The Kansas City Community-Wide Information Network (CWIN)

A community’s history of democratizing information
Since 1982, data users and providers in Kansas City have made several attempts to develop a regional information network.

The goal was to give researchers, grant writers, community organizers, and public and private planners easier and faster access to quality data.

Some of these efforts:
CWIN

- Research Data Center (RDC)

- The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) in the Kansas City area, and it is charged with developing and coordinating transportation planning for the region.

- MARC conducts extensive research and analysis of demographic and economic conditions, resulting in a large collection of data about Kansas City, and, from this collection, MARC produces both demographic and economic forecasts for the area.
Research Data Center (RDC)

In 1982, MARC created RDC to share its data, at cost, with the larger community.

The business, government, and education communities have benefited from access to these data.

In 1996, RDC was folded into MARC’s Research Services Department, and continues to provide access to quality, inexpensive data.
Vital Signs

In 1993, the Midwest Research Institute (MRI), with funding from the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and the Kauffman Foundation, developed *Vital Signs*.

*Vital Signs* was a collection of social and health indicators in the Kansas City region, and the first success in the efforts to create a regional information network.

**Serious shortcomings:**
- It was a single-user, diskette-based application when the world wide web was about to become the ubiquitous tool it is today.
- Worse, it lacked continuing funding, and thus only one edition was published.
Metro Dataline

A joint marketing and distribution agreement with MARC failed to save Vital Signs.

However, MARC used the data created, along with data previously collected, and released the web-based Metro Dataline in 1996.

Metro Dataline was conceived as a community resource to be maintained by MARC. Other organizations were encouraged to contribute, but this did not happen.

Metro Dataline remains a robust collection of data about Kansas City, but it is still substantially a MARC project.
In 1997, MARC, MRI, the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and others came together to form **CWIN**.

Kansas City’s earlier citizen-input initiative, FOCUS, had called for a “citywide clearinghouse of neighborhood information.”

The city’s Neighborhood and Community Services Department convened potential stakeholders (‘spark-plugs’) and contracted with MRI to develop a summary of best practices.

A steering committee was formed by the organizers. The Local Investment Commission (LINC), the Mid America Assistance Coalition (MAAC), the Community Resource Network (CRN), and the University of Missouri – Kansas City soon joined them.
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Three sub-committees were formed –

- service directory
- client data
- community data.

The service directory goals were addressed by Community Connections, a Missouri state program administered by the Kansas City Metropolitan Library and Information Network.

The client data would be assembled through a network of service providers linked by the use of MAACLink, a software application developed and supported by the Mid-America Assistance Coalition, a non-profit emergency services organization.

MARC would contribute Metro Dataline as the basis for the data system.
In 2001, the Kauffman Foundation convened a Research Forum to focus on growth and development in metropolitan Kansas City. Participants recommended the creation of a web-based, searchable portal to democratize access to Kansas City’s high quality research and information.

Kauffman, MARC, KU’s School of Public Administration, UMKC (The Center for the City, the Bloch School of Business and Public Administration and CEI) formed the KC Research Consortium to develop the portal.

The Kansas City Public Library expressed an interest in managing KCResearch, as it already had the capabilities for maintaining such a portal, and the project fell in line with other programs then under development.

The public library agreed to become the fiscal agent representing this partnership.
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- **KCResearch** will offer free, public access to a wealth of research around 3 content areas:
  
  1) research about Kansas City;
  2) research about issues affecting or concerning Kansas City; and
  3) research conducted by researchers working or residing in Kansas City.

- This portal is being developed in phases. Planning meetings will be held on validating the research to be made available (editorial board, content advisors, etc.) Other discussions are about linking research to related documents and/or to data that allows a user to do more research.
CWIN

- CWIN is re-energized by new members
  - The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City
  - The Downtown Council
  - The City of Overland Park, Kansas
  - United Community Services of Johnson County, Kansas

and the possibilities brought about by our association with NNIP.

- With the help of CEI, we are beginning to implement technology to further our objectives.

- We continue to explore ways to expand our reach and offer Kansas City a place to gather for research, education and information sharing.