In 1995, RAND published a report exploring the feasibility and societal implications of providing “universal” access to electronic mail within the United States (Robert H. Anderson et al., Universal Access to E-Mail: Feasibility and Societal Implications, MR-650-MF). Among its major policy conclusions and recommendations in that report were these:

- It is critical that electronic mail be a basic service in a National Information Infrastructure.
- There are no fundamental technical barriers to providing universal access to electronic mail services.
- It is important to reduce the increasing gaps in access to basic electronic information services, specifically, access to electronic mail services.

Analyses of Current Population Survey data for the report indicated that, even as computer and Internet use had grown dramatically, access gaps had widened rather than narrowed in the United States since the 1980s.

The sponsor of that study, the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, supported a subsequent study on a related subject of which this report is a part. Here, we use Current Population Survey data from 1997 to update the trends in computers and connectivity that were highlighted in the 1995 report.

We expect these analyses to be of interest to government agencies exploring the feasibility of providing services to citizens via
electronic communication, to organizations and individuals interested in expanding on-line usage to those currently without such access, and to policymakers attempting to understand and shape—or at least ameliorate—the social impacts of the continuing information revolution.

This research was performed under the auspices of RAND’s Science and Technology unit, directed by Stephen Rattien. For further information on this report, please contact the authors (Tora_Bikson@rand.org, Stan_Panis@rand.org). For an account of the complete study of which this research is a part, please see Sending Your Government a Message: E-Mail Communications Between Citizens and Government (RAND, MR-1095-MF, 1999), by C. R. Neu, Robert H. Anderson, and Tora K. Bikson.