and adoption. KOBD has made a commitment to moving beyond the first stages of communication with Kansans on their digital equity efforts. As programs and activities emerge, continual communication with key partners and stakeholders will be integral to ongoing success.

KOBD is fortunate to have the Advisory Council and other broadband champions who can make connections with community leaders and advocates. By committing to having KOBD Digital Equity staff spending time "in the community," these relationships will flourish.

## 4.2.4 State Agencies and Statewide Resources

Members of the Advisory Council were clear that many of the partner agencies and organizations identified in this plan are at (or over) capacity, especially with personnel and resources. Tighter collaborations, shared resources, support networks, and effective communication will ensure that digital equity efforts are sustainable. Rather than design and implement activities that duplicate existing efforts, KOBD will execute many components of this plan in alignment with partners to support, enhance, and scale existing programs. Leveraging the expertise, networks, and ideas of partners will ensure timely, useful, and efficient resource use that effectively undergirds the broader statewide objectives outlined in this first digital equity plan for the state.

## 4.3 Future Plans for Stakeholder Engagement

The work to close the digital equity gap relies heavily on local stakeholders. KOBD will maintain relationships with partners that help in plan development, implementation, monitoring, and growth. The future strategies and plans discussed in the following section describe how KOBD will maintain and grow stakeholder engagement.

### 4.3.1 Digital Equity Advisory Council

The Advisory Council will continue to play a key role in the implementation of the BEAD and DEA plans, offering feedback from the field as program development takes place and continuing to connect with resources in the field.

### 4.3.2 Regional Broadband Planning Strategy for BEAD/DEA Alignment

As infrastructure deployment begins, KOBD will support regional broadband planning efforts in combination with its BRC program, planning work, and technical assistance. Early and clear communication with these local and regional stakeholders about the parallel work of digital equity will be important.

The KOBD BEAD and DE teams are in communication to strategize how BEAD funds, additional federal and state infrastructure funds, and digital equity funds (both from NTIA and otherwise) all interplay. This will ensure there is no duplication of services and that a distribution of resources reaches every part of the state. This process is best informed by open channels of communication that informs and empowers local leaders and advocates. As discussed before, KOBD will be utilizing KDC's eight regions of economic development as the regional support structure that will support local broadband efforts in turn.

KOBD will interact with these local and regional broadband groups concerning digital equity in a number of ways:

1. Help educate in identifying and supporting existing digital equity assets and efforts
2. Allow KOBD staff to assess the places where BEAD and DE funds can be used strategically through local

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identification of partners and improved communication between broadband access, affordability, and adoption activities

3. Supply guidance to support identified digital equity efforts, encourage digital equity plans, and integrate their efforts into the growing statewide digital equity network

### 4.3.3 Act as the Convener on Key Issues

The Kansas network of digital equity practitioners is new and needs support to mature to a network of well-resourced collaborators working toward a unified goal. Stakeholders are interested in formal and centralized conversations around better ACP outreach, the role of housing authorities in promoting and offering digital equity resources, and the creation of toolboxes of various resources for organizations.

KOBD will lead issue-specific conversations through quarterly round tables, issue-specific learning sprints, and conferences for the development of this field.

KOBD will inform state agencies and service providers in the healthcare, education, nonprofit, and other industries on the availability of programs and resources for covered populations and will encourage participation in collaborative efforts or platforms where appropriate.

Being intentional about coordinating public and private funds together for digital inclusion programs is necessary. Amplifying the historic investment of digital equity funds by energizing and aligning local philanthropic organizations will contribute to the long-term sustainability of these initiatives. KOBD will reach out to community foundations and other private philanthropies to assess whether a state role as matchmaker, strategic partner, or another designation is appropriate. Regardless, Kansas' foundations will play a vital role in digital equity for the state.

### 4.3.4 Be Present Across the Entire State of Kansas

Kansans want to be part of an ongoing conversation about digital equity, but also want to serve as part of the solution to close the digital divide. KOBD will return to all eight economic development regions of the state and revisit (at minimum) 50% of the original Roadshow stops to keep the dialogue going, assess progress, and discuss change and needs.

The local conversations made it clear that support for the full spectrum of broadband issues—access, affordability, and adoption—will be a critical role for KOBD in our communities.

### 4.3.5 Deepen Existing Relationships and Build Out Additional Digital Equity Partnerships



KOBD is fortunate to have the support of many organizations actively working in the digital equity space. Yet, more organizations can still come to the table. While many have been identified, the relationships take time to develop. For example, conversations with housing authorities regarding affordability efforts have occurred, but there is more work to do. Housing authorities and Community Action Programs (i.e., operators of housing programs in areas that

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do not have defined housing authorities) could coordinate to develop programs that provide covered population support. KOBD had success in holding a focus group for the Hispanic population served by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. Expanding KOBD's ongoing communication and support of their efforts will be important, as will building relationships with other labor unions and trade organizations.

Another example is the need to create digital navigator programs in collaboration with organizations such as the Kansas Association of Retired School Personnel (KARSP), the Hospital Association, or the Medical Society. Continued communication and outreach for this purpose will continue, and deepening these relationships will be key to KOBD's efforts.



## 5.1 Implementation Strategy and Key Activities

KOBD developed the following implementation strategies and key activities with input gathered from listening sessions, focus groups with members of all covered populations, outreach sessions with state agencies and key organizational partners, and bi-monthly meetings with the Advisory Council.

### 5.1.1 Strategy 1: Leverage the work of existing partners to enhance the number of digital equity resources throughout the state

Most digital equity organizations in Kansas deliver vital services in limited geographic regions. KOBD will help provide these entities with a network of digital equity resources to effectively scale to cover the entire state. KOBD will also help state departments and agencies to focus on inter-agency communication and planning to streamline offerings, increase awareness, and magnify their collective impact while being good stewards of public dollars.

The first challenge in narrowing the digital divide in Kansas is to scale up existing programs. As identified elsewhere in this plan, many agencies and organizations supporting digital equity work in Kansas are building their resources and are not sufficiently funded to scale their excellent work statewide. A consolidated pool of digital equity funding to support expansion of these programs will help address these resource constrained efforts.

Coordination with state agencies and state benefits management divisions to synchronize messaging, identify opportunities to improve public services, and share tools and resources will strengthen gaps in awareness that contribute to low ACP enrollment.

These activities advance all digital equity plan objectives, principally the desire to promote the accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services. State agencies will be pivotal in leading the way for this issue, which will answer a major concern raised by Advisory Council members and the public. Many programs that support digital equity concerns exist; it is a matter of supporting the ubiquitous access of the services they provide. This increased access will in turn lead to improvements in KPIs related to device programs, affordability, digital literacy skills, and cybersecurity.

**TABLE 22: STRATEGY 1 ACTIVITIES**

Strategy 1 Activities	
<b>1</b>	<b>Coordinate state agency support of covered populations</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with an inter-agency committee of covered population subject matter experts to make sure external facing services align with existing digital inclusion programs</li> <li>• Ensure state agency resources are more inclusive and accessible to all Kansans</li> <li>• Develop a training and communications program to increase awareness and promote ACP and other digital equity affordability programs</li> <li>• Engage with entrepreneurial-facing resources in the Department of Commerce to reach underrepresented members of covered populations</li> <li>• Tie existing efforts, like the Community Healthcare Worker program, library initiatives, and other covered population specific programs, like Revolucion Educativa, into digital navigation skills development</li> </ul>

<b>2</b>	<b>Create a consolidated funding pool to scale up support</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a funding mechanism to promote collaboration between digital equity organizations to expand offerings through funding opportunities that pilot new collaborations from cohort support</li><li>• Give these cohorts short, attainable goals leading the coalition to larger funding opportunities after establishing initial benchmarks for ideas like supporting a consortium of tech hubs (example: Topeka’s IBSA and a larger, regional urban and rural coalition) and initiatives that expand remote-work upskilling (example: The Innovation Center and new rural partners working on remote worker training opportunities, especially for covered populations)</li></ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Fund expansion of existing efforts</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support existing efforts and work with additional funding, allowing established partners, like the Kansas Library Association (KLA), KC Digital Drive, and Goodwill Industries, to continue to build their footprint with a goal of statewide digital equity services</li><li>• Promote the replication of successful models with new partners when appropriate</li><li>• Increase awareness, skills, and support about ways to make services more accessible, available, and inclusive</li><li>• Utilize CPF-DCT funds to promote broadband access in communities where affordability is a barrier to broadband adoption through the purchase and installation of laptops, tablets, desktop personal computers, and public Wi-Fi equipment</li></ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>Create a statewide clearinghouse of digital equity resources</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a collection of software resources accessible to digital equity entities. Software platforms focused on digital equity challenges include Northstar, DigitalLearn.org, and Human-I-T</li><li>• Help ensure these platforms, training, and support are accessible to digital equity organizations with the expertise and infrastructure of partners</li><li>• Encourage statewide use of these platforms to provide aggregated and standardized data to inform decision-making, indicate success or improvement opportunities, and provide transparency to stakeholders</li></ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>Expand technical capabilities to cover the entire state</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support the expansion of the KU Center for Telemedicine &amp; Telehealth suite of digital offerings throughout the entire state and request additional support from organizations such as the Kansas Hospital Association and the Medical Society to expand telemedicine access</li><li>• Support telemedicine training and information fairs within healthcare facilities in partnership with organizations like AARP</li><li>• Support emergency services and navigators for public services, especially in rural areas, by partnering with local nonprofits to deliver virtual training sessions in hard-to-reach communities</li></ul>

## 5.1.2 Strategy 2: Create sustainable affordability options building on the success of current partners and programs

Affordability of broadband service, distribution of devices, and availability of digital literacy skills training are imperative for the overall success of this plan. Bolstering existing efforts and creating digital navigation resources throughout the state are critical in moving toward universal service.

Addressing affordability and device accessibility in this manner will improve affordability, digital literacy skills, cybersecurity, devices, and public services KPIs. Increasing the availability of digital navigators across the state will be a focal point, with improvement in ACP enrollment, device access, and digital literacy skills access expected as a result. KOBD will use ACP enrollment as its initial affordability KPI, replaced with a Kansas-specific affordability program when available. Additionally, KOBD will support development of a statewide device distribution network that will directly improve access to devices, with progress monitored through ACS responses.

**TABLE 23: STRATEGY 2 ACTIVITIES**

Strategy 2 Activities	
<b>1</b>	<b>Identify and expand digital navigator resources</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a Digital Navigator Expansion grant program designed to identify and assess digital navigation programs and navigators committing to beginning or expanding their digital navigation offerings, with cohorts of participating organizations meeting on a regular basis to co-learn, receive guidance, and connect with the growing network of digital navigator programs throughout the state</li> <li>• Increase KOBD’s awareness of resources to make agency and organization online services more available, accessible, and inclusive to support the work of navigators</li> <li>• Provide knowledge, training, and support for navigators to ensure familiarity with available services, benefits, and opportunities for civic and social engagement online</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Support ACP outreach efforts</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the growing network of organizations performing ACP outreach, including state agencies and FCC ACP Outreach grantees</li> <li>• Help identify any resources, monitor the improvement in enrollment, and identify areas of the state where resources will be the most effective</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Build a device distribution network</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a strong network of device distribution programs that serves the entire state, working with partners to close identified gaps, with leading partners including PCs for People, Digitunity, and others</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>Develop a robust and sustainable Kansas affordability program</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the development of a long-term state affordability strategy in the potential absence of long-term funding for ACP through potential activities like:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a pool of funds comprised of both public and private sources to fund a long-term affordability program for Kansas</li> <li>• Building on existing affordability programs to create efficiencies, like KC Digital Drive’s Internet Access Support Program that provides pre-paid debit cards for monthly subscription payment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 5.1.3 Strategy 3: Establish KOBD’s digital equity division as a repository of information and connections

KOBD will act as a two-way conduit of information, facilitating the development of programs, connecting residents with the latest information, and delivering sector-specific resources. This coordinating role will help ensure a continuous feedback loop strengthening statewide planning through local data and insight while improving local and regional access to key data and resources.

By taking on this role, KOBD will act as the backbone organization driving the coordination of digital equity plan efforts. The office will monitor measurable objectives, recognizing when pivots will be necessary to achieve the stated goals. Most notably, encouraging the growth of statewide digital navigation services will directly impact nearly all of these objectives. KOBD is uniquely positioned to support the accessibility and inclusivity of public resources as it convenes other state agencies. The office will work to improve broadband availability, adoption, and affordability through the effective management of grant programs designed to close the gaps.

**TABLE 24: STRATEGY 3 ACTIVITIES**

Strategy 3 Activities	
<b>1</b>	<b>Create a digital equity map and dashboard</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with partners to create an online digital equity map and dashboard that will help the agency, organizations, and the public to understand progress in closing the digital literacy skills gap</li> <li>Help ensure regular updates to the map and dashboard to improve accuracy, keep data current, and add useful new data</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Fund digital navigator training programs</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fund train-the-trainer programs for organizations that are rapidly expanding their digital navigation systems</li> <li>Build a cadre of certified and qualified trainers capable of providing basic device support, guidance for online public services, information on navigating the internet, training for commonly used software, and more</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Convene and connect practitioners</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Act as a convener of resources, bringing together practitioners from across Kansas with intention, including working with local and regional leadership on the integration of digital equity guidance with their broadband efforts</li> </ul>

## 5.1.4 Strategy 4: Engage and educate partners and donors to cultivate long-term investment in digital equity

Private investments and philanthropies need time and accurate information to adjust digital equity needs with their giving priorities. Long-term and meaningful relationships create the trust that establishes sustainable long-term success.

The Capacity and Competitive Grant funds will impact Kansas positively over the long term. KOBD will focus on amplifying those benefits by bringing more philanthropic partners to the table. Funding impacts the performance of all KPIs, making engagement of the philanthropic sector an important function of the Digital Equity work performed by the office.

**TABLE 25: STRATEGY 4 ACTIVITIES**

Strategy 4 Activities	
<b>1</b>	<b>Build upon existing work by philanthropic partners</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen existing relationships with the philanthropic sector to establish digital equity as part of their grant-giving priorities, including the Kansas Community Foundation and others</li> <li>Leverage these partnerships to focus on identifying the most impactful programs for covered populations, facilitating and encouraging events, and inspiring action</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Create a consolidated funding pool to scale up support</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus investments on strategic projects including scholarship programs, provider-led broadband technician training programs, tech hub network creation, and investment in technology centric “Career Cluster” exposure programs, particularly to students who are members of the covered populations</li> </ul>

## 5.1.5 Strategy 5: Empower Kansans with in-demand workforce skills so they can thrive wherever they live

Digital equity involves creating opportunities where they have been absent. Addressing local digital equity needs by incorporating solutions into new broadband initiatives is an opportunity to close the digital literacy skills gap. At the same time, expanding the availability of digital literacy skills training programs will increase the number of Kansans with skills, driving the digital economy for decades to come.

Addressing covered population needs as part of this integrated planning work improves not just their skills, but their communities and livelihoods. Families and residents across the state will have greater potential to create financial prosperity through improved employment prospects, greater access to education and training, and the ability to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. All these individual benefits roll up to improve Kansas’s financial and social outlook as a whole. Because cybersecurity is a core component of digital literacy skills, Kansas businesses and communities will be stronger, safer, and less at risk as an additional benefit.

**TABLE 26: STRATEGY 5 ACTIVITIES**

Strategy 5 Activities	
<b>1</b>	<b>Integrate digital equity with broadband infrastructure planning</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure regional and local broadband planning teams receive information about digital equity needs early in the process of building their own local efforts</li> <li>Support local and regional teams in the development of digital equity plans</li> <li>Promote BEAD-related workforce development programs housed in community colleges and other higher education institutions by encouraging scholarship development, employment matching to covered populations, and collaboration between digital equity partners and their local colleges and other providers</li> </ul>



<b>2</b>	<b>Promote advanced digital literacy skills programs</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify, support, and promote programs that build basic and advanced digital literacy skills for high-demand workforce careers, maximizing access for members of the covered populations to technology-forward programs in higher education institutions and technology skills programs in communities like Future Leaders Outreach Network, Youth Entrepreneurship Exchange, Lead for America Fellows program, and others</li><li>• Help expand technology-centric “Career Cluster” efforts for K-12 students in school districts where programs have lagged behind in the past, paying particular attention to areas with historic underinvestment</li></ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Align statewide cybersecurity efforts</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Align existing efforts on cybersecurity with OITS, the universities, KBOR, and others to ensure there is a continued evolution of and learning about cybersecurity issues</li></ul>

KOBD will monitor and identify gaps in needed programs, such as identifying a robust cybersecurity asset, coordinating a clearinghouse of digital literacy skills resources, and developing a model statewide digital navigator network. Regionally, KOBD will support technical assistance, introduction of a resources, and detailed identification of local needs and solutions. Understanding community needs will shift as statewide implementation of the Digital Equity Plan progresses, KOBD will work with stakeholders to implement feedback and adjust as required.

Standing up new statewide initiatives requires monitoring and evaluation of program success. Consistent evaluation of performance indicators of program activity can inform strategy and help respond to evolving circumstances. Thus, KOBD is committed to monitoring measurable objectives on at least an annual basis, since several KPIs are connected to the ACS data. Trends will be consistent and informative while allowing for annual tracking, analysis, and reporting. Measurement tools may need to be created (such as the percentage of covered population with basic digital literacy or cybersecurity skills available within a 30-minute commute of the nearest CAI) to help determine the proper KPIs.

Reporting will be necessary for subgrantee funded activities operated by other state agencies, organizations, and partners. This will help KOBD understand the effectiveness of the plan’s design, offering opportunities to adjust the approach if necessary.

Many of the key activities will be conducted in concert with other statewide resources, such as DCF, members of KLA, higher education institutions related to KBOR, and more. By design, a number of these state agencies are part of the Advisory Council and will evaluate the implementation, execution, and effectiveness of the key activities of the Digital Equity Plan.

KOBD is committed to universal service, which requires closing the digital equity gap across Kansas. The coordinated and judicious use of resources and funds dedicated to this effort will help achieve both goals.

# 5. Implementation

## 5.2 Timeline

Activities	Phases	Planning	One	Two	Three			Four	Five
		Consult, collaborate, & plan	Building digital equity capacity	Implement & monitor success	Continue to monitor, plan, and assist with grants.			Continue Phase 3, review & plan	Develop next five-year DE Plan
		2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Continue Convening Digital Equity Advisory Council									
Begin and continue work with broadband ready counties									
Continue dialogue with digital equity assets in the state									
Apply for Digital Equity Capacity Grant funds									
Convene digital equity partners around organizational needs, funding, and establishing coalitions on identified key issues (devices, digital navigators, etc.)									
Build and maintain a Digital Equity Asset Mapping Tool (2024).									
Support affordability efforts									
Convene subgrantees to establish goals and KPI, review progress and resource needs for success.									
Build digital equity awareness in the philanthropic sector.									
Capitalize on digital equity awareness in the philanthropic sector.									
Fund pilot round(s) of digital equity coalition cohort, digital navigator cohort, and run at least one train-the-trainer effort.									
Fund and monitor digital equity work through partners.									
Convene subgrantees to review progress and resource needs.									
Fund and sustain secondary round(s) of digital equity coalition and digital navigator cohort; run at least one train-the-trainer effort.									
Review and reflect on current Digital Equity Plan and development of 2030-2034 Digital Equity Plan									
Evaluate work through regular monitoring and reporting; celebrate impact									
Develop updated 2030-2034 State Digital Equity Plan									

## 6. Conclusion

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This is the first statewide digital equity plan for Kansas, developed with many dedicated individuals, organizations, Sovereign Tribal Nations, and state agency staff members who are committed to close the digital divide in Kansas. KOBD thanks the many people who attended Roadshow events, listening sessions, focus groups, Advisory Council meetings, tribal consultations, and other touchpoints as input was gathered from across the state.

This Digital Equity Plan shows KOBD's investment of time, energy, and resources dedicated to close the digital equity gap for all Kansans. Standing up new activities, monitoring the success of programs, and tracking progress will be important during the first five years of implementing this plan. KOBD and its partners will adapt as necessary when changing circumstances require it. As such, this Digital Equity Plan is a living, breathing, iterative, and changing document that will need everyone's effort for it to be successful.

Lastly, KOBD found direct conversations with individuals from the Roadshow were essential and the heart of this work. We are committed to spending time in our uniquely beautiful state with the individuals, families, farmers, and communities who are working through their connectivity issues every day. Thank you for welcoming us as we continue to travel across the state, collaborate with advocates, and work with providers to ensure broadband connectivity and digital equity for all Kansans.



Appendix 1—Glossary

Appendix 2—Digital Equity Asset Inventory

Appendix 3—Existing Digital Equity Programs

Appendix 4—Kansas Office of Broadband Development and Wichita State University Roadshow

Report – “Digital Equity in Kansas”

Appendix 5—University of Kansas Institute for Policy and Research Report – “Digital Inclusion Assets in Kansas”

Appendix 6— Agriculture Bureau Survey of Constituents

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