

CONNECTIVITY Playbook Summary

Concerns/Issues | Connecting to Solutions

Playbooks: Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, Webster County Area; Blue Valley Area and Public Health Solutions; Buffalo County Area; Cherry, Brown County Area; Douglas County Community Collaborative; Families First - The Connection (North Platte); Growing Community Connections (Dakota); Hall County Community Collaborative; Keith Perkins County Area; McCook Area; Norfolk Family Coalition; Panhandle Partnership; Sandhills Community Collaborative; Statewide-Youth 18-26; Tribal Communities (Metro Omaha, Western Nebraska, Omaha Tribe, Santee Sioux Nation, Winnebago); York County Community Collaborative

Themes and priorities common across communities:

Internet Access:

- Rural areas- some have no available access, limited access, or unreliable access (Buffalo County Area, Panhandle Partnership, Sandhills Community Collaborative)
- Low income- some people cannot afford access (Sandhills Community Collaborative, Buffalo County Area)
- Library closures -result in removed internet access (Dakota)
- Seniors, children, service providers all have internet access needs, increasing demand (McCook Area)
- Disconnected Youth 18-16 struggle to maintain consistent access (Statewide)
- Homeless or near homeless populations and college students are without access (Hall County Community Collaborative)
- Indian Hills OPS reports only 20% of families have access to internet and technology (Douglas County Community Collaborative)
- Access is needed for telehealth, to work from home (zoom and skype) and to complete online applications (i.e. unemployment). (Tribal Community, Omaha Tribe)
- Lack of access affecting ability to attend college and school virtually (Tribal Communities, Winnebago, Statewide- Youth 18-26)
- eLearning for children, college students, and adult/non-traditional learners (Douglas County Community Collaborative, Hall County Community Collaborative, Statewide- Youth 18-26)
- Reduced ability to maintain work, complete eLearning, and process service and support applications prove difficult (Douglas County Community Collaborative, McCook County Area, Sandhills Collaborative)
- Childcare providers with school-aged children will need to increase service to manage learning (Panhandle Partnership)
- Those in apartment buildings experiencing increase community use (Statewide – Youth 18-26)

Phone Access:

- Cost for services and smartphones (Buffalo County Area, Sandhills Community Collaborative, Tribal Communities- Native American Metro Omaha, Tribal Communities- Native American Western Nebraska, Tribal Communities- Winnebago)
- Lack of phone access limits working from home/conference calls (Tribal Communities - Omaha Tribe)
- Access to resources/information (Tribal Communities- Winnebago, Blue Valley Area and Public Health Solutions)
- Inability to communicate with Sixpence, EDN, school, medical providers (Sandhills Community Collaborative)
- Inability to access mental health providers (Sandhills Community Collaborative, Tribal Communities - Native American Metro Omaha)

Device Access:

- Smart phones needed for elderly and low income families/individuals (Buffalo County Area, Panhandle Partnership), Youth (Buffalo County Area), Families/eLearners (Panhandle Partnership, McCook Area), rural areas, (Buffalo County Area), and Tribal Communities
 - Phones provide least expensive way to stay connected
- For people not involved in the school system it is unknown if they have the tools they need to be able to connect remotely to services (Growing Community Connections - Dakota County)
- eLearning distribution need to include adult learners and non-traditional students (Douglas County Community Collaborative)

Technology Help Needed:

- Some families are not tech savvy and unable to utilize technology (Douglas County Community Collaborative)
- Wait time for IT and internet assistance is a problem (Families First - The Connection (North Platte))
- Seniors feeling isolated without tech knowledge (Panhandle Partnership)

Unique needs and disparities

- Information is all provided in English. Need for translation. Need information provided on social distancing, school-work in multiple languages
- Increased access needed to reach immigrant communities (Douglas County Community Collaborative)
- Rural areas- some have none to limited access available (Buffalo County Area, Panhandle Partnership, Sandhills Community Collaborative)
- Some cannot afford access/cannot access by normal means, e.g. library (Sandhills Community Collaborative, Buffalo County Area, Growing Community Connections (Dakota))
- Seniors may be isolated without tech knowledge (Panhandle Partnership)

Barriers that exist for people to access necessary services

- Internet access and device access by schools is inconsistent
- The move to online access for assistance seems least accessible by the populations most in need. Providing phone assistance access would open access to a larger population.
- Funding requirements need flexibility to work for all populations, such as Youth 18-26

Workforce capacity related barriers to serve people impacted by COVID-19

- Internet and phone and device access
- Internet and device capacity barriers by household- not enough devices or bandwidth for people to work and attend classes.

Barriers around serving specific populations (historically segregated neighborhoods, immigrant populations, LGBT youth)

- Lack of communication noted for non-English speaking individuals and immigrants.
- Internet and device programs are largely centered on those with school aged children.
- Internet and phone access is needed to work remotely and to apply for assistance. Those who cannot afford access and devices will lose work options, lose ability to apply for new job without a number to be reached, and be limited in their ability apply for assistance
- Hotspot may require transportation to the location, thus require work, school, and applications to be completed while sitting in the car, in a parking lot
 - While helpful, this is conducive to short access needs rather than full days of learning and working

Solutions being implemented or proposed

- Refurbish/reuse technology
 - One therapist gave old cell phone to client, set up hotspot, and drove over and conducted the assessment/meeting from outside the house (Sandhills)
- Phone cards provided to access internet (Blue Valley Area and Public Health)
- Phone access for those unable to access the internet
 - Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership: They are helping to complete SNAP/ Medicaid/Headstart/Early Headstart applications over the phone – typically people would go to a library computer – since that can't happen, they can call in and can get help to apply over the phone (Growing Community Connections - Dakota County)
 - COVID 19 hotline ; call for services (Tribal Communities, Winnebago)
- Device distribution programs are reported in the following areas:
 - Schools- devices - largely reported as Chromebooks (Buffalo County Area, Families First - The Connection (North Platte), Growing Community Connections (Dakota), Keith Perkins County Area, McCook Area, Panhandle Partnership, York County Community Collaborative
- Smart Phones – (Richard Young Hospital, Buffalo County Area and DHHS, York County Community Collaborative)

- Devices donated and refurbished to provide to community families - consider request to local companies and families (McCook Area, Panhandle Partnership)
- Offer funding to ESUs to purchase tablets for students and connect with families to set it up; umbrella organization to procure technology; distribution must be granular and aimed at families with biggest need (Douglas County Community Collaborative, Statewide- Youth 18-26)
- Free Internet and Hotspot Access:
 - Concerns about free internet access:
 - . Cox online asks about citizenship scare undocumented individuals (Douglas County Community Collaborative)
 - . Worry over how to cover internet after the 2-month free period (Sandhills Community Collaborative)
 - . Build broadband backbone to support rural areas of county, hot spots for low income and minorities (Buffalo County Area)
 - . Some families are afraid to call Spectrum for free access because they already owe money (Keith Perkins County Area)
 - . Families might not know or be able to access the companies that are providing free internet (Blue Valley Area and Public Health Solutions)
 - . Hotspots don't work with all technology (Buffalo County Area)
 - . Some of the "free" internet providers are still doing a credit check (Statewide - Youth 18-26)
 - . Families get "2 months free" of a 12-month contract (Statewide - Youth 18-26)
 - . Cox low-income internet and Spectrum free internet requires participation in SNAP/ADC/Free Reduced Lunch Program and requires school-aged children in home (Statewide- Youth 18-26)
 - . SSN required to apply with Cox (Statewide - Youth 18-26)

Other findings

- Mental/behavioral health needs are impacted by technology
- Access to telehealth needs are noted in the following areas:
 - Cherry Brown County Area
 - Families First - The Connection (North Platte)
 - Sandhills Community Collaborative
 - Statewide- Youth 18-26
 - Tribal Communities- Native American Metro Omaha
 - Tribal Communities- Omaha Tribe
- Lack of central point of communication for the community is an issue (Sandhills Community Collaborative)
- Sandhills reports printing posters and distributing them at gas stations to communicate more broadly

Connectivity Survey Summary

A survey was created and sent out through the Bring Up Nebraska community collaboratives to assess connectivity needs for different populations across the state. Respondents to the survey represented over 30 counties and four tribal communities.

Data on internet/device availability was collected for the following populations:

- Early childhood / young children
- School-aged children (K-12)
- Older Youth (aged 18-26)
- Children and Youth in State Care (e.g., Foster care, probation, emergency placements, YRTC)
- Seniors
- People with disabilities
- People who are currently experiencing homelessness
- Victims of domestic violence
- People with chronic illness, co-morbidities, COVID-19 positive or exposures
- People with serious, chronic mental health issues

Early childhood / young children

- Thirteen of 22 (59%) survey respondents said that early childhood and young children had internet connectivity issues in their communities, in particular those in rural communities and lower income families.
- Half of respondents indicated the need for laptops or tablets ranging in number of devices from 5 to 400. In terms of who would be responsible for the devices, schools or parents/guardians were named as the responsible parties.
- Other possible devices/technology needed for young children included hot spots and headphones to use with laptops and tablets.
- Tablets and computers could be used for accessing learning games, reading opportunities, and counseling services.

School-aged children (K-12)

- Fifteen (68%) of the 22 survey respondents said that school aged children had internet connectivity issues in their communities and the need would be exacerbated if school did not start normally in the fall.
- Half of respondents indicated the need for laptops or tablets ranging in number of devices from 5 to 500. Three respondents indicated a need for mobile phones and two said hot spots were important to improving connectivity.
- In terms of who would be responsible for the devices, the schools were named as the responsible party.
- Tablets and computers could be used for e-learning curriculum, Zoom meetings with teachers, instructional games, and telehealth with counselors or therapists. Mobile phones could be used to keep in touch with students via text and ensure the safety of students.

Older Youth (aged 18-26)

- Six (27%) of the survey respondents said that older youth had internet connectivity issues in their communities and the need would be exacerbated if school did not start normally in the fall.
- All of the respondents indicated the need for laptops or tablets and mobile phones. The number of devices required ranged from 10 to 100.
- In terms of who would be responsible for the devices, the young adult would be the responsible party with the assistance from local libraries, colleges, or independent living agencies.
- Tablets and computers could be used for school work, job searches, and telehealth services. Mobile phones could be used to provide a point of contact for employers, childcare, schools, and behavioral health services. Funding streams for this population is difficult and would require community conversations to determine possible resources.

Children and Youth in State Care (e.g., Foster care, probation, emergency placements, YRTC)

- Only three respondents provided information about children and youth in state care. One of the respondents indicated that internet was provided for those children and youth connected to DHHS offices. Another respondent the need for tablets, computers, or phones for the purposes of staying in contact with case workers.

Seniors

- One respondent provided information about seniors, indicating that seniors (in particular low income) would benefit from computers or tablets. However, there was not any guidance on how they devices might be used or who would maintain them.

People with disabilities

- Two respondents provided information about connectivity needs of people with disabilities. The benefit to having devices (computer, tablets, or phones) would be to access telehealth therapy or support groups from a secure platform.

People who are currently experiencing homelessness

- Six (27%) of the survey respondents said that people experiencing homelessness had internet connectivity issues in their communities.
- All of the respondents indicated the need for laptops or tablets and mobile phones. The number of devices required ranged from 1 to 100.
- In terms of who would be responsible for the devices, the young person would be the responsible party with the assistance from an independent living coach, or service groups like Project Homeless.
- Tablets and computers could be used for telehealth services, meetings with case managers, or e-learning. Mobile phones could be used to provide a point of contact for employers and housing agencies, and accessing resources and supports.

Other Special Populations

- No information on connectivity issues was provided for people with chronic illness, co-morbidities, COVID-19 positive or exposures.
- One respondent shared the connectivity needs of victims of domestic violence. In particular, mobile phones would provide this population an opportunity to access services and complete job applications.
- One with respondent shared the connectivity needs of Nebraskans with chronic mental health issues. Like individuals with disabilities, devices and internet connectivity provide those with mental health issues to safely access therapy services and support groups.

Overall Connectivity Issues

Options for internet providers in communities:

- The number of providers is larger in the more urban communities and smaller in rural communities
- Rural communities have the issue of fewer providers as well as less consistent service which makes things like Zoom meetings challenging

Broadband issues need to be addressed in order for computers, tablets, and phones to work:

- Signal strength in rural areas
- Improved upload and download speeds in rural areas
- Subsidies to reduce cost for low-income families

