

**Narrowing the Digital Divide – Bringing Broadband Access to Low-Income Households**  
**The City of Wichita, Kansas**  
**Housing and Community Services Department**

The City of Wichita, Kansas, is narrowing the digital divide for low-income households. In 2017, T-Mobile donated 50 tablets to the City of Wichita Housing Authority (WHA) to be used in Public Housing's Greenway Manor and McLean Manor. WHA paid internet access fees on each device for the two-year program period. Senior and near senior residents age 50 and above had expressed strong interest in gaining access to the internet to enhance their lives. A small percentage of tenants learned to use the tablets successfully. One resident used his to find a job. Residents often went to the Housing Authority office to gain access to the internet through its Wi-Fi network.

The WHA is currently in the process of substantially rehabilitating all of its Public Housing units with the Rental Assistance Demonstration Program (RAD). WHA plans to install wi-fi in its multifamily buildings and its clusters of single-family houses. The City will require broadband cable installation in all new homes for first-time homebuyers funded by the HOME Program.

During February and March of 2019, the City of Wichita Office of Community Services collaborated with T-Mobile to provide mobile hot spot devices for low-income families. Two of the City's Neighborhood Resource Centers (NRCs) participated in the pilot program with the technical assistance of staff from the City's Information Technology Department.

T-Mobile donated 40 hotspot devices to the City for the purpose of loaning them to citizens for periods of up to two weeks. Forty devices were divided evenly between the Atwater NRC and Colvin NRC. Both centers are located in areas where 50 percent or more of the households qualify as being low-income. Atwater is located in the northeast part of the city and Colvin is located in the south central part of the city. Citizens checked the hotspots out for two-week periods. Just over 120 families were served in this two-month pilot program. The hotspots primarily stayed in the districts where they were checked out.

The 2013-2017 American Community Survey QuickFacts data reported 151,665 households in Wichita, Kansas. According to the data, nearly 84 percent have a computer and 74 percent have a broadband internet subscription. However the Brookings Institute article Signs of Digital Distress, (September 12, 2017), by Tomer, Kneebone, and Shivaram, included a map of broadband subscriptions in Wichita. The highest rates of internet need are in core areas of the City. See attached map.

Due to the success from the pilot, a one-year hot spot program will begin at Atwater, Colvin and Evergreen NRCs in August 2019. Evergreen is located in the near northwest portion of the City. Twenty devices will be stationed at each center and loaned to citizens for two-week periods. According to the HUD's 2018 CDBG Low- and Moderate-Income Data on HUD Exchange, 131,085 low-income persons live within a three-mile radius of the three NRCs listed above (an estimate of nearly 52,000 low and moderate income households).