



# FEDERAL RESERVE BANK *of* KANSAS CITY

## **Backgrounder: Kansas City Fed “Speeding uptake” project**

The Federal Reserve System seeks to elevate community expertise through *community-engaged research*. Five Reserve Banks, including Kansas City, are launching *six pilot projects* that each use community-engaged research. The pilots are part of a *community of practice* that the Urban Institute will convene between August and December 2022. The *Kansas City Fed* pilot project focuses on neighborhoods in Midtown Kansas City and in Lee’s Summit with *low broadband uptake*.

The Kansas City Fed would like to engage *partners* in Speeding Uptake, with neighborhood-level connections and/or with broader interest in digital inclusion. The Kansas City Fed would *pay and train community members* to recruit participants and to facilitate conversations. The conversations could happen through interviews and focus groups or through other processes, such as a data walk. Participants would also receive a stipend.

## **What is community-engaged research?**

Community-engaged research is:

- Community-based: grounded in the needs, issues, concerns and strategies of communities and the community-based organizations that serve them.
- Participatory: directly engaging communities and community knowledge in the research process and its outcomes.
- Action-oriented: supporting and/or enhancing the strategic action that leads to community transformation and social change.

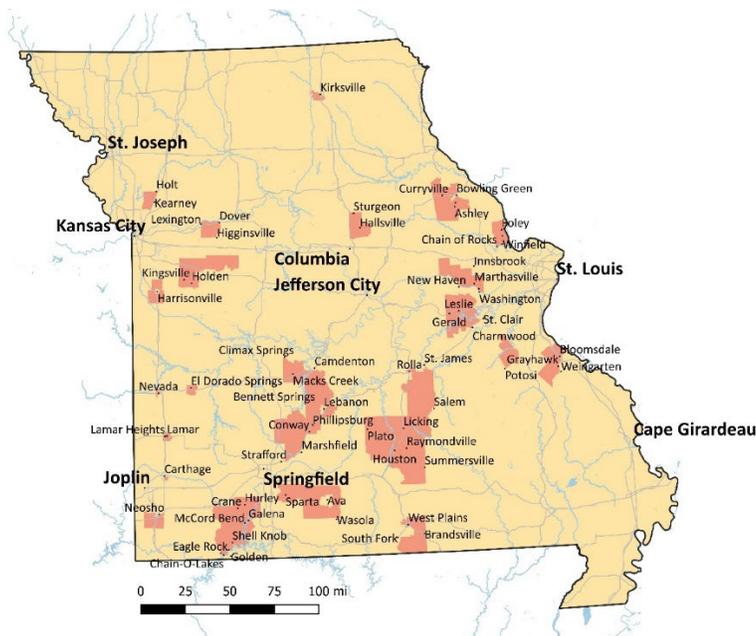
Community-engaged research addresses these issues:

- Exclusion: Community expertise needs to be integrated with researcher expertise.
- Extraction: Research should contribute to, not extract from, communities.
- Devaluation: Community research shares power.
- Non-contextualization: Lived experiences matter and create valuable context.

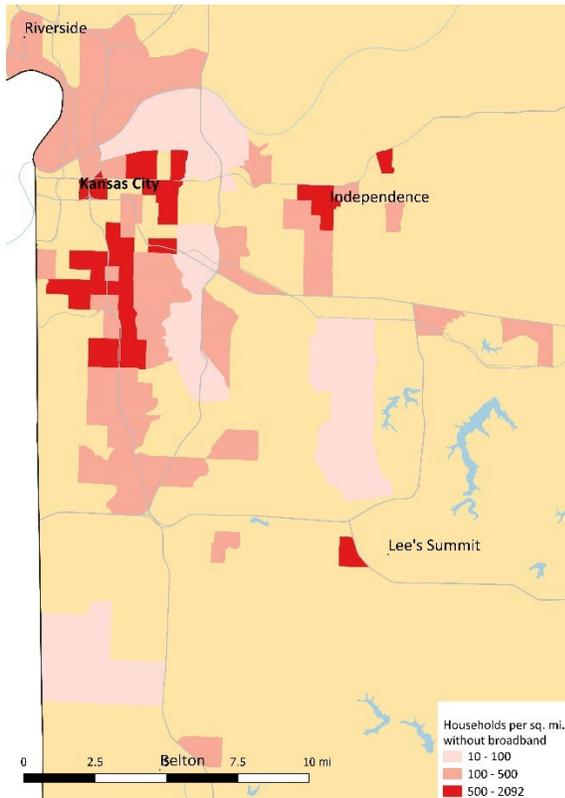
## What is the Kansas City Fed pilot project?

Over the next six years, states and U.S. territories will receive \$42.5 billion to expand broadband access. This once-in-a-lifetime infusion provides an opportunity to connect millions to high-speed, affordable broadband. But even when high-speed broadband is available, barriers often prevent people from subscribing. States will have access to another \$1.5 billion, with an additional \$1.25 billion available more broadly through competitive grants, to fund programs to provide people with the digital skills, computers and support needed to participate in the digital world.

The Kansas City Fed has used datasets, including maps provided by internet service providers and the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey, to map where in Missouri broadband is unavailable as well as where broadband is available but has low uptake, meaning that subscriptions to internet services are low. The map below shows the parts of Missouri where the most people probably don't have access to 100/20 broadband.



In metro Kansas City, we find low uptake in some low-income urban areas, where we might expect that people would lack funds for computers and internet subscriptions. But we also found low uptake in Lee's Summit, a wealthier suburb southeast of Kansas City. The map below shows urban unsubscribed populations in the Kansas City area.



Based on our research, we expect the following four reasons might have an impact in one or both communities:

- Digital redlining, which means that internet services providers have not upgraded their infrastructure in lower income areas to the same extent they have in wealthier areas.
- Affordability, as purchasing a computer and \$70 monthly internet subscription may be beyond the reach of those living paycheck to paycheck.
- Lack of awareness and trust, which can be remedied with the work of trusted community partners like neighborhood organizations, schools, and churches.
- Lack of digital knowledge and confidence, such as when an elderly person lacks skills and confidence to tackle life online.

While we are interested in learning from community residents why they are not online, we are most interested in learning what solutions they would like to try. What would make broadband feel worth the cost and trouble? What skills training might help them feel comfortable online, and where would they like to receive it? What would they want to try first, and where would they want to devote the most resources?

**How would the project findings be used?**

Local partners would help develop a work plan that provides the most possible benefits to the neighborhoods studied.

The information learned would be useful to communities wanting to benefit from the \$2.75 billion to assure that Americans have affordable, reliable broadband, along with the skills, confidence and devices to utilize it. The findings from this project will help inform policymakers so those funds can be spent on the most effective interventions. The findings will be shared with the public, so they can be used by any nonprofit or other organization competing for uptake grants. We would provide other Reserve Banks with a toolkit they can use to replicate the “Speeding Uptake” community engagement project in their own districts.