



Connections

How businesses can close the digital divide

by: Jennifer Wilding

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KC Fed explores new paths toward digital inclusion

In its community development role the KC Fed traditionally has raised awareness of issues, convened stakeholders to find solutions and educated banks and community organizations on funding needs and opportunities. Recognizing its role as a community anchor with more than 1,900 employees, the KC Fed is exploring additional ways it can help close the digital divide.

Increasing Access and Knowledge

During a recent forum, Jeremy Hegle, a senior community development advisor at the Bank, announced a pilot program to divert 25 of the Bank's obsolete computers from its current computer recycling contract to Connecting For Good, a community organization that provides low-cost computers to individuals of low-to-moderate-incomes and organizations that serve them.

Hegle also introduced a volunteer effort headed by the KC Fed's Community Involvement Program. The employee-led initiative will support Literacy KC, a community organization that provides basic computer literacy training. KC Fed employee volunteers will assist students one-on-one in a computer lab, aid students during computer classes and instruct classes on such topics as computer basics, Microsoft Office and using email.

Why Digital Inclusion Matters

“Ninety-five percent of students today report needing to use the internet to do their homework,” Hegle said. “What happens when they don’t have computers or internet? They’re immediately put at a disadvantage. We also know that teaching people computer basics can be a significant boost to their employability skills. So I began thinking of our role in the digital divide as an employer, as a business. I challenged our Bank leadership to consider some innovative ways we can help close the digital divide. They saw it as a no brainer; neither of these initiatives bear any real cost to the KC Fed. Great solutions can result from just getting people together for some creative thinking and problem solving. “

Hegle said he hopes these initiatives will serve as a model for other employers to follow and explore additional ways they can support the community.

Author



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Jennifer Wilding, community engagement advisor for the Kansas City Fed, uses writing and public engagement skills on special projects for the community development department.

WritingIn 2026, the Kansas City Fed released Wilding's "[The Byways Report: The Scenic Route to Rural Prosperity](#)," examining how small towns have used route-based tourism as a strategy for economic development. Along with expert interviews and technical resources, the report includes stories from several byways, with a focus on Route 66 in Oklahoma. Her [three-part series on Investment Connection](#), the Kansas City Fed's signature program, appears on the [national website](#) about the Fed's work in

communities. Wilding co-authored [Disconnected: Seven lessons on fixing the digital divide](#), a layperson's guide to putting broadband, devices and training within reach of a community. In addition to special projects, Wilding edits the Kansas City Fed's [community development newsletter](#).

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Engagement Wilding served as project director for community-engaged research in a neighborhood where broadband subscriptions were very low. The engagement [built understanding](#) of barriers to connection. She also led [focus groups with unemployed individuals](#) and with people from nonprofits that serve them, held in Chicago, Detroit, Denver and Kansas City. Before joining the Kansas City Fed in 2018, Wilding was executive director of Consensus KC, a nonprofit consulting firm specializing in public policy and civic engagement. She holds a B.A. in urban affairs from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Her hobby is letterpress printing, using a 1,500-pound cast-iron press from the late 1800s.

About the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City is one of 12 regional Reserve Banks that, along with the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., make up our nation's central bank. We work in the public's interest by supporting economic and financial stability. The Kansas City Fed's territory includes Colorado, Kansas, western Missouri, Nebraska, northern New Mexico, Oklahoma and Wyoming. Our headquarters is in Kansas City, with branch offices in Denver, Omaha and Oklahoma City. The Kansas City Fed Community Development Department promotes economic development and public understanding that leads to progress for lower-income individuals and communities. Our focus areas include community development investments, digital inclusion, small business / entrepreneurship, and workforce development.

Media



Children learn new skills at the Juniper Gardens computer lab, in Kansas City, KS. Connecting For Good supports the lab, which also provides a safe place to gather after school.