



KANSAS BROADBAND ROADSHOW



Digital Equity in Kansas

Kansas Department of Commerce
Office of Broadband Development | May 2023

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Disclaimer

This study was conducted by the PPMC at Wichita State University. The PPMC is an independent research body unaffiliated with the Kansas Department of Commerce, Kansas Office of Broadband Development. This report was prepared by the research team and data collected from external sources. PPMC's findings are based on assumption of data accuracy received from internal and external sources. The findings represent the views, opinions and conclusions of the research team alone. The report does not express the official or unofficial policy of Wichita State University.

Executive Summary



The Kansas Office of Broadband Development (KOBD) was established in 2020 to help ensure all Kansans have the opportunity to live, work, learn, and compete in a global economy by improving universal access to quality, affordable, and reliable broadband.

The information gathered in this report is intended to support the development of the KOBD's State of Kansas Digital Equity Plan, which will aim to ensure people have access and skills to benefit from digital technology. The Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) at Wichita State University supported KOBD by providing project management, facilitation of statewide stakeholder engagement to solicit resident feedback on digital equity, logistical and strategic support for stakeholder engagement, and a statewide survey. From inception to delivery of the Digital Equity report, this project occurred between January 26, 2023, and May 15, 2023.

Project Approach

The approach of the project sought stakeholder input in a three-step process including:

1. On-site facilitated community listening sessions (Roadshow)
2. Statewide digital survey
3. Virtual focus groups with organizations representing underserved groups (Covered Populations)

KOBD identified access and inclusion as a priority for the project; PPMC supplied translation services to eight roadshow events and offered accommodations for registrants as needed.

Challenges

Those most impacted by lack of affordable, dependable internet access were students, low-income families, businesses, older adults, agriculture, those who work from home, nonnative native English speakers, emergency services, and the disabled. The largest concern regarding digital equity for Roadshow participants was lack of access to the internet in their homes. Those who live in rural areas of Kansas are adversely affected by the lack of broadband access and many voiced feeling “left behind.” This impedes access to education, jobs, and basic health services. Without reliable broadband access, older adults and the disabled cannot access telehealth and mental health services. A community that does not have reliable, affordable broadband will likely not grow, which affects property value and economic growth. This is often coupled with lack of cell phone service, causing rural inhabitants to feel vulnerable and without essential safety services. At every Roadshow location, participants noted the inaccuracy of what ISP providers claim to cover compared to their reality of slow connection speeds and intermittent connectivity. The inaccuracies of coverage maps affect rural populations most significantly.

There is a lack of knowledge regarding the use of basic computer skills for older populations and those with language barriers. Basic literacy skills are needed especially in rural communities. Libraries across the State offer computer literacy training, though the turnout is generally low. The need for reliable devices can be addressed in conjunction with computer literacy. Though feedback suggests that this need pales in comparison with the need for fiber and internet access across the State. FCC maps are not accurate and the formal process to “challenge the map” is hard to navigate.

Champions

Libraries, urban and rural, remain the champions of the community, providing resources, internet access, and training for communities across Kansas. Kansas State Extension offices find ways to connect youth and older adults to necessary resources. The Farm Bureau is advocating for growers and producers across the State. As this is a

grassroots effort, local champions were found in many communities. When possible, these names were identified to the KOBD staff for further discussion.

Opportunities

Jade Piros De Carvalho often refers to the work of installing underground fiber optic cable across the State of Kansas (through KOBD) as “our generation's moonshot.” The PPMC asked focus group participants to imagine their community as though broadband challenges were solved.

“What is possible in your community?”

Access to the global economy	No crime	Lives become more meaningful and purposeful	Civic Engagement
Unlimited access to education	Small towns become more marketable to new residents	Increased productivity and efficiency	Access for older adults and all ages groups
Access to arts and culture	Cure isolation	Age in place	Better for the environment – use less gas
Downtown storefronts filled	Access to health services	Increase in home values	Increase workforce training and opportunity
Great equalizer for the underserved	Attract and retain the next generation	Maintaining schools and hospitals	Public safety and real time alerts for weather related events
Business attraction	Participation in the Global Economy	Work from home option	Economic development

Roadshow

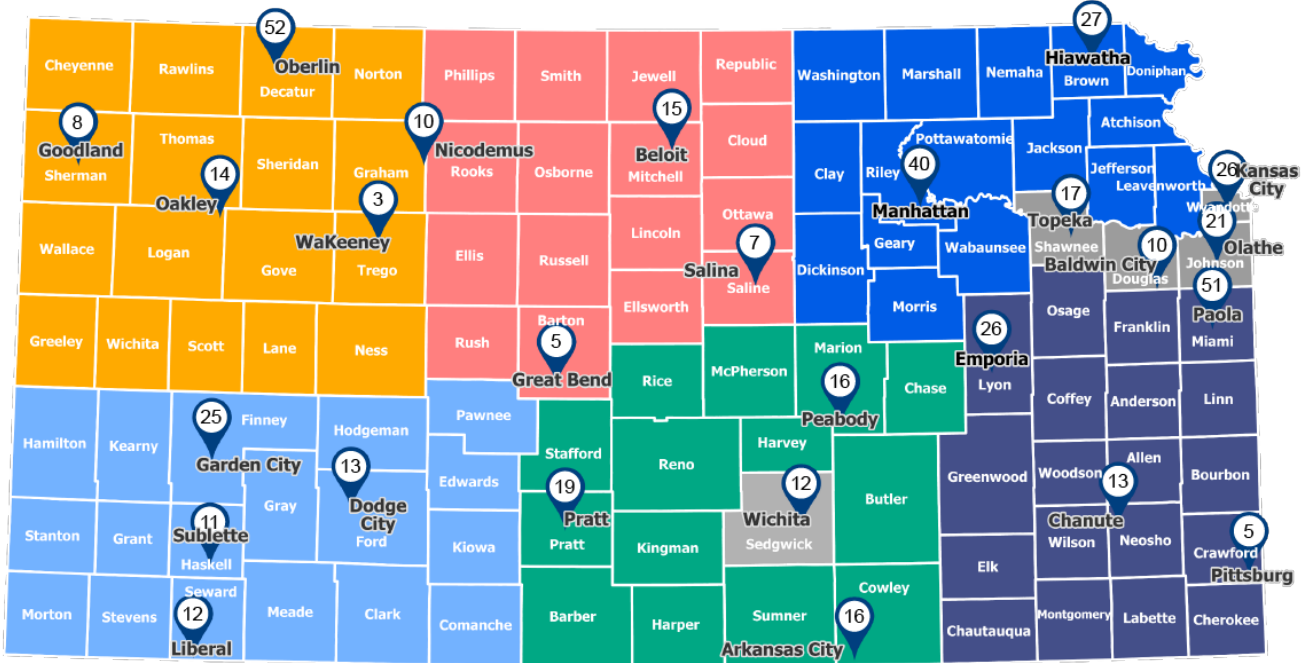


The Public Policy and Management Center planned, executed, and delivered 26 statewide Roadshow focus groups across Kansas between February 14 and May 4. PPMC used the following channels for outreach marketing to local networks to ensure robust participation.

Roadshow marketing included local and regional outreach with the below agencies:

- Lions, Rotary, & Kiwanis Clubs
- Kansas Hispanic, Latino American Affairs Commission
- League of Women Voters
- Girl Scouts
- Latest area employers
- Community colleges, universities
- K-State extension offices
- Local utilities
- Local housing authority
- Local community foundation
- Local school district
- Farm bureau
- Local print media
- Local libraries
- Local chambers of commerce
- Senior services and senior centers
- United way
- Goodwill
- City and county managers
- Social media
- Economic development agencies
- Public information officers
- Chief information officers
- Local museums & Kansas Museum Association
- Salvation Army

Focus Groups were designed by the PPMC to maximize engagement and data collection. Roadshow locations were designated by The Kansas Office of Broadband Development. Attendance numbers are shown on the map below:



<i>Northwest</i>	<i>North Central</i>	<i>East Central</i>	<i>Northeast</i>
Apr. 4 - Oberlin	Mar. 9 - Beloit	Mar. 22 - Topeka	Feb. 28 - Manhattan
Apr. 5 - Oakley	Mar. 9 - Great Bend	Apr. 10 - Baldwin City	Mar. 7 - Hiawatha
Apr. 5 - Goodland	Apr. 19 - Nicodemus	Apr. 11 - Kansas City	
Apr. 19 - WaKeeney	May 4 - Salina	Apr. 13 - Olathe	

<i>Southwest</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Wichita</i>	<i>Southeast</i>
Feb. 22 - Dodge City	Feb. 22 - Pratt	Mar. 23 - Wichita/ Sedgwick County	Feb. 15 - Emporia
Mar. 27 - Garden City	Feb. 23 - Peabody		Mar. 2 - Chanute
Mar. 28 - Sublette	Apr. 25 – Arkansas City		Mar. 2 - Pittsburg
Mar. 28 - Liberal			Apr. 13 - Paola

Each on-site Roadshow delivery followed the same process to ensure continuity. During each Roadshow event, The Kansas Office Of Broadband Development presented

information regarding the statewide digital equity plan and resources available to participants. The PPMC followed with a focus group of six questions. Data gathered from the focus group participants is found below by specific regions and communities.

Northwest Region

This region includes Oberlin, Oakley, Goodland, and WaKeeney, Kansas.

Northwest Region Highlights

- **Oberlin**: Gateway Civic Center is an asset, Library has computers, internet, 3D printer and classes. Starlink, a satellite internet service provider developed by SpaceX, enables rural residents to have internet access. School is teaching students how to use devices which is a communal benefit.
- **Oakley**: Most people in town have a consistent connection if they have service. Subsidies are available and an opportunity to identify people in covered populations like the older adults who can be served better.
- **Goodland**: Through innovation, investments, and partnerships, the city is ahead of other communities. There are options for ISPs in Goodland only. The library, Northwest Kansas Technical College, and public schools are community leaders in technology.
- **WaKeeney**: Fiber laid throughout the community and serviced by Nex-Tech

Northwest Region Challenges

The Northwest region of Kansas faces unique digital broadband challenges due to its rural and sparsely populated terrain. The region is characterized by vast farmlands and remote communities that are often located far from telecommunication infrastructure.

Broadband challenges include:

- Businesses (i.e., remote workers) are impacted by the inability to scan and transmit documents and the loss of potential businesses because of the inability to have virtual meetings.
- The older adults often feel alone and disconnected.

- Emergency services (i.e., weather emergency communications, response times, hospitals) are negatively impacted.
- Economic impact comes in many forms as citizens must go to the library to fill out job applications, debit/credit card machines lack service, and online business economy has limited access.
- Churches and faith-based communities were impacted especially during COVID by a lack of tech know-how for services.

Many residents and businesses in the region have limited access to high-speed internet services, which negatively impacts their economic growth and quality of life.

Furthermore, the region's extreme weather conditions, such as severe storms and tornadoes, can damage telecommunication infrastructure, leading to prolonged service disruptions. These challenges have made it difficult to bridge the digital divide in the region and improve access to critical broadband services.

Organizations for Follow up in Northwest Region

- Oberlin: Gateway Civic Center, library, schools, Starlink
- Oakley: Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center, Buffalo Bill Cultural Center
- Goodland: Library, Northwest Kansas Technical College
- WaKeeney: Library, McDonalds, Dairy Queen, post office, schools, Bird City Housing Authority, Nex-Tech

North Central Region

The North Central region includes Beloit, Great Bend, Nicodemus, and Salina, Kansas.

North Central Region Highlights

Through the efforts of the Farm Bureau, there was a widespread coordinated effort to challenge the coverage maps and elevate the distinction between a coverage map and a marketing map in Beloit. There is also collaboration among ISPs in the region and the

North Central Regional Planning Commission. The North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC) is responsible for facilitating and coordinating regional planning and development efforts within its jurisdiction. As part of this role, the NCRPC collaborates with internet service providers (ISPs) to expand broadband access and improve connectivity in rural areas. The NCRPC helps identify areas with limited broadband access, works with ISPs to develop solutions, and assists with funding and grant applications to support broadband infrastructure projects. The NCRPC aims to promote economic growth, enhance quality of life, and improve access to essential services in rural communities. Another asset in the region is the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, which awards community grants and scholarships to provide opportunities and improve the quality of life in 26 counties in Northwest Kansas.

- Beloit: There is fiber access within city limits and in some surrounding rural communities the schools are proactive in helping families get connected, and there is coordinated collaboration with entities like the North Central Regional Planning Commission.
- Great Bend: Schools, specifically USD 428, have the best connection in the community and host parent nights and tech day initiatives. Local businesses, like a local coffee shop in Ellsworth, have free public WIFI.
- Nicodemus: The community center has WIFI but with limited range outside of the center. The local ISP Nex-Tech, which is the only provider that serves the area, is very responsive and a great community partner.
- Salina: The city has in-town service, but it caters primarily to the more affluent neighborhoods, less/uneven coverage in lower income areas. Abilene is including fiber in their new housing development builds. Ada, Kansas has a wireless system thanks to North Central Kansas Community Network (NCKCN), a nonprofit private organization that currently serves 14 communities within North Central Kansas with High-speed Fixed Wireless internet.

North Central Region Challenges

North Central Kansas faces several challenges in terms of digital broadband connectivity. Students, lower- and middle-income families, businesses, older adults,

farmers, those who work from home, nonnative English speakers, emergency services, disabled are all affected by lack of digital equity. One of the primary issues is the lack of infrastructure, as many rural areas lack the necessary equipment and fiber-optic cables to support high-speed internet. This leads to slow and unreliable connections, hindering access to online resources such as education and telehealth services. There is a struggle in the rural areas (even as close as five miles outside of Salina for example) to have connectivity at all. In rural Dickerson County students have no access in their homes and lack cell phone service. Additionally, the cost of broadband services is often prohibitive for low-income households, exacerbating the digital divide. Finally, the limited competition among internet service providers in the area further limits the options available for consumers, making it difficult for them to find affordable and reliable broadband services.

Organizations for Follow up by region

- **Beloit:** Kansas Farm Bureau, North Central Regional Planning Commission, Hansen Foundation
- **Great Bend:** Barton Community College, USD 428, USD 431, Southwest Kansas Area Agency on Aging, Golden Belt Telephone (GBT Communications) Association Inc, Kansas WorkforceONE
- **Nicodemus:** Nex-Tech/Nex-Tech Wireless, Nicodemus Township Hall/Visitor Center, A.M.E Church
- **Salina:** NCKCN - North Central Kansas Community Network, Nex-Tech, Library, Senior Center, K-State Aerospace & Tech College, Abilene School District

East Central Region

This region includes Topeka, Baldwin City, Kansas City, Olathe, Kansas.

East Central Region Highlights

- **Topeka:** The city has strong collaboration among organizations addressing broadband challenges and more support is needed for these local providers. The city could offer public connection points in public open spaces like parks.

- Baldwin City: Libraries are revitalized, fiber has reached the south end of Baldwin City, gaps in the fiber are being filled by wireless; Clearwave is a telecommunications company based in Baldwin City that offers high-speed internet, digital phone, and TV services to residential and business customers in the area. In the digital broadband space, Clearwave's services play a crucial role in connecting people and businesses to the internet and enabling them to access the vast array of digital resources available online.
- Kansas City: Fiber infrastructure is strong due to initiatives like Google fiber. Libraries can leverage resources to close the digital divide for covered populations like under-resourced and non-English speakers.
- Olathe: The active nonprofits in this community provide extensive resources to the underserved. Using the community access of these nonprofits could further uncover what covered populations in the Johnson County area really need.

East Central Region Challenges

The East Central Kansas Region faces unique digital broadband challenges despite containing more urbanized areas. The region's digital infrastructure has struggled to keep up with the rapidly growing population, leading to slow internet speeds and limited access to high-speed broadband. Many rural areas in the counties also lack adequate broadband access due to inadequate infrastructure and low population density throughout the counties. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted these challenges as many residents have had to rely on remote work, online education, and telehealth services. Also negatively impacted during the pandemic were older adults, veterans, homeless populations, homeschoolers, students, families, under-resourced and marginalized communities with nonnative populations, and people who lack digital skills. The cost of expanding broadband services for these populations is high, and there is a lack of competition among internet service providers, leading to limited options for residents. These challenges have hindered the region's ability to fully participate in the digital economy and have highlighted the need for increased investment in digital infrastructure.

Organizations for Follow up in East Central Region

- Topeka: TSC Get Digital, K-State Research & Extension - Shawnee Co., Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, City of Topeka: Chief Diversity Equity and Inclusion Office, Washburn Tech East, Washburn, IBSA, Inc.
- Baldwin City: Baker University, Clearwave Fiber, RG Fiber
- Kansas City: Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), KC Digital Drive, KCKPS, Essential Families, Youth Entrepreneur Exchange, Latinx Ed. Cooperation, Goodwill, KC Coalition for Digital Inclusion
- Olathe: Libraries, Jewish Family Services, school districts, community colleges
- Catholic Charities, Department of Aging, Mental Health, and Environment, Parks and Rec., Center of Grace, Latinx Ed. Cooperation

Northeast Region

This region includes Hiawatha and Manhattan, Kansas.

Northeast Region Highlights

- Hiawatha: These are strong communities with committed, local ISPs Several advantages were noted:
 - The Rainbow (ISP) distributes information and is willing to work with local businesses.
 - There are community hot spots in parks and recreation areas.
- Manhattan: As a university town, Manhattan has many advantages:
 - Good connection within city limits
 - Fort Riley and Kansas State University are listed as assets.
 - Competition between ISPs creates good choices and competition for this area
 - Free public WIFI and a strong public school system with 1:1 device for students is noted asset
 - Twin Valley is running fiber in this area
 - WTC is championed for being an asset to the community as an ISP

Northeast Region Challenges

Residents in and around Hiawatha note the local economy depends upon agriculture. Lack of access to dependable, affordable broadband in the rural areas prevents the economy from growing and hinders economic development. One local business owner who has locations in several small towns notes that unless connectivity improves, the offices that employ rural residents will be forced to close. Residents cannot work from home, and this prohibits economic growth. The local hospitals have trouble getting emergency services due to lack of dependable GPS mapping. A participant noted an incident when a telemed helicopter refused to land for emergency services because of lack of location services. Improved access and equity of rural broadband is possibly the singular most critical issue that businesses and residents face in Northeast Kansas. One resident said, "Without better access and infrastructure, we will continue to lose population, businesses, and many of our local communities."

Challenges for Manhattan Area Include:

- Lack of access to telehealth for the older adults, especially in rural areas
- Failure of broadband connection in inclement weather
- Rural expansion requires collaborative efforts, public private partnerships, and city and county leadership
- Lack of options to work from home outside of Manhattan with inconsistent internet and cell connection

Organizations for Follow up in Northeast Region

- Hiawatha: Nemaha County Community Health Workers, Brown County Community Health Workers, and Donovan City Library
- Manhattan: WTC, Blue Valley both laying fiber

Southwest Region

This region includes Dodge City, Garden City, Sublette, and Liberal, Kansas.

(Note: Translation services were provided for all of this region's roadshow locations.)

Southwest Region Highlights

This Southwest Region is characterized by a growing Hispanic population. Libraries, K-State Extension Offices, and community colleges are all community assets in these areas.

- Dodge City: There are collaborative partnerships within the city/counties that focus on underserved areas and serving covered populations by working with the Unified School Districts (USDs) and entities like Dodge City Community College - Adult Learning Center (dc3). There is also a robust public library system.
- Garden City: Multiple service providers and mix of tech in the area is beneficial. Public libraries offer access to devices and internet free of charge.
- Sublette: Robust library services including help with technology are an asset. Free access points (i.e., high school parking lot and library) are critical. Local ISP providers are willing community partners.
- Liberal: EPIC Touch offers broadband grants, which have given sections of town good service. Local companies with vested interest in the community have great impact. USD 480 gives Chromebooks to students.

Southwest Region Challenges

The Southwest Kansas region faces unique digital broadband challenges due to its rural and remote location. Broadband challenges impact rural communities, schools, and teachers (during COVID, students sat in the library parking lot to access the internet), employees working from home, older adults, small business owners, colleges, retail stores, and doctors' offices. All communities are impacted by weather, which derails service. The area has a low population density, making it unattractive for internet service providers (ISPs) to invest in infrastructure. The terrain is also a challenge, with a lot of flat land and few natural features to attach cables. Additionally, extreme weather conditions such as tornadoes and blizzards disrupt communication infrastructure, leading to frequent outages. The lack of reliable high-speed internet access affects not only residents but also businesses and farmers who need to stay connected to the global market.

Organizations for Follow up in Southwest Region

- Dodge City: Dodge City Community College - Adult Learning Center (dc3), K-State Extension Office - Ford County Extension, Dodge City Public Library, Kansas Hispanic & Latino American Affairs Commission (KHLAAC), United Food and Commercial Workers District Union Local 2
- Garden City: Garden City Public Library, Garden City Community College, Southwest Research: K-State Extension Center
- Sublette: Southwest Plains Regional Service Center Libraries
- Liberal: Seward County Community College, Libraries, EPICTOUCH

Southcentral Region

The southcentral region includes Arkansas City, Peabody, and Pratt, Kansas.

Southcentral Region Highlights

Southcentral Kansas includes rural areas often with little to no service. Grant availability allows funding opportunities otherwise impossible. These communities are tight knit, readily supporting one another. Competition among ISPs has begun to cut the cost and provide choices, though there is a long way to go. Additional funding has provided more incentives and investments.

- Arkansas City: USD 470 provides adult education classes. Orion Education in Winfield sells refurbished devices.
- Peabody: TCC network, a multicounty cooperative for service, is an asset. More options for providers in the area are needed. Grants from KOBD have helped. Small TV providers are working on fiber. USD 398 provides good broadband connection for students at school.
- Pratt: Increased incentives for service providers are needed. Library is assisting by offering computer literacy classes.

Southcentral Region Challenges

The underserved residents of this region include older adults, farmers, rural homeowners, low-income families, and homeless populations whose access to employment, healthcare, education, and basic resources correlate to lack of connectivity. Noted concerns by this region include lack of civic engagement without increased access to social media and other communication platforms, especially for older adults in rural areas. However, this group may not see the need for digital literacy to improve connection and reduce isolation. Lastly, the lack of access or slow and intermittent access is no longer acceptable in today's economy and this region is frustrated. ISPs also tend to be territorial, further limiting access and affordability.

- Arkansas City: This college town notes a brain drain because of lack of viable connectivity in Arkansas City and in the surrounding region. College students sit in hallways on campus to complete homework due to lack of internet access in their homes. Rural residents emphasized a lack of reliable and affordable internet connection in their homes affecting students. Older adults discuss increased isolation without connection via social media, emails and other. Cell phone coverage is equally lacking in this area.
- Peabody: Peabody and the nearby town of Burns lack broadband. Access to emergency services is compromised because the GPS maps don't work for emergency vehicles, creating dangerous conditions for rural residents. The weather can cause spotty internet connection for those who have access at all. Parents of school aged children note the schools use social media to communicate with families, which causes those without connectivity to feel out of the loop. Weather related outages are also a concern.
- Pratt: Time spent for rural inhabitants waiting for slow downloads and buffering was a particular frustration to this group.

Organizations for Follow up in the Southcentral Region

- Arkansas City: Career tech program at Winfield high school, Cowley Community College Golden Tiger Program for older adults, Angels in the Attic (nonprofit),

COPE project (health and digital access), Eagles Nest, USD 470 adult tech classes, Orion Education

- Peabody: TEEN network in school, Peabody Librarian
- Pratt: Local community college, library, local small ISPs helpful and knowledgeable

Wichita/Sedgwick County Region

This area encapsulates Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas.

Wichita/Sedgwick County Region Highlights

Some highlights elevated in the Wichita region were the SNAP/food pantry, legal aide, USD259 providing tech and hotspots to students at home, the robust and evolving library network, immigrant assistance programs, applying for jobs using devices, receiving assistance and free WIFI, and youth with knowledge.

Wichita/Sedgwick County Region Challenges

Wichita faces unique digital broadband challenges due to its urban geography and socioeconomic factors. While high-speed internet infrastructure is available in most areas, the cost of access can be prohibitive for low-income households. The digital divide is exacerbated by the widening education gap for students without in-home access. Also left behind are older adults unfamiliar with technology and/or devices. Low income, underserved groups, and marginalized communities are at greater risk, as well as people with disabilities. Rural communities are also affected by gaps or lack of reliable and affordable coverage the farther you get away from the urban core. This digital divide affects access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities, exacerbating existing inequalities. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of reliable and affordable broadband access for remote work and online learning, but many households lack the necessary infrastructure and equipment. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of public and private investment in broadband infrastructure and programs to increase digital literacy and affordability for underserved communities.

Organizations for Follow up in Wichita/Sedgwick County Region

- WSU
- WSU Tech
- McDonalds
- Starbucks
- Coffee Shops
- YMCA
- Hospital Lobbies
- City Hall/Sedgwick County Government
- Senior Centers
- Churches
- Urban League
- United Way of Central Plains
- Goodwill Industries
- USD 259
- The Wichita Chamber of Commerce

Southeast Region

The southeast region includes Emporia, Paola, Chanute, and Pittsburg, Kansas.

Southeast Region Highlights

Increased competition among providers has allowed competitive pricing for this region. Fiber buildouts happening in Emporia are encouraging to residents. Schools in these towns provide devices and access to students (Pittsburg and Paola), while libraries remain the community anchor by providing access.

- Pittsburg: Good broadband within the city limits which has contributed to economic growth. New residents moved to Pittsburg during the pandemic because of reliable and affordable internet, making working from home a viable option. The public school has its own network for students and is free for

educational services. The City of Pittsburg offers to host a cooperative for ISP providers.

- Chanute: Several ISP provider options with ample equipment and good community education resources. Lynn City is using ARPA funding to expand fiber. Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas/ Chanute Elementary clinic offers telehealth services.
- Emporia: Locally owned companies are a highlight, advocating for improved access to broadband. Buildouts are planned, and fiber has been laid by existing providers.
- Paola: Miami county has a broadband champion whose influence extends through Paola and surrounding towns. This area is well informed and has been advocating for better affordable connectivity for years – a good grassroots effort model. Schools have the best connection in the community for youth training. A unique model has 4-H kids teaching older adults computer literacy.

Southeast Region Challenges

- Chanute: Access to reliable, dependable internet connection is not evenly distributed within the city limits. Toronto public library has WIFI so it covers the parking lot because so many people are working from their cars in the parking lot.
- Paola: Parents who work from home with young children are affected by the lack of access to broadband. It is difficult to attain upward mobility due to lack of equitable access to broadband in homes. Those with disabilities and homeless populations are also greatly affected by lack of access to services. There are safety concerns for rural residents who don't have dependable connectivity.
- Pittsburg: Network outages affect many in the area causing a lack of trust in the system. New residents outside city limits have no access to homes causing frustration and lack of upward mobility. Low-income families and older adults are affected as well.
- Emporia: Decreased profitability for businesses and agriculture is a result of lack of dependable internet connection. Students have suffered from schooling from

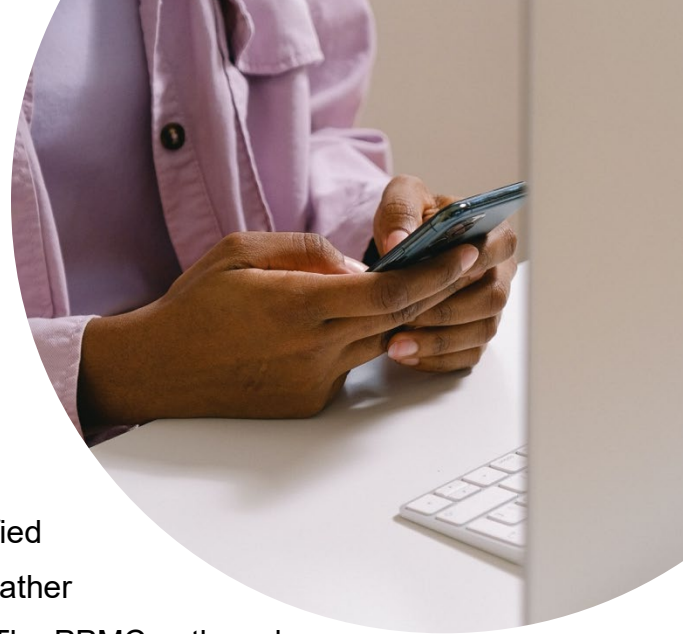
home during COVID – those without connectivity are lagging in school. Participants note inability to perform simple tasks like checking on a flight. Cell phone and landline access is limited in Emporia and the surrounding region.

Organizations for Follow up in Southeast

- Pittsburg: Wesley House provides free WIFI 12 hours per day. Walmart and Dillons grocery stores. The city manager would host a provider cooperative.
- Chanute: Community health center provides telehealth access to the school. Toronto public librarian.
- Emporia: Kansas Farm Bureau
- Paola: KC Digital Drive, Miami County, training for older adults on cybersecurity, Franklin County MOCAM, ISPs provide customer service in resolving problems/ concerns, USD 416

Covered Population

Focus Groups



Overview

The Kansas Office of Broadband Development identified underserved communities (Covered Populations) to gather information from all people affected by digital equity. The PPMC gathered information from six covered population groups in Kansas through virtual and phone methods. Participants were providers of services to these populations, providing insight to the unique challenges of each group. Represented populations included: Senior Services and Disabled, Agriculture, Justice Involved, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and Veterans.

The covered population groups share common challenges present in the digital age today. Access to basic resources increasingly rely on online access and digital literacy. Applications to apply for basic services like healthcare are online. Access to job applications and educational opportunities and services are also online, presenting challenges for many included in covered populations. Without improved affordable internet connectivity these groups will continue to fall behind. The barriers of the justice involved and refugee populations, for example, are great without the added hinderance of lack of digital equitable access. The many difficulties of being an agriculture producer are vast without the additional challenge of lack of affordable connectivity to land and homes to run businesses. Similarly, the everyday challenges for disabled populations are great without the added burden of lack of access. These covered populations and others need access and considerations necessary to bring them along into an increasingly digital age, especially those covered population groups who live rural areas.

Seniors and Disabled

The PPMC hosted a virtual Roadshow for providers who resource the Area Agencies on Aging across the State. Six providers attended from across the State of Kansas.

Highlights

Workforce Centers, libraries, Johnson County Community College, local provider community WIFI (Hiawatha, KS) and K-State extension offices were noted as highlights in the State for access. The Administration for Community Living Grant was cited as a great resource for older adults, providing internet services and devices. Assistive Technology for Kansas (ATK) provides tech modifications solutions for disabled populations.

Challenges

The lack of reliable and affordable access to the internet at home, coupled with lack the transportation, creates challenges for older adults and those with disabilities. Many rely on internet connection for telehealth and mental health services, at a minimum. Many of the resource applications for those on a limited income are online only. One example of lack of access to resources is the Medicaid Application, which is online only and can be difficult to navigate. The barrier of lack of connection in homes causes reliance on cell phone service. The cost of data for different cell phone packages presents an additional barrier. Older adults may not be as tech savvy; digital literacy training is needed for this group. Older adults may also underestimate the personal fulfillment and social connection that can be gained with increased digital literacy, which may benefit mental health for generations that did not grow up with the internet.

Specific regional challenges for this population:

- Harrington has no public library
- Johnson County needs devices for clients
- Shawnee lacks dependable connectivity
- Rural Johnson County lacks service
- Jefferson County (between Topeka and Lawrence) lacks service

Opportunities

- Help people set up computers in homes for older adults and disabled populations
- College IT departments could provide services and training for clients across Kansas
- Geek Squad noted as a resource

Agriculture

The Kansas Farm Bureau used the focus group questions in an online survey for members to collect information from growers and others involved in agriculture across Kansas. They received 112 fully complete surveys. The following is information from this survey.

Highlights

Several respondents put hope in Starlink; many noted they are on a waiting list. Rural communities are accustomed to working together, helping to write grants and getting access to resources when possible. Community resources in rural areas are Grain and Electric Cooperatives, senior centers, and libraries.

Challenges

Reliable and affordable broadband access is integral for the work of growers and others in agriculture. Everything from livestock auctions, sales, marketing, market trading, invoicing, and other basic business activities rely on connectivity. Many noted they would be able to sell more and grow their business if internet connections were reliable and affordable.

Farm equipment relies on GPS or other mapping connections, if there is no access to GPS in the area it limits the productivity of the farm. Sustainability efforts often rely on technology and access to the internet. Growers in Kansas cannot stay viable without last mile connectivity. Many noted that they will not be able to continue their business unless things improve.

Opportunities

- Work with service providers locally to get reliable, affordable internet
- Reduce weather related disruptions with more secure access through inground fiber
- Set up a fully networked infrastructure by partnering with organizations and companies

Organizations for Follow up

In general, coffee shops, McDonalds, and libraries were noted for offering free Wi-Fi. One participant noted it is not optimal for conducting business on an unsecured network. Specific locations and businesses mentioned are:

- Garden City airport
- Larkrise Coffee in Hamilton
- Hays Recreation Center
- Fort Hays State University
- Uniontown Community Center

With improvement of internet across Kansas, farmers could better monitor the water crisis, animal management, and other efficiencies that urban areas are demanding the agriculture industry pay.

Justice Involved

PPMC hosted three virtual focus groups with those who serve incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations. Representatives from Southeast Kansas Juvenile, Probation, Drug Courts in Allen, Woodson, Wilson, and Neosho counties participated, as well as the Kansas Department of Corrections, risk education program representatives, and other providers across the State.

Highlights and Locations

For those who are incarcerated or in work release type programs access to resource rooms with computers is available.

Hutchinson and Ellsworth Correctional facilities offer technology literacy classes. Those who are in transitional programs have access to Pathway Grants which provide a Chromebook and three months of cell service with a cell phone. Most of these individuals are estimated to have a basic knowledge of technology.

Challenges

Older adults who are justice involved are often hesitant to use technology or, reluctant to learn. Having been incarcerated for several years, when they are released, many find the world has moved on with technological advancements. Reluctance to learn digital skills may hinder employment, engagement in the community, and access to basic resources.

Affordable connection is a primary hindrance for this group. For those who are justice involved in southeast Kansas, affordability is the primary hindrance to access to broadband. Clients receive government issued cell phones, but they rely on WIFI connection and have limited minutes for calls, hindering access to continuing education and vocational advancement. For example, the FAFSA application for student loans requires an email and 3rd party authentication, which is not an option for these clients. Staffing shortages are also a concern in access to the computer resource rooms in correctional facilities, as staff must be onsite when clients use computers and other technology.

Refugees

The PPMC hosted a virtual focus group for providers who serve refugees and asylum seekers across Kansas. Representatives from the International Rescue Commission attended.

Highlights and Organizations

Many clients receive cell phones as part of the resettlement process. The International Rescue Commission offers tech literacy classes for their clients and families. After

COVID, IRC created a position dedicated to digital literacy. USD 457, in Garden City, offers hotspots for families.

Challenges

Challenges for this group include language barriers, lack of access to devices, and lack of affordable connection in homes. Most applications for jobs and resources are in English and Spanish, and sometimes Vietnamese. Providers noted that they need applications translated into Swahili, Pashto, Dari, Arabic, and Ukrainian for their clients in the Wichita area. Garden City has 40 different countries represented, with many indigenous languages spoken. Refugees often don't apply for discount service due to lack of social security number and fear of their immigration status. Another barrier involves internet service providers to schedule in-home internet installation for new clients online, providing a barrier for those without internet access. The technicians who install services for the ISPs only speak English, creating confusion for those who may not speak English. Participants suggested ISPs who serve areas with larger non-English populations employ bilingual technicians to better serve their communities when possible. For refugees and asylum-seeking individuals, finding affordable devices is an added challenge.

Opportunities

- Using the model of tech literacy specialist position for other communities
- Incentivizing ISPs to employ bilingual, and refugee populations to help with workforce and translation services

Veterans

The PPMC hosted two virtual focus groups inviting providers from across Kansas. The results below reflect two individuals' feedback. One serves Veterans in Western Kansas, the other in Wichita.

Highlights

The Veterans Administration provides case managers who help clients get access to the internet in their homes. Medical appointments through the Veterans Administration

are often Telemed, for those who qualify, and have reliable affordable access. In Western Kansas no highlights were noted for Veterans. For clients who live in Wichita, the following provide significant resources for necessities:

- United Methodist Open Door
- Catholic Charities
- Interfaith Ministries

Challenges

Access to employment often relies on online applications; this presents a significant barrier for many Veterans. Some of whom are homeless with no access to technology, and those who lack basic computer literacy. Many in this group are on a limited and fixed income, limiting access and affordability and devices.

In Western Kansas the challenges for Veterans are much greater. The lack of affordable, reliable internet prevents access to medical appointments, jobs, and other basic resources.

Basic computer literacy classes would benefit the older adult Veterans who may not recognize how lack of connectivity affects connectivity to community, as well as basic resources. One participant said, "If they feel like they can learn something productive, it will snowball into something bigger and bigger. Gather resources and facilitate training on basic tech to Veterans."

Survey



A total of 870 survey responses were received during late February to April 2023. After disqualifying responses under 50 percent complete, the PPMC analyzed the 680 remaining responses. Fifty Kansas counties are represented in the data.

Respondents had the option to take the survey online or on paper. The survey was offered in three languages: English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The overwhelming majority of respondents took the survey in English. For most survey questions, respondents were allowed to select all responses which apply to their particular situation.

Promotions of the survey included videos in Spanish, Vietnamese and ASL, in addition to English. Several distribution methods were used. Focus group participants from across the State were strongly encouraged to take the survey after participating in an event. Links and QR codes to the survey were also distributed via social media, several Kansas association listservs, and the Commerce Community Connection newsletter. [E11]

Survey Findings

Access

Almost all (95 percent) of respondents reported they have access to the internet at work or home.

Respondents who said they had no internet access at work or home were asked why it was not available.

- 80% said there's no service in their area
- 26% said they cannot afford it
- 13% said they are not sure how to use it

- 10% said they do not have equipment

Public Internet Use

Respondents without access at home or work were asked if they can access the internet in a public location. Over half (57 percent) access the internet at a library.

Other public places where respondents access the internet are:

- Work (40%)
- Coffee shop or restaurant (32%)
- School (15%)
- Community center (4%)

Six percent of respondents reported they are housebound with no public access to the internet.

There are challenges to using the internet in a public location. The biggest challenge for respondents is lack of privacy (82 percent). Reliable internet availability (72 percent) is another significant challenge. A quarter (25 percent) of respondents said there are not enough computers. Eleven percent of respondents indicated either they need help once they get on the internet, or they do not always have a ride to the location.

Quality of Life

The majority of respondents agree better access to the internet would improve quality of life. More respondents think better access would improve their community's quality of life (93 percent), compared to their own (89 percent).

Assistance

Many respondents (71 percent) said they have some place to go when they need help using the internet. Retail stores are where most respondents (65 percent) go for help.

Other common places include

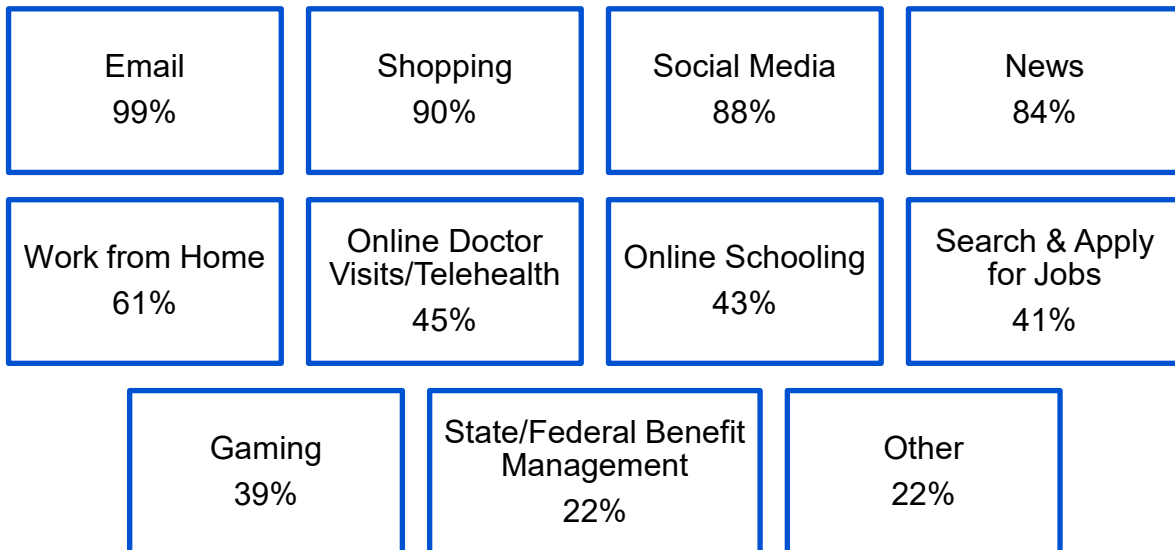
- YouTube or Google (43%)
- Library (2%)

- School (15%)
- Community center (13%)
- Church (8%)
- Friends or family (4%)

About a third (29 percent) of respondents said they have no place to go when they need help.

Internet Use

All respondents were asked about different ways they use the internet.



A large number of respondents indicated “other” uses. When asked to specify, some common responses were:

Streaming
Accessing information
Finding forms and paperwork related to healthcare, taxes, etc.
Attending church
Banking and finance management
Paying bills, fines, etc.
Running a business
Connecting with family and friends
Checking the weather and alerts
Attending school

Most (66 percent) respondents have four or more ways to use the internet. Just over a quarter (27 percent) have two or three ways. Only a few (5 percent) have just one way to use the internet.

Respondents are confident they know how to use the internet and computers. The overwhelming majority agree they know how to use the internet (95 percent) and computers (94 percent).

Time Spent on the Internet

A large majority of respondents (80 percent) said the internet gets used for four or more hours a day at their home or business. Few (15 percent) respondents indicated daily use of two to four hours. Even fewer (5 percent) said zero to two hours.

Service Levels

The most common (29 percent) service level for respondents reported having was between 25 and 100 MBS download/3MBS upload. A quarter of respondents have better than 100 MBS download/3 MBS upload. Fewer (19 percent) have under 25 MBS download, 3 MBS upload. Over a quarter of respondents (27 percent) did not know their service level.

Cost

Most respondents (62 percent) pay between \$50.00 and \$99.99 per month for their internet. Others pay:

21%	\$100.00 - \$149.99
8%	\$0.00 - \$49.99
4%	\$150.00 - \$199.99
1%	\$200.00 - \$249.99
1%	\$250.00+

The median cost for internet service reported was \$101 per month. Respondents who reported an income less than \$20,000 per year reported paying on average \$54 per month for internet access. Those who reported earning between \$20,000 and \$99,000 per year reported paying an average of \$86 per month. Those who reported earning over \$100,000 per year reported paying the most, at an average of \$132 per month.

Training

Respondents were asked whether training could help them use technology better. Some respondents indicated the training on the following would be helpful:

- Online doctor visits (telehealth) (26%)
- Work from home (19%)
- State or Federal benefit management (18%)
- Social media (16%)

Respondents were also asked about training for shopping, news, online schooling, email, searching & applying for jobs, and gaming. Less than 15 percent of respondents indicated training in these areas would be helpful.

Demographics

Covered Populations

About a third (28 percent) said they did not identify as a covered population. The remaining 72 percent of respondents did:

46%	Aging
42%	Rural Inhabitant
11%	Low-Income Household
9%	Disabled
8%	Veteran
7%	Racial and/or Ethnic Minority
4%	LGBTQI+
3%	English is a Second Language

No respondents identified as incarcerated.

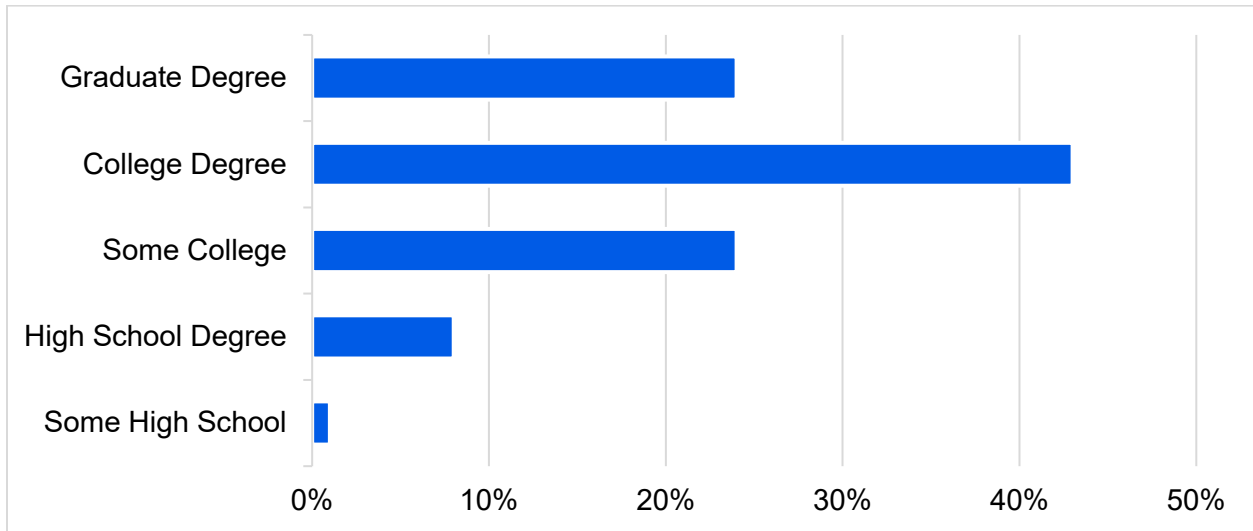
Gender

Most respondents (62 percent) identified as female. Almost all other respondents (35 percent) identified as male. Less than one percent identified as nonbinary. Two percent of respondents preferred not to answer the question.

Education

Less than half of respondents (43 percent) have a college degree. About a quarter of respondents have either completed some college (24 percent) or have a graduate degree (24 percent). Few respondents have a high school degree or less (9 percent).

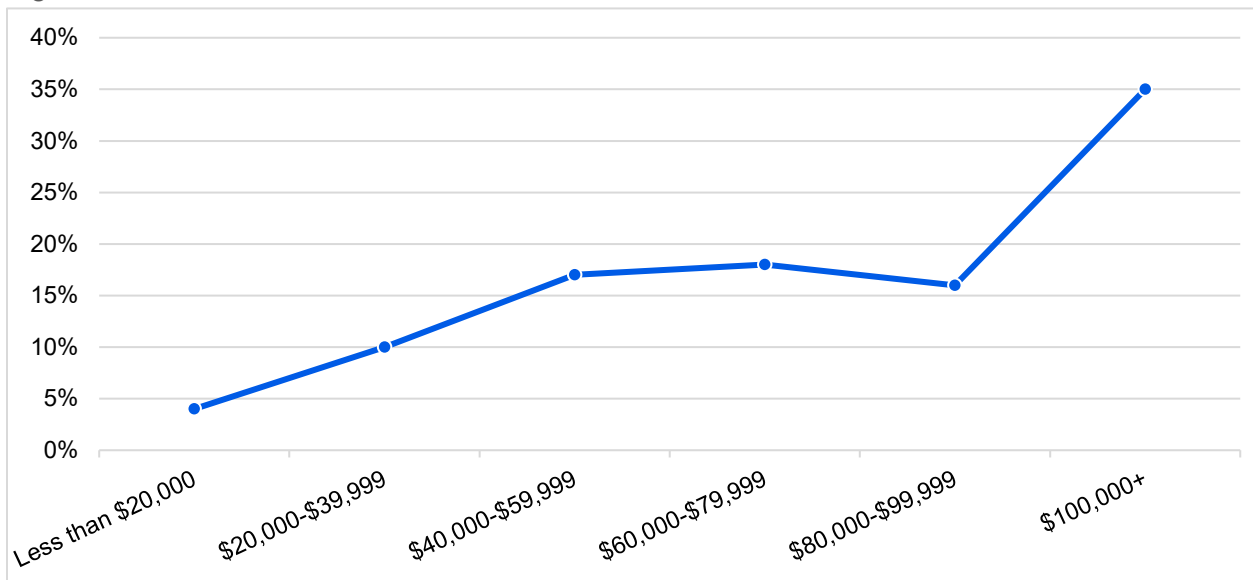
Figure 1: Education Level



Income

Most survey respondents (35 percent) indicated their total household income is more than \$100,000 annually. Taken together, about half of respondent households (51 percent) make between \$40,000 and \$99,999 annually. Fourteen percent of respondent households make \$39,999 or less.

Figure 2: Annual Total Household Income



Location

Respondents were asked to provide their zip code and address. Many (86 percent) provided their zip code. Eighty-three unique zip codes were provided, representing 50 different Kansas counties.

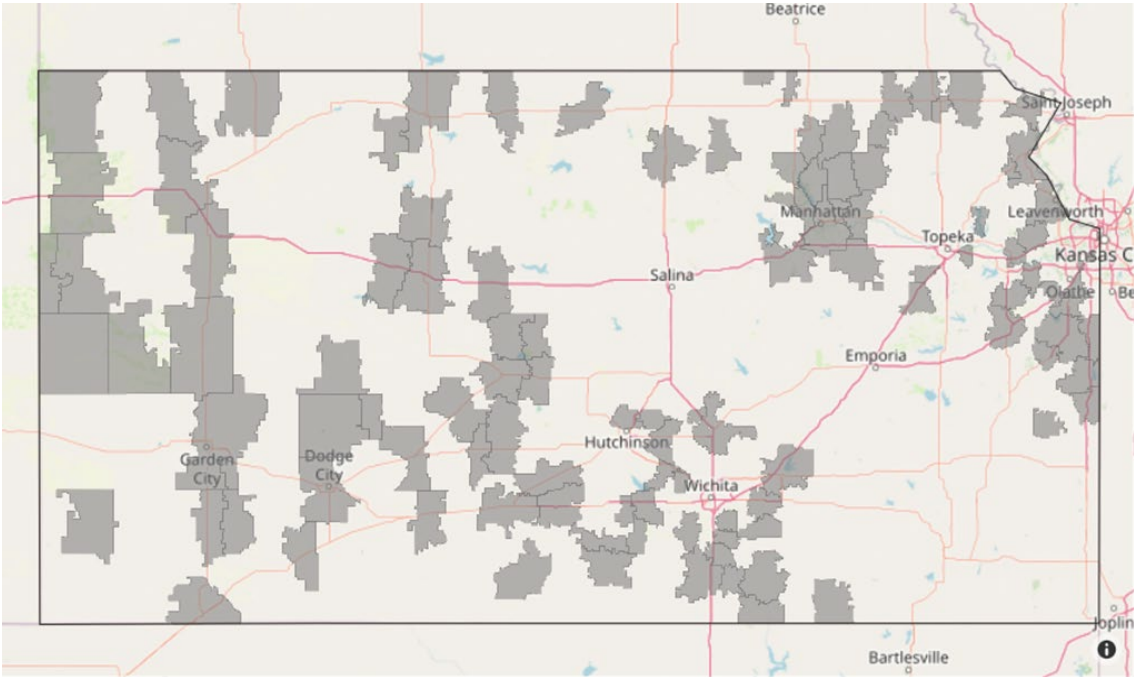
Zip codes with the highest participation included:

- 66502 | Riley County (14 respondents)
- 66701 | Bourbon County (8 respondents)
- 66801 | Lyon County (8 respondents)
- 67901 | Seward County (8 respondents)
- 67801 | Ford County (6 respondents)

Notably, there were no responses recorded in Salina or the greater Southeast Kansas area. Salina was the last roadshow focus group. Survey analysis had already begun, so any responses would not be included in the analysis. The lack of responses in the greater Southeast may be partially attributed to the fact that Emporia was the first focus group of the roadshow and the survey had not yet been opened.

Zip codes with one or more survey response(s) are shaded grey in the map below.

Figure 3: Kansas Zip Codes Represented by Survey Participants [E12]



Recommendations for KOBD

The Kansas Office of Broadband Development can take several recommended steps to improve digital access statewide. Feedback in this section is generated from a focus group question asked to all participants. Below are the specific repeatable recommendations.



Recommendations

1. Fund grants that prioritize underserved communities
 - a. Clarify grant requirements for applicants
 - b. Provide grant writers for underserved communities
2. Serve as a statewide advocate for rural and underserved areas, promoting their needs and concerns
 - a. Collaboration with the legislature to allow USF to be directed to internet service providers, improving access for rural Kansans; the same approach can be taken for cellular infrastructure
 - b. Eliminate regulations to achieve greater good
3. Community Education
 - a. Provide training for individuals and organizations
 - b. Provide tech training for library staff
4. Continue planned buildouts-outs
 - Infrastructure Development
 - a. Prioritize fiber and collaborate with cell carriers for increased impact
 - b. Implement last-acre and door-to-door fiber
5. Enhance marketing and continue robust outreach to engage all voices
6. Establish a poll sharing policy
7. Support small ISPs that don't have the cash flow for large capital investment
8. Prioritize serving rural areas first
9. Cull ISP providers together by region

10. Use shovel-ready programs like KC Digital Drive and MARC
Streamline ACP process
11. Expedite agreement with KS DCF to quickly enroll families who already qualify
for assistance

Conclusion

This project included important takeaways. Residents of Kansas are passionate and willing to engage. The need for increased fiber infrastructure across the State is great. Digital literacy and access to devices, though important, needs to come after important infrastructure is built. This project built trust with the Kansas Office of Broadband Development and community influencers from every region. The opportunity to build on this trust through continued communication and progress with communities and stakeholders will be the key to success.

Appendix

Roadshow Focus Group includes 6 questions.

At each KOBD Roadshow location (26 total cities) the PPMC asked the listening audience the same six focus group questions listed below:

1. This topic can be confusing. When we say digital access, what does that mean to you?
2. Tell us about a time when you or your community were impacted because they were unable to access the internet or devices or did not know how to use them.
 - a. Who is most impacted in your opinion?
 - b. What is the current loss to your community?
3. Tell us about what is going well for digital access in our community. What are resources, assets or knowledge that we can build upon?
4. What would be the benefits to your community if everyone had access to the internet and devices and knew how to use them? In your view, what would it look like for these problems to be solved?
5. How can KOBD help?
6. Is there any other feedback you would like to provide at this time?

Covered Population Focus Group Questions

The PPMC conducted seven Virtual Focus Groups/Listening Sessions over Zoom and asked the same group of questions listed below to representatives serving covered populations:

1. Is using a computer new to your clients? What help or services are provided?
2. Do your clients have broadband connection at home? Where do they go, if not? If those places are not open- where else?
3. Many people experienced issues with broadband connection during the height of Covid closures. What was that like for those you serve?

Are their resources you have found to make the cost of an internet connection more affordable? Or programs that help with purchasing a computer?

4. What programs do your clients depend on for support (food bank, nonprofits, churches, etc.)? Do these organizations have resources for you to use for computer training or broadband affordability?
5. Is there any other feedback you would like to provide at this time?