**Minneapolis: a patchwork quilt of digital inequality**

About one-quarter of households in the poorest and most racially-segregated neighborhoods in Minneapolis don't have any Internet connections at home -- not through smartphones, Wi-fi, home computers or anything. However, most other areas of the city have much lower rates, often as low as five percent.

This disparity has been unchanged, despite improvements in Internet access in other parts of the city in recent years. Citywide, about 9 percent of households don't have any Internet access and about 15 percent don't have Internet-connected computers at home, according to the 2014 [Minneapolis Community Technology Survey](http://www.minneapolismn.gov/it/inclusion/WCMS1P-118865).

“The [digital] divide has gotten much finer”, it’s more “shades of gray,” says Jennifer Nelson, director of State Library Services with the Minnesota Department of Education, adding that “the gaps are narrowing but getting deeper.”

Compared to other parts of the country, however, Minneapolis is doing pretty well. The Twin Cities' has one of the highest Internet access rates among metro areas in the U.S.  Only about 17 percent of households don't have high-speed Internet-connected computers at home, according to the 2014 American Community Survey. The national average is 25 percent. (San Jose, Calif. has the lowest rate in the nation at 11 percent)

The city of Minneapolis' annual survey shows digital equity gaps related to education, race, age and income, says Otto Doll, the city's chief information officer.

About 24 percent of black residents and 10 percent of other minority residents who responded to the survey did not have Internet-connected computers at home, compared to six percent of white residents.

But it's not entirely about being unable to afford Internet access. About half of survey takers in the Hawthorne and Jordan neighborhoods said home Internet was inessential, a sentiment shared among older, less-educated and poor respondents across the city.

Cellphones with mobile Internet are increasingly common, but the north side lags behind on that, as well. About 22 to 35 percent of households on the north side lack mobile web access.

For those looking for jobs, that cell phone might not be good enough for the various tasks involved with applying for jobs, such as uploading a resume, Nelson says. That's one of the city's big concerns about this digital inequality because about one-third of respondents who said they were unemployed reported not having a home Internet connection.

And though USI Wireless offers more than 100 free Wi-Fi hotspots throughout Minneapolis, along with paid plans people can use at home, only about 28 percent of survey respondents said they used it or similar services.