Computer and Internet Access in King County

Report Date: October, 2020

Economic, Social and Overall Health Impacts in King County, Washington

www.kingcounty.gov/covid/impacts

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Key findings

- Overall, access to adequate internet coverage is high (96%)
- But not all King County households have equal access to computers or high-speed internet that allow employees to work at home or children to participate in remote schooling
  - About 6,700 children do not have access to a computer in their home; another 14,600 have no internet access or only a dial-up connection
  - Almost 1 out of every 5 households with incomes under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level lack internet access.¹
- In addition to limited access, almost 500,000 people are digitally insecure in King County. Another 300,000 are limited by cost concerns.
- Technology, training, and resources could assist in closing the gap

¹. In 2020, 200% of the FPL is $39,660 for a family of 2.
Access differs across school districts

• About 6,700 children do not have access to a computer in their home

• Another 14,600 have no internet access (13,700 children) or have a dial-up connection (840 children).

Numbers may not add up to total due to rounding
Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey
23% of adults in King County have internet access barriers

- Internet access too expensive
- Slow internet (25 Mbps or less)
- No broadband service available
- No internet service at home or only have access through a smartphone/cellular plan
- No device to access the internet

Data Source: King County Technology Survey
Access to technology covers a range of services and abilities – this report focuses on the Access Limited to Access Stressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spectrum of Digital Connectedness: Segment Descriptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Technologically Inclined and Connected</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purposefully Disconnected</strong></td>
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<td>2%</td>
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- **Lack internet at home because they “don’t need or want the internet,” “don’t trust the internet,” or “don’t believe it is important or useful.”**
- **Believe the internet is important but do not have access where they live or rely on limited access including limited cellular data plans or free/public internet only.**
- **Have access to the internet where they live, but use borrowed devices or may only own one device in the household. Technology/the Internet is not central to their lives.**
- **Lack necessary skills to access and use the internet independently and confidently.**
- **Have access and the skills needed, but are frustrated by the speed and cost of their connection, as well as the service from their provider.**
- **Technologically savvy and adept, with adequate connections, but affected by worry about privacy/data security and lack of trust of internet companies.**
- **Have adequate access and the skills needed to actively utilize the internet. They also have all the devices and appropriate connections to reliably use the internet every day.**
- **Use the internet independently. Technology is “extremely important” to them. They have faster connections, unlimited data plans, and use a variety of devices throughout their daily lives.”**

*General Population figures based on 2017 ACS 5-Year Projections. Base: King County Residents age 18 and older (1,679,051), Individual Weight.*
Two-thirds of residents in the Digital Skills Limited segment rely on others for assistance. Nearly half in the Device Limited segment also face digital literacy barriers.
Residents without a Bachelor’s Degree or more education are more likely to be in the Digital Skills Limited, Device Limited or Access Limited segments.
Relative to their size in the population, a high number of Access Limited and Device Limited are Black and Hispanic, Asians are over-represented among the Digital Skills Limited segment.

Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding. AIAN=American Indian/Alaska Native, NHPI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
Households making less than $75,000 a year have significantly more technology access barriers.
2 of 5 families with children are Access Stressed and 1 in 4 have Digital Skills and Access limitations.
Households reporting a member with a disability had higher rates of technology barriers.
Background

• Policy strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 include:
  • March 9, 2020: All area colleges/universities switch to online classes
  • March 17, 2020: All K-12 schools closed for in-person schooling
  • Summer 2020: King County K-12 school districts and all area colleges/universities to begin school year with remote learning

• Telecommuting mandated by many large employers in March 2020 and continuing in Summer/Fall 2020
Background, continued

Segment Classification Criteria
(Survey Questions Applied to Determine Segments)

- **Purposefully Disconnected**
  - "Don’t need or want the internet (as a reason for why they are not using the internet)" OR "Don’t trust the internet (as a reason for why they are not using the internet)" OR "Don’t have internet at home" AND "Believe internet is not important or useful at all"

- **Access Limited**
  - Not any of the previous segment AND "Don’t have internet at home" AND "Believe it is at least somewhat important/useful" OR "Rely on a limited/prepaid cell phone plan ONLY" OR "Rely on free/public or building-supplied internet ONLY"

- **Device Limited**
  - Not any of the previous segments AND "Only have a smartphone, no other devices" OR "Are borrowing their device (do not own one)"

- **Digital Skills Limited**
  - Not any of the previous segments AND "Rely on others to use internet at least sometimes (but they own devices and have internet service at home, so access is not the reason for the reliance)" OR "Are unable to do three or more internet-related tasks online" OR "Are not confident using the internet" OR agree that they are "Not very good with technology" OR "Have a hard time learning how to use technology"

- **Access Stressed**
  - Not any of the previous segments AND "Have inadequate internet at home to do all the things they need to do" OR "Worry about affording new technology as it comes out" OR "Believe internet service is too expensive (as a reason they do not use it more)" OR "Believe internet is too slow (as a reason they do not use it more)" OR "Believe service plans are confusing (as a reason they do not use it more)"

- **Digitally Cautious**
  - Not any of the previous segments AND "Believe internet companies are hard to trust" OR "Worry about online privacy" OR "Are not confident doing all business online" OR "Believe technology is at least somewhat harmful to themselves, their families or society"

- **Digitally Connected**
  - Not any of the previous segments AND "Technology is somewhat important to them"

- **Hyper Connected**
  - Not any of the previous segments AND "Technology is extremely important to them"
Background, continued

• Data come from the King County Broadband Survey and the American Community Survey
  • U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014-2018 5-year data.
  • King County Broadband Access Study, February 2020. The King County Broadband survey looks at access and ability and creates different profiles. Thank you to KCIT for their review.
    • Summary

• Suggested citation: Computer and internet access in King County. Report date October 2020. Abigail Schachter, Amy Laurent, Eva Wong. Public Health Seattle & King County; Assessment Policy Development and Evaluation Unit.

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• For questions, please contact us at Data.Request@kingcounty.gov

• For information on other key Economic, Social and Overall Health Indicators related to strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19, see www.kingcounty.gov/covid/impacts