



Find out where you stand

Nationally, the average Internet adoption rate for families living in public housing is about 54%, but the rate in your community may be higher or lower. Conducting a **baseline survey** of residents will give you a more accurate measure of Internet adoption and the digital divide in your community.

Determining more precisely where your community stands can help you better understand your residents' needs, set feasible annual goals, develop an effective action plan (*Playbook 5*), and serve as a reference point for tracking progress (*Playbook 12*).

ConnectHome communities that successfully completed a baseline survey gained valuable data and insights about their residents' needs and adoption rates. Communities that worked closely with a **research partner**, such as a local university or college, had greater success administering their survey.

Building your research team

TIPS →

Find a research partner

The American Association for Public Opinion Research's *Blue Book* will help you identify potential research partners. You can read, search, and download it at aapor.org.

Empower your people

Training your staff and residents (with support from resident councils) to conduct a survey can be a cost-effective and efficient option (see "Connecting residents through the survey" below).

Start by evaluating your available research capacity, including both financial resources and staff time, to determine your resources to conduct a baseline survey. Consider the following elements:

- Is there a local research partner—a university, think tank, nonprofit, or high-school math department—with the statistical background and resources to design and analyze a survey?
- Does your local government have a research department that could provide survey guidance?
- Are there staff members with experience conducting surveys?

Once you have assessed your available capacity and resources, you can **build your research team**, encompassing both technical **analysis** and survey **administration** roles. Options for building a team include:

- Partnering or contracting with a professional research institution
- Hiring interested residents or students as survey administrators
- Enlisting housing agency staff to manage survey administration

| Organization | Possible Roles |
|------------------------------|---|
| Public housing agency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Defines survey purpose → Coordinates the survey → Dedicates appropriate resources → Trains staff as needed |
| Research partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Advises about survey methodology → Helps select a valid sample → Analyzes results |
| Resident council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Community outreach → Encourages responses → Administers the survey |

Playbook 3: Assessing Your Baseline

Case Study

Little Rock, AR

Connecting residents through the survey

Consider leveraging your baseline survey to advance your other digital inclusion objectives in the process. The Metropolitan Housing Alliance took such an approach, using its baseline survey as a platform for engaging its residents in digital inclusion.

The housing agency enlisted resident council members to administer its baseline survey by providing them advanced digital literacy trainings. This equipped them to inform other residents about the survey, conduct door-to-door surveys, and enter survey data.

As compensation, Resident Council members received Section 3 funds for administering the survey. They also were given the option to receive a free tablet or purchase a computer for \$50, thereby helping to further the community's connectivity goals.

STEPS: Surveying Residents

STEP 1: Identify your population and key metrics

Addressing three key questions about your resident population will help define the scale and scope of your connectivity efforts:

1. Who will you focus on connecting to the Internet at home?

- a. All HUD-assisted households?
- b. Just public housing residents?
- c. Only public housing residents with school-aged children?

2. Which metrics are most important for your community?

In addition to the in-home Internet adoption rate, consider tracking the percentage of your resident population that has a computing device or is digitally literate. It is important to assess your baseline for any key metric that you would like to guide your efforts.

3. What data already exists?

Local government offices, research institutions, and Internet Service Providers may already have Internet adoption data for your community. While this data might not be specific to your residents, it can provide helpful background for your survey.

STEP 2: Select your survey sample

Depending on the size of your selected population and your available resources, you may be able to survey all members of the population. However, if your population is large and resources are limited, you can select a representative sample of households to survey.

Selecting a representative sample for your survey can be a complex process. The following tasks can help guide you when consulting and working in collaboration with an experienced research partner:

- 1. Complete a list of your selected population.** For example, if your population is all households with school-age children who live in public housing in your community, then you will need a full list of each of those households. If your population list only includes households in a single building, your survey results will not be generalizable to all of the buildings in your community.
- 2. Consult an in-house researcher or research partner** to determine an appropriate sample size and sampling method based on your estimated response rate.
- 3. Compile a survey sample list from your selected population.** Using your chosen sampling method, select households from your population list until you reach your desired sample size.

STEP 3: Design your survey

A well-designed questionnaire will greatly facilitate the administration and analysis of your survey, minimize confusion, and provide reliable data. Be sure to:

- **Keep your survey short.** Each additional question makes it less likely that households will complete the survey. Only ask the most essential questions. No more than three questions is ideal.
- **Ask whether households have high-speed Internet access at home.** Make it clear that having only a smartphone data plan does not count as high-speed Internet access at home.
- **Make the survey and questions as easy as possible to understand.** Questions must be clearly-worded, specific, and leave little room for ambiguity. Include relevant definitions, with precise, easy-to-understand language.

Playbook 3: Assessing Your Baseline

EXAMPLE: Single-question survey

Question: Do you currently have access to high-speed Internet on a computer or tablet in your home?

High-speed Internet allows you to quickly view webpages, download large email attachments, and watch live videos. Examples of high-speed Internet at home include a cable Internet subscription or wireless Internet available inside your home.

Answer “No” if you do not have high-speed Internet in your home or only access Internet using a smartphone or a dial-up connection.

TIP →

Engage resident councils

Before administering your survey, meet with your resident council and ensure that it understands the plans for administering the survey, the survey’s objectives, and why resident participation is critical. This enables the resident council to effectively educate residents and vouch for the survey.

STEP 4: Conduct your survey

Important considerations include how to contact, interact, and follow-up with residents, how to record data, your survey timeline, and how to respond to common complications like survey refusals and respondents not being home.

Directly interviewing residents is most likely to yield high response rates and reliable data. In-person interviews with residents allows them to see the survey and follow along with the interviewer, who can further explain the survey and address any concerns that residents may have.

When administering the survey, consider the following:

- 1. Develop training materials for your survey team.** These materials should outline the purpose of the survey, provide a survey script, detail survey-administration procedures, and offer responses to frequently asked questions.
- 2. Train your survey team.** Host in-person training sessions with your survey administrators to clarify the purpose of the survey, review training materials, and practice mock interviews.
- 3. Survey residents.** Consider surveying door-to-door if possible. Where geography and available resources are limiting, you may also consider integrating your survey along with other required resident paperwork. When surveying English language learners, provide multilingual interviewers, materials, and translation resources (see “Providing translation assistance” below).
- 4. Follow-up by phone,** and use other proven methods when initial attempts at contacting residents are unsuccessful.

Providing translation assistance

If your survey population includes non-English-speaking residents, ensure that they can understand and complete the survey. This will improve response rates and avoid demographic bias in your results.

You can provide translation assistance by:

1. Printing the survey in languages commonly used in your area
2. Engaging resident council members as survey translators
3. Contracting with telephone translation services as needed

TIP →

Keep it going

Use your baseline survey results as a foundation for ongoing tracking of connectivity in your community. Before you begin connecting residents, develop a strategy for collecting connectivity information to ensure continuous data (see *Playbook 12*).

STEP 5: Analyze and share your results

Work with your in-house analyst or research partner to analyze your survey results. To better understand, interpret, and contextualize your results, share them with residents and other stakeholders to solicit their feedback.