

# Kansas Digital Equity and Inclusion Collaborative Request for Proposals – Spring 2021

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## **What is the purpose of this initiative?**

Broadband is essential infrastructure and lack of access is a significant equity issue to address because its wide-ranging applications touch every social determinant of health. “From economic stability, to education, to social supports, to civic agency, broadband and the digital services it enables are today intrinsically tied to collective health and equity outcomes.”<sup>1</sup> High-speed broadband services create new jobs, attract new industries and expand markets for new and existing businesses.<sup>2</sup> In reverse, “communities and businesses unable to access high-quality internet connections aren’t just at a disadvantage, they are effectively disqualified from a major portion of the economy.”<sup>3</sup> While the digital divide has been recognized for some time, the pandemic has elevated its depth and impact, especially in low-income communities of color, rural and other under-resourced areas of the state. For example, during the onset of COVID-19, school districts had to pivot to distance learning. Due to the inability to afford sufficient internet services and/or the lack of devices, many children across Kansas were unable to participate consistently in online lessons with their teachers and classmates. This gap in availability caused some students to fall further behind. New data on the impact of suddenly switching to virtual instruction is revealing that students started the 2020-2021 school year behind, with “students of color and those in high-poverty communities” falling further behind their peers, “exacerbating long-standing gaps in American education.”<sup>4</sup> To help Kansas families attain the best possible educational, economic and health outcomes, digital access and literacy is a necessity. **The focus of this request for proposals (RFP) is engaging collaborative partners to advance equitable digital access and literacy among families of color, low-wage worker households and others experiencing greater systemic barriers that contribute to the wealth gap.**

**To this end the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) will engage four organizations to co-create and implement a shared agenda to advocate for greater digital access, literacy and broadband adoption to support long-term goals of improving equitable educational and economic outcomes.** These organizations will facilitate the development of a bold new strategic planning process to create a framework for advocating for policies, programs and services that promote digital inclusion. These frameworks **will focus on developing plans that work toward convenient access to a stable, robust internet connection and appropriate devices, and connecting residents to resources for digital literacy skills.** At the center of these collaboratives should be the voices of families most impacted, as partners work together to identify and address systemic barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/digital-prosperity-how-broadband-can-deliver-health-and-equity-to-all-communities/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kansascommerce.gov/the-kansas-edge/utilities/broadband-initiative/>

<sup>3</sup> Kansas Office of Broadband Development, <https://www.kansascommerce.gov/community-development/infrastructure-assistance/broadband-development/>

<sup>4</sup> Meckler, Laura and Hannah Natanson. The Washington Post, December 6, 2020. “A Lost Generation: Surge of Research Reveals Students Sliding Backward, Most Vulnerable Worst Affected.” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/students-falling-behind/2020/12/06/88d7157a-3665-11eb-8d38-6aea1adb3839\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/students-falling-behind/2020/12/06/88d7157a-3665-11eb-8d38-6aea1adb3839_story.html)

KHF anticipates funding four organizations who will each receive up to \$250,000 (up to \$83,333 per grant year). The grant period spans three years, beginning August 1, 2021 and ending July 31, 2024.

### **Who can apply to participate?**

Nonprofits who identify as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code can apply. Eligible applicants are tax-exempt organizations qualified under Sections 509(a)(1) or (a)(2) of the Code. Verified government entities and religious organizations are also eligible to apply. Organizations that are not currently eligible may work with a fiscal sponsor to submit a proposal. If you have questions about your organization's eligibility, please contact Gina Hess, KHF Grants Associate, at [ghess@khf.org](mailto:ghess@khf.org).

This opportunity is for eligible organizations whose leadership is ready to think in bold new ways, using a two-generation, equity-focused approach to advance policies that create digital equity and opportunity for low-wage worker households and Black, Indigenous and other Kansans of color. KHF is interested in reaching organizations who have authentic connections to these households/families experiencing digital inequities and who are ready to create and implement a digital equity plan in conjunction with a network of stakeholders. These stakeholders could include regional and economic development and planning organizations, community-based organizations, tech companies, broadband coalitions and local or state agencies. If you have content questions regarding this RFP, please reach out to KHF Program Officer Chan Brown at [cbrown@khf.org](mailto:cbrown@khf.org).

### **What will the work look like?**

We are asking the four organizations funded through this initiative to engage in a strategic planning process and policy and advocacy efforts to:

- Develop a framework unique to their local context to advocate for policies, programs and services that promote digital inclusion, provide increased access to a stable, robust internet connection and appropriate devices, and identify/connect communities experiencing the greatest inequities to resources to learn digital literacy skills;
- Educate community members about the disparities in home service usage and build local capacity necessary for more widespread broadband adoption and digital education;
- Create a business case for greater adoption to encourage Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to explore how to extend services to communities with lower home adoption rates;
- Ensure that "[Smart City](#)" or other city-wide technology initiatives build equity into the planning process to avoid worsening the digital divide.
- Closely track sources of federal funding being made available to ensure consumers facing the greatest barriers benefit. Managing and coordinating resources as they become available will be an ongoing part of the strategic planning process.

Central to this process is involving those most affected by these issues in crafting solutions and creating a structure within the collaborative that provides opportunities for meaningful engagement. Grantees will co-create a shared advocacy agenda under the guidance of a neutral facilitator to ensure all partner voices are heard as they work to increase broadband adoption by addressing the multiple systems, policies and factors impacting connectivity and digital inclusion. **These efforts will be designed to:**

- Elevate the perspective of low-income families in developing local broadband strategic plans to encourage broadband adoption for targeted communities/regions, particularly low-income Kansans, to position communities in the best way possible to attract growth from current providers.
- Analyze broadband needs and digital literacy of local residents and existing resources and gaps in connection with businesses, industries, institutions, and organizations -- leveraging interest in economic and community development strategies, education, and health care.
- Increase public-private partnerships and connections with technology entrepreneurs, social impact companies, anchor institutions, organizations led by Kansans of Color, community-based organizations, corporations and agencies to support and sustain expansion of broadband adoption policies, digital literacy programs, low-income assistance programs, and awareness campaigns.
- Invest in digital skills/literacy training for adults and children, for example at community anchor institutions, such as libraries, neighborhood non-profits, and schools to prepare them for more lucrative job opportunities or STEAM careers.<sup>5</sup>

Grantees will dedicate one staff member (1.0 FTE) to this initiative who will serve as the primary point of contact. This staff member is required to attend all initiative-related meetings, such as learning community activities, grantee calls to share emerging issues and advocacy trainings to build capacity.

### **Application Process**

Proposals must be submitted online through the KHF Grant Portal, accessed by clicking [here](#). A user account is required to log into the portal. If you do not have an existing account, click on “New User” on the login page and complete steps, as instructed, to create one (contact us at [grants@khf.org](mailto:grants@khf.org) if you need help). Once you are logged into the portal, click on, “Open Grant Opportunities” from the home page to start an application for *this* initiative. Applications are not required to be completed in one sitting. You may come back to the application later by clicking on the “Applications” tab located at the top of the portal home page.

**Applications are accepted between April 28, 2021 to June 4, 2021 at 5:00 pm CST.** Applications submitted after the deadline are not considered for funding. Please direct questions about the submission process to Gina Hess, KHF Grants Associate, at [ghess@khf.org](mailto:ghess@khf.org).

### **How can I learn more about this initiative?**

We invite you to attend an **informational webinar, on Tuesday, May 4, 2021 at 2:00 PM CST.** This is an opportunity to learn more about the initiative and ask questions about the work, application process, etc. The webinar will be recorded and posted to the RFP webpage. **To participate, please click on this link to register to attend:**

<https://khf.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUpfuCspj4oGNQiwDT5ScTg-7bEitVw-ZDa>. We encourage prospective applicants to attend; however, attendance is not required to apply or be considered for funding. Applicants will be sent the Zoom link upon receipt of RSVP.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://edu.stemjobs.com/what-is-steam/>

A webpage dedicated to information about this RFP is at <https://kansashealth.org/grant-opportunities/khf-digital-equity-and-inclusion/>. In addition to basic details, this site will include the informational webinar once available, links to required attachments and a list of *Frequently Asked Questions* about the initiative.

### **What is expected during the grant term?**

Grantees will be asked to participate in meetings and report on activities throughout the grant term:

#### **Meetings**

- A virtual two-day cohort retreat kicks off the grant term. Two staff members from each organization are expected to attend. Applicants should plan time for sessions spread out over two days. Costs for attending are not necessary in the project budget as this is a virtual retreat.
- One meeting takes place each year of the grant term (four total, including the beginning kick-off retreat. Meetings in years two and three *may* take place in person or virtually, depending upon COVID-19 health and safety guidelines at that time. Grantees should budget costs associated with attending these annual meetings. Budgeted travel costs for in-person meetings that are ultimately held virtually may be repurposed for other grant costs.

#### **Reports**

- Every six months, grantees will communicate with KHF about their digital advocacy activities and any support needs.
- Brief annual project narratives will be submitted describing successes, challenges and budget expenditures updates.
- Grantees will participate in periodic evaluation activities.

### **What kind of information is being requested in the online proposal?**

Applicants provide the following information through the online application form:

- Contact information as needed.
- Applicant organization's mission and how it aligns with the stated aims of this RFP.
- Organization's existing or past efforts in championing policies and issues impacting digital equity and inclusion for families and children as well as current relationships with other active stakeholder/coalitions, if applicable.
- Community(ies) you will prioritize, including rationale and level of connection.
- Planned approach to develop a diverse collaborative of stakeholders that includes engagement with households most impacted by digital inequity
- Planned approach for working with a collaborative to create a framework for advocating for policies, programs and services for improved broadband adoption and digital literacy that is driven by community input.
- Bold policies you imagine your collaborative would promote to increase digital inclusion for families of color and those experiencing the greatest barriers to academic and economic success.
- Key personnel, partners and their role in advancing this work.
- What will be different because of this effort?
- A three-year budget for up to \$250,000 total covering costs for

- Personnel/Salary: Documenting each position directly employed to support the proposed work
- Consultants: Documenting costs for contract workers who are not regular employees, such as, consultants brought in for a specific, time-limited purpose.
- Project Costs: Documenting costs directly associated with initiative implementation (travel, supplies, meetings, etc.).
- Indirect Costs (if applicable): Indirects are not project-specific but support the organization's overhead necessary to project operation. Ex: postage, telephone bills, printer ink, facility rent or lease, utilities (not to exceed 10% of all other budget categories).
- Required attachments:
  - Acknowledgement of agreement review (provided by KHF).

Non-Profit Organizations Only

- IRS Form 990
- 2021 Organizational Budget
- Most recent unaudited financial statement (balance sheet)
- Official Audit (if available)
- Statement of cash flow

Government Entity Applicants Only

- Documentation of status as government entity (example: enabling statute, IRS letter of determination)

Churches Only

- Group Ruling Letter (if available)

**What is the timeline for next steps?**

RFP Released	April 28, 2021
Optional Informational Webinar	May 4, 2021, 2:00 – 3:00 PM CST
Proposals Due	June 4, 2021 by 5:00 PM CST
Grant Awards Announced	By July 5, 2021
Grant Term Begins	August 1, 2021
Final Grant Term Ends	July 31, 2024

**Please note:** This timeline is subject to minor changes that are updated on the RFP website.

**How are proposals scored?**

In reviewing proposals, consideration is given to the extent to which applicants describe:

- Their organization's readiness to examine the fundamental drivers of digital inequality and capacity to effectively implement high-quality advocacy efforts
- An authentic working relationship with the community(ies) being prioritized in this proposal and reasonable strategies to center their voice in this work
- A clear and thoughtful plan to engage the collaborative through strategic planning and the implementation of proposed advocacy efforts

- A compelling vision for bold policy advocacy that will address barriers to digital equity and inclusion for low-wage families and/or communities of color and contribute to improved long-term educational and economic outcomes.

## Appendix A: Definitions Provided by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)

### Digital Inclusion

Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). This includes 5 elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.

### Digital Equity

Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services.

### Digital Literacy

NDIA recommends the American Library Association's definition of Digital Literacy via their Digital Literacy Taskforce: *Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.* A Digitally Literate Person:

- Possesses the variety of skills- technical and cognitive- required to find, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information in a wide variety of formats;
- Is able to use diverse technologies appropriately and effectively to retrieve information, interpret results, and judge the quality of that information;
- Understands the relationship between technology, life-long learning, personal privacy, and stewardship of information;
- Uses these skills and the appropriate technology to communicate and collaborate with peers, colleagues, family, and on occasion, the general public; and
- Uses these skills to actively participate in civic society and contribute to a vibrant, informed, and engaged community.

### Broadband Adoption

*Rhinesmith, Colin. "Digital Inclusion and Meaningful Broadband Adoption Initiatives." Evanston, IL: Benton Foundation, January 2016. Benton.org/broadband-inclusion-adoption-report*

Broadband adoption has traditionally been defined as residential subscribership to high-speed Internet access. But for those in the field working to increase the digital capacity of communities, broadband adoption is daily access to the Internet:

- At speeds, quality, and capacity necessary to accomplish common tasks;
- With the digital skills necessary to participate online, and
- On a personal device and secure convenient network.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> National Digital Inclusion Alliance, "Definitions." <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/>