

# **The Arc Minnesota and Regional Quality Council**

## **Technology Needs Assessment Analysis and Report**

### **Executive Summary**

**6/2021**



# Table of Contents

Introduction and Purpose .....	3
Methods .....	3
Results .....	3
Demographics: .....	3
Technology Devices and Internet Privacy .....	5
Internet .....	6
Technology and Connecting During COVID-19: .....	6
Discussion and Recommendations .....	7
Center Civil and Human Rights .....	8
Intentionally Fund Equitable Access .....	8
Person-Centered Technology .....	8
Presume Competence .....	9
Assessment Limitations: .....	9
Conclusion .....	10
Appendix .....	11
Appendix A: Technology Needs Assessment Survey .....	11
Appendix B: Technology Needs Assessment Outreach Materials .....	11
Appendix C: Technology Resource Page .....	11
Appendix D: Technology Needs Assessment Outreach List .....	11
References .....	12

## Introduction and Purpose

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already existing state of isolation that was prevalent among people who have disabilities. As a result of the pandemic, there was widespread need for, and increased reliance on, technology to complete daily tasks. People who have disabilities must be able to access and navigate technology in ways that work for them.

The Regional Quality Councils and The Arc Minnesota partnered to conduct a statewide technology needs assessment to better understand the barriers to accessing and navigating technology for people who have disabilities and their caregivers. The results from this assessment will inform the development and distribution of resources and training for people who have disabilities and their caregivers.

## Methods

This survey was conducted electronically through Survey Monkey. Other participation options were a printed survey or completing survey over the phone with a staff member. Surveys were translated and available in Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. The survey was open February 1, 2021 through March 31, 2021. Participants who completed the survey were put in a drawing to win a \$25 Visa gift card.

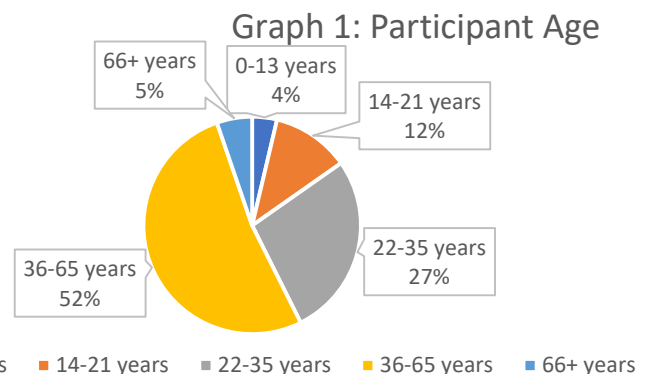
## Results

There was a total of 215 responses to this survey.

### Demographics:

#### Age

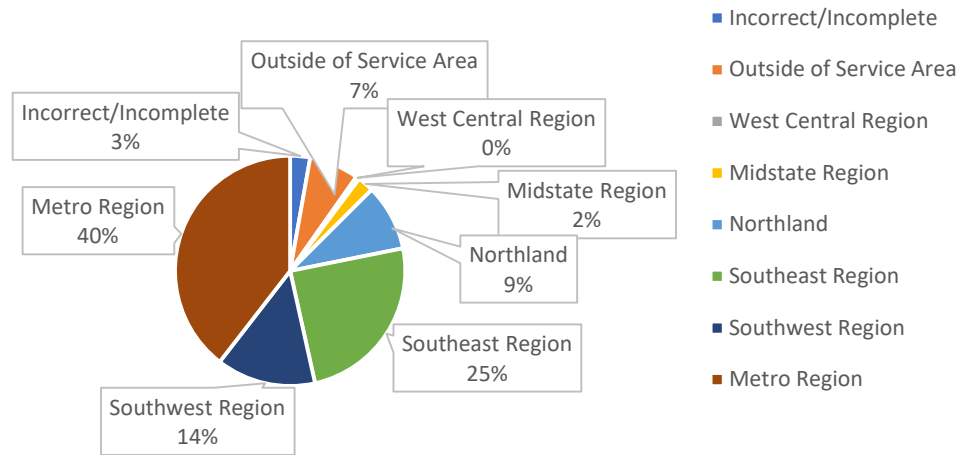
The majority of respondents were between 36-65 years old (52%) followed by 22-35 years old (27%). The remaining 21% fell in the following age categories: 0-13 years old, 14-21 years old, and 66 and older. The full distribution of age can be found in graph 1 to the right.



#### Location:

The participants were organized by service area of The Arc Minnesota or affiliates. Out of the 215 respondents, the majority were from the Metro Region, followed by the Southeast Region and Southwest Region. The participants categorized as “Outside of Service Area” were from counties technically not served by any of The Arc regions such as Beltrami, Sherburne, McLeod, Mower, Wright, Polk and Renville counties. See full participant location breakdown in Graph 2 on page 4.

**Graph 2: Participant Location**

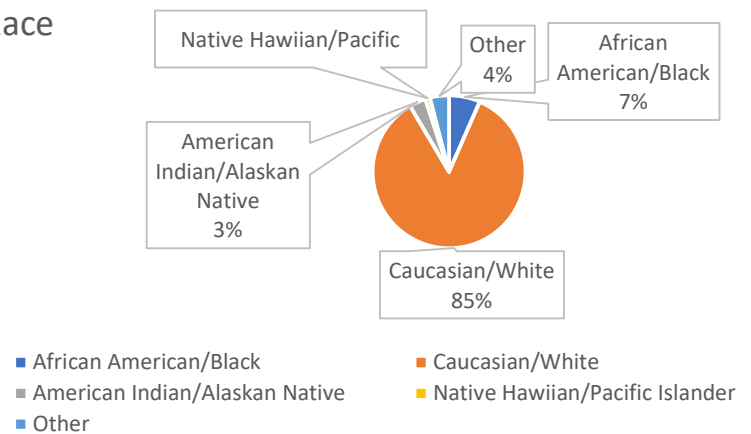


**Race and Ethnicity:**

The majority of respondents reported not being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (96%).

Most respondents were Caucasian/white (85%) followed by African American/Black (7%), other (4%), American Indian/Alaskan (3%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%). The full breakdown of ethnicity and race can be found in Graph 3 to the right:

**Graph 3: Race**

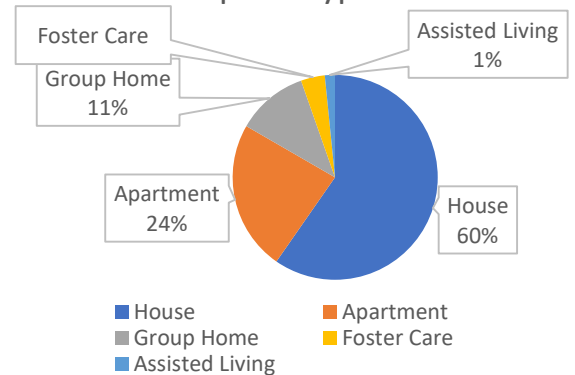


**Living Situation:**

The majority of respondents lived in a house (60%), followed by apartment (24%), group home (11%), foster care (3.63%), and assisted living (1.55%).

Respondents had mixed responses regarding who they lived with. The most common response was with a parent (29%), other family member (25%), living alone (22%), or with a partner or spouse (18%). Other people reported living with roommates (16%) and friends (2%). The full breakdown of people’s living situations can be found in Graphs 4 to the right:

**Graph 4: Type of Home**



## Technology Devices and Internet Privacy

### Using a device at home

People reported using multiple devices in their home, with the most frequently used device being a smartphone (68%) followed by tablet/iPad (60%), and laptop computer (53%). See the full breakdown of device use in graph 6. Of the four people who reported not using a device all responded they do not know how to use the device, 3 stated they cannot afford a device and 2 said that staff or caregivers do not know how to help.

### Privacy

The majority of participants (87%) responded that they have privacy when they use their device. Of those who use devices, 70% reported that they do not share their device(s) with others, 15% reported that they share with one person, and 13% reported that they share with two or more people.

The majority (59%) of respondents who use a device report that they do not share their passwords, while 10% do not have passwords and 27% share their passwords. Of those who share their passwords, 19% do it because they need help remembering, 5% share for school or work, and 4% are told they have to share their passwords.

### Using the Device:

Of those who use a device, 82% report they can use it how and when they want to and 12% said there were restrictions put on their use by others.

Respondents reported using their devices most often to connect with friends (58%), for entertainment (54%), and social media (53%) followed by news (42%) and finding resources (42%). Other activities mentioned were: reading/writing, working, school/learning, and using as a communication device. See the full breakdown of how people report using their devices in Table 1 to the right:

Table 1: How People Report Using their Devices				
Activity	Not at all	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Shopping	40.82%	34.69%	18.37%	6.12%
Connecting with friends	12.93%	9.52%	19.73%	57.82%
Social media	29.86%	3.47%	13.89%	52.78%
Dating	84.35%	4.08%	6.80%	4.76%
Finding resources	18.24%	14.86%	25.00%	41.89%
News	34.25%	6.85%	16.44%	42.47%
Entertainment	17.69%	10.20%	17.69%	54.42%
Medical appointments	42.47%	32.19%	18.49%	6.85%
Transportation	65.77%	13.42%	15.44%	5.37%
For job	58.78%	4.05%	9.46%	27.70%
Looking for work	76.03%	6.85%	10.27%	6.85%

### Video Chat

Of those who use a device to connect through video chat, the most frequently used applications are Zoom (72%), Facetime (42%), Facebook Messenger (36%), and Google Meet/Hangout/Duo (28%). 11% of respondents reported that they do not use video chat for connecting.

Of those who use video chat to meet with their support team, 60% reported that they use the video program that they prefer while 18% reported that they do not use their preferred program.

## Internet

### Accessing Internet

The majority of respondents reported that they get their internet at home (87%), followed by getting internet through their data (32%), using public internet (14%), and getting internet at friends' or family members' home.

Only 3% of respondents reported that they do not use the internet. The most commonly cited reason for not using the internet was no service or bad service (4%), followed by not knowing how to use the internet (3%), and fear of personal information being shared or stolen (2%).

### Internet Safety

The majority of respondents (53%) reported that they had not taken a class or learned about internet safety. Of the 47% of people who reported taking a class or learning about internet safety, the most frequent topics covered were password protections (40%) scams from people or businesses asking for money (33%), texts, calls, or messages that make you feel uncomfortable or threatened (30%), and posting on social media (30%).

Of those who have not taken a class or learned about internet safety, "other" was the most frequent reason why (33%) with responses such as:

- "I don't need a class, I'm not stupid"
- "My family taught me about the stuff"
- "Does not read"
- "I have not taken a class, but I have learned about internet safety via informational resources through my work."
- "Parental controls"

Additional reasons people cited for not taking a class or learning about internet safety were, never being offered to them (23%), they had never thought about it (22%), and they do not want to take a class on internet safety (22%).

When asked, 52% of respondents said that they would like to learn more about internet safety. Of those who were interested in learning more about internet safety, there was a broad range of topics of interest. The most popular topics were identity theft (44%), password protections (38%), secure internet connection (38%), scams from people or businesses that ask for money (35%), spam (35%), and phishing (34%).

### Technology and Connecting During COVID-19:

The large majority of people reported that technology had helped them stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic (91%). Specific examples of how people used technology to stay connected were:

- "Facebook has helped so much to keep in touch with old classmates and talk about losing loved ones and the grieving."

- “Self-advocacy meetings on the Internet”
- “I’m very social and it was difficult not being able to visit getting and family so this has helped greatly. I have anxiety issues and this seems to help”
- “Dept of Health updates, CDC updates, vaccine locator, online orders for groceries, facetime with grandkids/kids/siblings, Pinterest activities”
- “I did my distance learning with school using my school Pad”
- “Technology allows me to work as productively at home as when I was in the office. My job became completely remote during the pandemic. Remote work has been a lot better for my health and well-being since I am able to take care of all my disability-related needs at my own pace, without doing things that jeopardize my health (like skipping meals, bathroom breaks, therapy, because of inaccessible work environments). Technology has allowed me to stay connected to my friends and family even though we can't be together in person.”

When asked what people needed in order to stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic, responses related to:

- Access to social media
- Auto-captions or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) caption services
- Funding and access to quality wi-fi, internet connection, or hotspot
- A device other than a phone to promote accessibility
- Access and trainings to use Zoom and other services
- Camera for online meetings or connecting
- Help buying minutes and smartphone
- Help from family or caregivers and more family/friends to communicate with

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic worsened an existing state of isolation that is widespread for people who have disabilities. As a result of the pandemic, there was ever-present need and increased reliance on technology to complete daily tasks such as working, shopping, and connecting with friends and families.

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) recognized the importance of accessible technology. In September 2020, they adopted a Technology and Internet Access Position Statement highlighting the issues for a digital accessible world. Access the full position statement here: <https://www.aidd.org/news-policy/policy/position-statements/technology-and-internet-access><sup>2</sup>

To better understand the experiences, challenges, and needs of people who have disabilities when accessing and navigating technology, the Regional Quality Councils and The Arc Minnesota conducted a technology needs assessment for people who have disabilities across the state of Minnesota. This section will highlight general and targeted recommendations to improve equitable access to technology for people who have disabilities in Minnesota. Find the complete list of recommendations in the full report.

## **Center Civil and Human Rights**

When advocating for increased access to technology for people who have disabilities, human and civil rights must be at the forefront of all discussions. There are various laws that protect the human and civil rights of people who have disabilities to access and use technology. Historically, these rights have not always been upheld as a result of a deep rooted and false assumption that people who have disabilities are inherently vulnerable and therefore incapable of using technology.<sup>1</sup> This misconception is especially prominent for people who live in group or congregate settings, as there has been a long history of staff, families, and professionals limiting rights under the guise of “safety” skills and capability. Not only does this restrict the rights of people who have disabilities, but it also limits their fundamental knowledge of what internet is and what is available through the internet.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act require government entities and businesses to make their online resources equally accessible to everyone.<sup>3</sup> However, despite these requirements, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has abdicated their responsibility to provide clear requirements to assist entities with complying to the laws.<sup>4</sup> This lack of guidance has resulted in confusion and inconsistent implementation of accessibility practices. The widespread lack of accessibility considerations on devices, websites, and applications creates another large barrier for people who have disabilities to access and navigate technology. This prevents people who have disabilities from accessing the same content and information that non-disabled people have access to, further perpetuating inequity.

## **Intentionally Fund Equitable Access**

There must be funding dedicated to increase and improve access to technology that promotes participation in ways that fits individual needs.

## **Person-Centered Technology**

One clear theme that emerged from this assessment is that people who have disabilities have unique and individual experiences with using technology that are largely dependent on factors such as their location, living arrangement, and access to quality supports. Being person-centered in this area may be difficult but it is necessary to promote an equitable experience. There must be support, resources, and training available to help people who have disabilities navigate technology in ways that ensure a quality experience. It is not enough to provide access alone.

Technology resources and trainings must be responsive to individual needs and focus on the types of devices that individual prefers (such as a smartphone, tablet, or laptop) as well as the applications they want to use (such as Zoom, Facetime, and Facebook Messenger).

Some people have more specific needs that may not be able to be solved by the device itself. In this case, it is important to train caregivers and family members how to use and navigate technology. They also must learn best practices when supporting someone who has



disabilities to access technology in ways that balances safety and their rights to access information, while also ensuring privacy and autonomy. Members of one's support systems must continue to promote person-centeredness by using the video or meeting program that the individual prefers. To do so, training should be available to case managers, providers, and other members of support teams so they are able to provide high quality meetings while using the program that the person prefers.

To do this, there must be intentional budgeting and funding in programs, waivers, and services to help people access the specific devices they choose. Training and resources must be available to help people successfully navigate apps and software programs in ways that work for them.

### **Presume Competence**

One common fear of technology is the risks that come with using the internet. While there are risks for all internet users, too often people who have disabilities are assumed to be "too vulnerable" to be able to safely navigate the internet. This misconception and presumed incompetence leads to a lack of opportunity for people who have disabilities to receive training. The absence of opportunities leads to a lack of knowledge, experience, and ability to safely navigate the internet.

Additionally, people who have disabilities generally reported being interested in learning more about internet safety. To offer this training in an equitable way, all materials must be developed with accessibility and plain language at the center. There also needs to be partnerships developed across disability services that connect providers, support staff, and other community partners to offer this training where people feel most comfortable. We must move forward with the understanding that all people must be able to make informed decisions, including how they choose to use and enjoy the internet.

### **Assessment Limitations:**

There were limitations in the outreach and methods of this assessment that may have impacted the results.

- **Online Approach:** The vast majority of surveys were completed online through Survey Monkey, despite paper surveys being offered. Additionally, due to safety concerns related to COVID-19, the bulk of the outreach was done online through emails, social media posts, and newsletters. Because of the limited in person outreach, we can assume that we missed a portion of the population of Minnesotans with disabilities who have challenges accessing and navigating technology.
- **Culturally-Specific Outreach:** Despite offering surveys in Hmong, Spanish, and Somali, no one requested a translated survey. Based on this, we can assume that we did not have sufficient outreach to non-English speaking communities.

- **Optional Nature:** The majority of the questions were optional and gave participants the option to skip questions if they did not understand. This resulted in between 20 and 100 people skipping various questions throughout the survey.
- **Unintended Respondent:** An estimated 17% of the responses were from professionals or people who do not have disabilities. There was no way of knowing if the professionals were supporting someone to complete the survey or if they were answering on their own behalf.

Despite these limitations, themes and best practices have emerged from the assessment. These findings are preliminary and more rigorous research must be conducted in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Advancements in technology have the opportunity to connect people and share information in ways that were never previously possible. In order to continue to connect with friends and family, participate in community, work, and navigate daily tasks, people who have disabilities must be able to access and navigate technology in ways that work for them. This needs assessment found that there are many financial barriers to accessing technology and a lack of training and resources that prevent a high-quality experience. To alleviate this, there must be targeted funding available to meet individual needs, in programs, and across the system to provide a person-centered approach. There must be a broad range of training and resources available in multiple formats so that all people are given the opportunity to learn how to be safe and have autonomy in their technological experiences.

## Appendix

### Appendix A: Technology Needs Assessment Survey



Technology Needs  
Assessment with Imag

Double click the image above to access the survey

### Appendix B: Technology Needs Assessment Outreach Materials



Technology Needs  
Assessment Flier 2.1.2

Double click the image above to access the Technology Needs Assessment Flier.



FB Technology Needs  
Assessment Announce

Double click the image above to access the Technology Needs Assessment Facebook Post.

### Appendix C: Technology Resource Page



Technology Needs  
Assessment Resource

Double click the image above to access the Technology Needs Assessment Resource Page.

### Appendix D: Technology Needs Assessment Outreach List

You can access the Technology Needs Assessment Outreach List spreadsheet here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16yROOdVZn\\_IPkeLOefqC2f8xyiSGbnEpDHGICjex7bs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16yROOdVZn_IPkeLOefqC2f8xyiSGbnEpDHGICjex7bs/edit?usp=sharing)

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