



Broadband and Digital Equity Investment Strategy

An Action Plan for Metropolitan Kansas City

July 2022



FEDERAL RESERVE BANK of KANSAS CITY

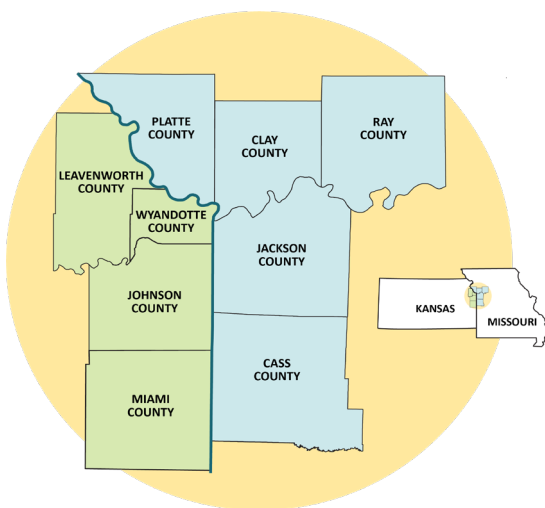


Over the next few years, the federal government will invest billions of dollars to eliminate the digital divide in unserved and underserved areas.

Much of the funding will be awarded to the states, which in turn will determine how and where to invest the funds. State governments will need to quickly ramp up capacity for managing new programs. A regional strategy, developed and supported by regional stakeholders, will be critical to ensure investments of state funds are effective.

The nine-county Kansas City region is diverse, as are the needs of the many

communities within it. Many organizations on both sides of the state line have worked for years to narrow the digital divide. They have knowledge, networks and credibility that will make a regional strategy for digital investment possible. Developing a regional strategy will not impede any effort currently under way. Instead, it will allow existing efforts to align towards common goals. It will also allow counties with less-developed efforts to build their capacity to be full partners in this effort.



Creating the regional strategy will require building on past and existing efforts, engaging organizations and subject matter experts working in this field and organizing and convening many stakeholders. The Mid-America Regional Council, KC Rising and the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City will serve the role of conveners and organizers. The role of these three organizations is not to make decisions or identify priorities on projects for applications to the two states for federal funds. Rather, they will help the many stakeholders — local governments, business and civic leaders, and community partners — identify together what would be the best collaborative investments for the region.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Kansas and Missouri state governments will choose to invest in state-wide and community projects over the next several years. Our outcomes will be produced by late fall 2022 to help encourage the two states to incorporate the Kansas City region's needs and proposed investments in their plans.

1 Broadband infrastructure analysis identifying **unserved and underserved areas** within the nine-county region*.

2 Identify infrastructure projects for **application to state or federal funding programs**, and assist the community in coordinating on possible grant applications.

3 **Digital Equity Investment Strategy** with specific projects to support broadband adoption and meaningful use by area households and small disadvantaged businesses—with recommendations for connectivity, devices and training.

4 Pilot **implementation projects** to support affordable internet subscription options, device provisions and digital training services.

(The COVID-19 Fund Advisory Board will provide oversight.)

**Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas; Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri.*

FUNDING TO SUPPORT THIS WORK

MARC has secured funding from the COVID-19 KC Regional Response and Recovery Fund to support this effort and pilot implementation projects. The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City is supporting the strategy with initial funding for the broadband infrastructure analysis.

PROJECT OUTLINE

The following is an initial project outline. The partners will identify and engage the many important stakeholders to be involved in the preparation of this investment strategy for the Kansas City region.

Coordinate work with key community partners

Identify and engage key partners. Build on previous and existing efforts like those advanced by KC Digital Drive and the KC Coalition for Digital Inclusion. Engage broad interests to build awareness, support community engagement, analyze needs and identify possible projects for investment.

Local government outreach

Interview county and city contacts across the nine-county region to determine the extent of their local broadband and digital equity planning work.

Inventory/Engagement of Community Organizations

Hear from those who have needs and experience barriers to adoption of technology. Engage with stakeholders to consider approaches to achieving connectivity, devices and training. Design approaches that build on existing stakeholder engagement efforts. Build off of known/existing work.

Business/civic engagement

KC Rising will lead engagement efforts with business and civic leaders, Internet Service Providers, philanthropy, and small business and entrepreneurial support organizations.

Build Strategic Relationships with State Broadband Offices

Consult with state officials to ensure that the regional information is useful for state decision-making.

Outreach to Educational Institutions

Engage school officials to understand student and employee needs and determine interest and possible role in the plan/funding strategies to address digital equity.

Broadband Infrastructure

Initiate 90-day project to evaluate broadband infrastructure in the KC region and identify unserved and underserved areas. Work with key stakeholders and possible national consultants/advisors to understand more about technologies to serve households with affordable connectivity.

Review Best Practice Research

Review report/discuss findings from UMKC Law School Student evaluation. Identify most relevant best practices and determine what additional information or discussions will strengthen the regional plan.

HOW STAKEHOLDERS WILL BE INVOLVED

MARC, KC Rising and the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City staff contacts are organizing a series of small working groups to guide the project to achieve stated outcomes over the next four to six months. In addition, a series of workshops will enable a broad group of local governments, community organizations, civic institutions, businesses and residents to be engaged.

Advisory Group

- Guide project and ensure stakeholders across the region are identified and engaged
- Communicate with foundation, business and civic supporters
- Be representative of the bistate region

Work Group - Broadband Infrastructure

- Serve as advisors for analysis to identify the areas that are unserved and underserved with broadband infrastructure (speed and price)
- Help identify projects that might be advanced for funding

Work Group - Community Engagement

- Work with consultant to design and carry-out a community engagement effort to better understand barriers to adoption and use. Engage community organizations.
- Identify investment opportunities to increase broadband adoption, device availability and digital skills training.

Work Group - Research and Tech Innovations

- What are the new technologies? What might be the opportunities through 5G?
- Identify best practices from other communities for households and small businesses.

This regional effort offers an opportunity to move digital inclusion forward, and it will involve and build on groups that have started work while at the same time increasing capacity throughout the region.

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The views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect those of the Federal Reserve System, its governors, officers or representatives. The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City makes no endorsement of any organization or funding decision.

APPENDIX A

Digital Equity Action Plan

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance has produced a guidebook for state digital equity plans. The 9-county regional analysis will include the elements to gain an understanding of population groups with the greatest needs, organizations with skills and capacities to support investments, measures to evaluate our region's progress, and possible projects for infrastructure and program investments.

- Estimates of households with and without broadband subscriptions and devices, with detail for targeted population groups (households by race/ethnicity, age, income, English proficiency, disabled, families with young children, veterans, re-entry, unemployed and low wage earner adults, public housing and other multi-unit housing tenants, etc.).
- Identify community organizations and ways to engage residents and groups to share information and perspectives on needs and opportunities for removing barriers to access and increasing connectivity. Engage trusted community organizations to help residents understand the value and safety of digital connectivity to improving their lives.
- Identify barriers to digital equity (including but not limited to costs) for targeted population groups and strategies to remove the barriers.
- Develop measures for increasing digital equity among each of the population groups listed above and outline steps to promote digital access for each group.
 - Availability of fixed and wireless broadband (infrastructure)
 - Affordability of access to fixed and wireless broadband
 - Digital literacy
 - Online privacy/data security
 - Availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support
- Outline broadband infrastructure investments needed to achieve the measures for digital equity – new/expanded fixed and wireless broadband.
- Develop specific actions on how community organizations and digital navigators could assist households achieve digital connection for meaningful uses.
- Determine the role of major public institutions, including libraries, schools, hospitals and safety net clinics, to help households achieve digital connection and meaningful uses.
- Outline how achieving these measures will support the region and states' economic growth.
 - Economic and workforce development goals/outcomes
 - Educational and health outcomes
 - Civic and social engagement
 - Delivery of other essential services
- Outline specific funding strategies to achieve the economic measures building on the assets of organizations and institutions in the region, including libraries, schools, nonprofit organizations and local governments. The strategies will help to bring organizations together for a coordinated approach to use of federal funds and strengthen the potential for matching resources.
- Define specific project concepts for federal funding with identified required match. The possible projects are to assist local jurisdictions and organizations in coordinating their efforts to secure dollars.
- Outline plans for ongoing regional planning and coordination to ensure long-term support for quality broadband infrastructure, opportunities to benefit from emerging technologies, and to ensure all households have access to high quality broadband services for meaningful uses.