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

While Minnesota and the Twin Cities are highly ranked for tech access nationwide, the digital map of Minneapolis is a patchwork of inequality.

Though plenty of neighborhoods across Minneapolis saw improved Internet access the past few years, about 15 percent of households – roughly 25,000 in all – don’t have Internet connected computers at home, a divide cut along racial and socioeconomic lines.

Worse, about 9 percent of Minneapolis households don’t have Internet connections at all – not through smartphones, Wi-Fi or anything -- numbers that more than double in the city’s north and central neighborhoods.

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

With only six percent of whites lacking home connectivity compared to about 24 percent of black people and 10 percent of other minorities, the city’s poorest and most racially segregated areas are two to five times less connected than other neighborhood groups.

These trends are outlined in the Minneapolis Community Technology survey, which the city’s chief information officer Otto Doll says points to digital gaps related to education, race, age and income.

And it’s not just about a lack of technology, since only about half of survey takers in the Hawthorne and Jordan neighborhoods said home Internet access was essential -- sentiments shared among older, less educated and poorer respondents across the city.

Cellphones with mobile Internet are increasingly common, though the north side still lags behind, where households lacking mobile Internet connections still ranged between 22 percent and 35 percent depending on the area.

Even those with smartphones may find those devices aren’t quite smart enough for tasks like applying for jobs or running complex applications, Nelson said, situations where laptops or desktops would fare better. And that’s a significant challenge since the survey reports about a third of the unemployed seeking work don’t have Internet connections.

While every public library has at least one Internet-connected computer, according to Nelson, the survey shows about a quarter of respondents didn’t use them or other publicly available devices, a trend that’s even greater in some poorer areas of the city.

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 that or similar services.

Though the city conducted its technology survey each year from 2012 to 2014, Doll said it didn’t run a 2015 survey and hasn’t scheduled another.