

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES AMONG COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS

by

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Executive Summary

The Illinois Community Technology Fund (ICTF) came about through the SBC/Ameritech merger that set aside \$1.5 million in 2000 to provide advanced telecommunications services and skills necessary to improve the quality of life for low-income and rural Illinois populations through organizational grants. This is an evaluation report of a multiple organization community technology project funded by the Illinois Community Technology Fund. These funds were distributed in 2001 and 2002 grant rounds to prepare citizens to live and work in a growing technological society. A wide variety of organizations including community based organizations, community colleges, and schools were given a maximum of \$50,000 to support programs dedicated to the ICTF goals. These organizations served a broad spectrum of ages and populations to attempt to bridge the digital divide.

After the close of the grant distributions the Center for Urban Research and Learning was asked to evaluate the ICTF grant program. The goals of the evaluation were as follows:

- Organize and summarize the types and levels of services provided
- Assess the impact of the grants on the lives of the service users particularly concerning the employment and educational impacts.
- Develop a model technology program by integrating key successful aspects of the organizations funded through the ICTF grant

Organizations and Individuals Served by the Program

Seventy-seven programs were funded statewide with 35 of those in the Chicagoland area. Of the 76 grantees, 68 provided some level of information about their programs activities for this evaluation. In speaking with the service providers, it appears the programs served a broad spectrum of ages from youth under eighteen to individuals over 56 years old. The most common

age group served was the 26 to 35 year old range (63.5%). The vast majority of individuals who utilized these technology services were from traditionally underserved populations in the rural and metropolitan areas of Illinois. As well, a majority were currently unemployed (53.8%) and ended their education with a high school diploma or GED (53.8%). Program service providers indicated that 80% of the individuals using the center would be classified as lower socioeconomic status. The number of individuals served per week ranged between 0 to 10 and more than 100 of individuals with the most common number being between 21 and 30 (28%).

Similar to the number of individuals, the type of services provided varied greatly. Some grants funded conventional community technology centers that provided classes and assistance with in-house computer technology while other programs built websites, provided a mobile lab to multiple organizations along with other innovative community technology services. The start-up organizations tended to provide the basic computer skills training courses while the organizations that were well established were able to provide more advanced training such as networking and software development training. Typically an organization provided between 0-10 (40%) and 10-20 (40%) computers connecting between half or all to the internet primarily via broadband services. The variance of the program types and service levels necessitates flexible and sustainable funding to adapt to the differing needs of the programs.

Introduction

The "digital divide," a term coined to describe the gap in availability and knowledge of advanced technological resources for underrepresented populations, became an issue of great importance in the early 1990's as educational institutes, healthcare options, and the job market began to rely more on computer technology. As our society continues to become more technologically advanced, the digital divide becomes an increasingly critical issue to address. Half of America's adults are not online indicating that half of the adult population does not have access to the educational, health care, and employment resources as well as life skills education available through computers and the internet (US Department of Commerce, 2000). While Illinois ranks 5th in the country for population size, the state ranks 38th in online population (US Census Bureau, 2001). To assist the portion of the population without access to computers, community-based technology resources provide an opportunity to learn computer and internet basics that can then be used to advance education and employment and to improve health and general well-being of individuals.

Background of the Illinois Community Technology Fund

In 2000, the Illinois Community Technology Fund (ICTF) was established to address the potential negative impact that the SBC/Ameritech merger (Docket # 98-0555) could have on the citizens in rural and low income areas of Illinois. Through the SBC/Ameritech merger, \$3 million was set aside to be distributed across the three consecutive years following the closing of this merger. The funds were to be distributed to organizations that could assist the individuals most likely to suffer from the financial effects of the competition-limiting merger (i.e. inability to afford increasing cost of service or current service level).

The ICTF board members - comprised of individuals from SBC, the Illinois state government, and community technology programs - distributed *Request for Proposals* to organizations interested in creating or enhancing their current community technology program. Each proposal in the first round of applications (2001) was reviewed by two board members, recommendations were made and the board decided if the program should be funded based on the perceived ability of the proposed program to develop sustainable services in one or all of the following areas: Community Building, Community Economic Development, Health, and Education. The second round of grants (2002) were reviewed and distributed similarly. After assessing the size of the grants needed to fund the applicants, the board limited the grant rounds to two years rather than three to concentrate funding on a smaller number of successful, sustainable programs rather than a larger number of under-funded programs. The proposal selection process over the two year grant period resulted in the funding of 76 organizations throughout Illinois.

Methodology

Evaluation Approach

The Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) seeks to promote equality and to improve people's lives in communities throughout the Chicago metropolitan region. CURL pursues this goal by building and supporting collaborative research and education efforts. These partnerships connect Loyola faculty and students with community and nonprofit organizations, civic groups, and government agencies. Such collaborations link the skills and wisdom present within every community with the specialized knowledge and academic discipline of a vital urban university. Working together, community needs are addressed and the academic experience is enriched.

After the close of the final grant period, the Center for Urban Research and Learning of Loyola University Chicago was asked to evaluate the ICTF grant program. The goals of the ICTF evaluation were as follows:

- Organize and summarize the types and levels of services provided
- Assess the impact of the grants on the lives of the service users particularly concerning the employment and educational impacts.
- Develop a model technology program by integrating key successful aspects of the organizations funded through the ICTF grant

Of the original 76 organizations that received ICTF funding, 62 organizations participated in the evaluation, in the form of site visits, focus groups, phone interviews, report submission and written surveys. The ICTF board members were also interviewed by members of the evaluation team.

Evaluation Team

The evaluation team was comprised of CURL staff members, ICTF Community Fellows and CURL Graduate Fellows. CURL staff member supervised the research data collection conducted by the ICTF Community Fellows and CURL Graduate Fellows. The staff members as well as the fellows were also responsible for data analysis and report writing. A key component of this multi-voiced evaluation plan was the use of Community Fellows. Community Fellows are community leaders – staff, board members, or resident volunteers of community-based organizations that have been active in the funded agencies, in this case community technology programs. Community Fellows were able to offer a unique insight on the implementation of the ICTF grant in their community. With the absence of a community-based partner on the ICTF evaluation project, the Community Fellows ensured that a community voice was included throughout the evaluation process.

Once CURL introduced themselves as the evaluator for the ICTF initiative to primary contact persons at all 76 organizations, CURL staff sent a “*Request of Applications*” (RFA) to all of the organizations to solicit five “ICTF Community Fellows.” Two Community Fellows were to represent the Chicago area, and the remaining three were to represent the Southern, Central, and Western regions of Illinois. A limited number of applications were received so one Community Fellow was brought on the team to represent Southern Illinois and one to represent Chicago.

Evaluation Process

The CURL/ICTF research team utilized a participatory evaluation approach for this ICTF initiative. Using a collaborative approach that included active participation from the various levels of stakeholders provided a more complete portrait of the ICTF grant. Given the collaborative nature of participatory evaluation methodology, the evaluation plan was determined by the evaluation research team with the flexibility to allow changes suggested by the community partners. The collaborative evaluation assessed the impact of the ICTF initiative on three levels:

- ICTF Board Members
 - Focus Group
- Service Providers
 - Focus Groups
 - Site Visits
 - Questionnaires
 - Dialogue facilitation
 - Planned Dissemination Partnering with Illinois Community Technology Coalition (ILCTC)
- Service Users
 - Satisfaction Survey

By including multiple voices in this evaluation, the capacity of the stakeholders to evaluate and implement evaluation recommendations has been enhanced. This, in turn, has helped to ensure

utilization of evaluation findings through informing dedicated stakeholders of the need for sufficient sustainable funding throughout Illinois.

Stakeholders

The planned data collection phase of the project involved three levels of stakeholders: Board Members, Service Providers and Service Users.

Board Members: The 11 ICTF board was composed of technology community leaders, employees of Ameritech/SBC, members of Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) and government agencies. All board members were asked to participate in a focus group located either in Chicago, Illinois or in Springfield, Illinois. Given that the ICTF Board dissolved shortly after the last funding period, their participation in the evaluation process posed a challenge for the evaluation team. In lieu of scheduled focus groups for ICTF Board members, the evaluation team conducted an in depth interview with the chair of the ICTF Board.

Service Providers: After determining the current contact information of all of the grantees, the organizations were contacted via mail to inform them of CURL's evaluative role in the project. The organizations that agreed to participate were asked to set up a date for a site visit from a member of the Loyola CURL evaluation team. The sites that were unavailable for a visit were administered a written or phone survey to gather information about their program. Organizations also were asked to supply any of the documentation related to the ICTF grant (grant proposals, reports, in-house evaluation results).

Service Users: Initially the grant involved gathering input from service users through focus groups and through the creation of a community discussion web site. While the input of service users would have been valuable, the length of time between the initial grant onset and the beginning of the evaluation posed challenges in contacting the service users. Due to the lack of

available documentation of service users during the funded period and graduation and change in clients because of the time lapse between the grant period and the evaluation period, ICTF service user were not able to be included in the evaluation of the initiative.

Development of Evaluation Measures

Telephone/Written Surveys

To gather information from the service providers, the representatives from the organization were asked to fill out a two page questionnaire constructed by the ICTF evaluation team. The survey consisted of basic questions about the program activities, program employees, specific resources of the program, demographic information about service users and an open-ended comment section. The questionnaire was created by the CURL research team based on existing evaluation questionnaires used in previous CURL evaluation projects (see Appendix A).

Initially the survey was either mailed to the organization after contact had been established or was personally handed to a staff member during the site visit. Given the time constraints of the service providers, many surveys were left unreturned. In order to maximize the response rate, the format was changed to a telephone survey administered by the members of the research team.

Site Visit Questionnaires

The ICTF research team constructed an outline of questions to address toward the organization representative hosting the organization site visit. The questions focused primarily on the philosophy of the organization and the details of their technology program both during and after the funded period. The site-visit questionnaire was an open-ended interview where the organizational staff could elaborate on the projects successes and lessons learned.

Focus Group Questions

The focus group questions were constructed by the ICTF research team including the Community Fellows. The Graduate Fellows and the Community Fellows discussed the topics that the focus group should address and created a list of questions. The final set of focus group questions were approved by all of the evaluation team members. The themes addressed in the ICTF board member interview related to the grant background and process. The themes in service provider focus group related to the success and lessons learned in the program as well as ideas for the direction of future funding for community technology.

Changes in Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the service users perspective of the ICTF grant activities were not evaluated because of the lengthy time lapse between the conclusion of the grants and the commencement of the evaluation. Originally the research team was to set up a networking site to facilitate stakeholder dialogue. After consultation with the Community Fellows and individuals in the non-profit technology community, the research team was informed that an organization, Illinois Community Technology Consortium (ILCTC), already has established as a potential networking resource for individuals providing technology through a list serve. Therefore the research team established contact with the organization to be able to disseminate the information and educate the stakeholders of the opportunities for further networking through the organization.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected in the focus groups, site visits and questionnaires was coded for themes by the research team. The quantitative data was entered into an online survey

database. Data was analyzed using Survey Monkey the online data collection system, Microsoft EXCEL and Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS).

Quantitative Data Results and Discussion

Profile of Service Provider Organizations

	Chicago	Outside Chicago
Year 1 (2001)	21	19
Year 2 (2002)	15	21

Number of Programs Funded

The ICTF grantees encompassed a varied sampling of organizations including educational institutes, service organizations, housing organizations, faith-based organizations, museums, technology coalitions, and child care centers.

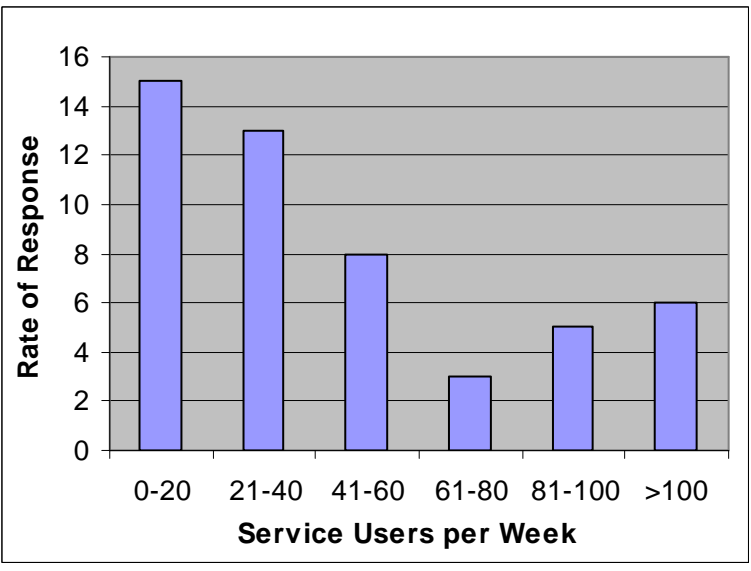
Areas of Illinois Hosting Organizations

Area Surrounding Chicago	12
Central Illinois	15
Western Illinois	6
Southern Illinois	7

Amount of Funded Grants

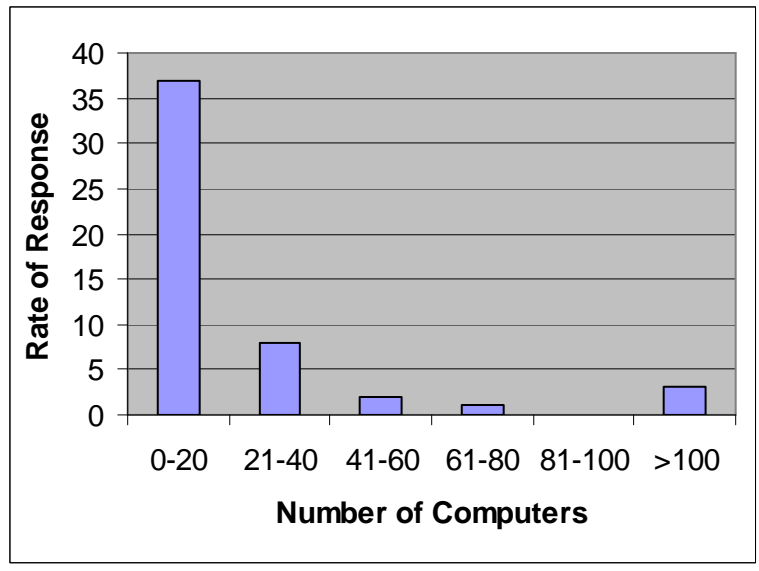
	High	Low	Average (Statewide)	Average (Chicago)	Average (Outside Chicago)
Year 1 (2001)	\$50,000	\$10,862	\$35,629	\$35,334	\$35,923
Year 2 (2002)	\$49,925	\$10,527	\$39,595	\$42,750	\$37,388

Service Users per Week



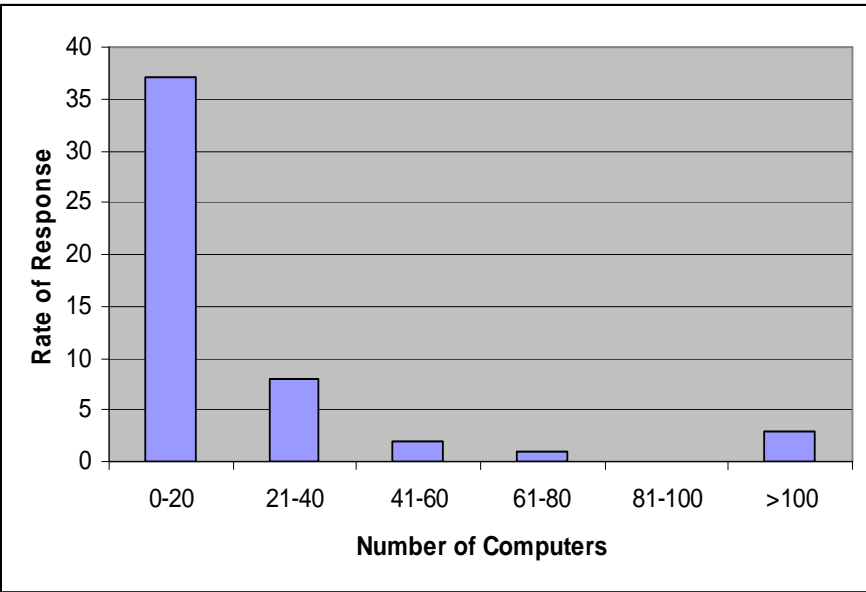
The number of service user varied with a range of program types.

Computers Available for Use



The typical computer center accommodated around 20 individuals at one time.

Computers with Internet Access

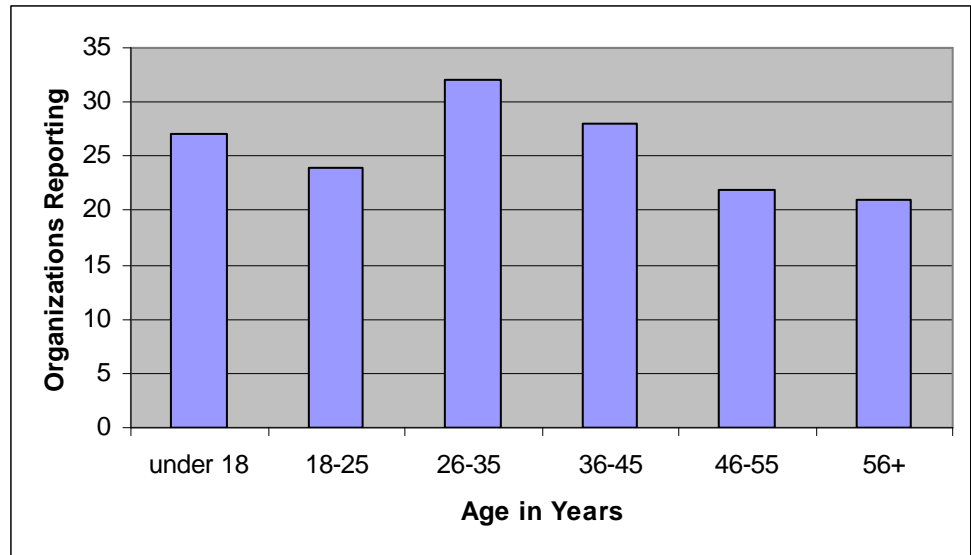


Almost all computers had internet access as reflected by the corresponding rates in number of computers with internet access and the number of computers centers housed.

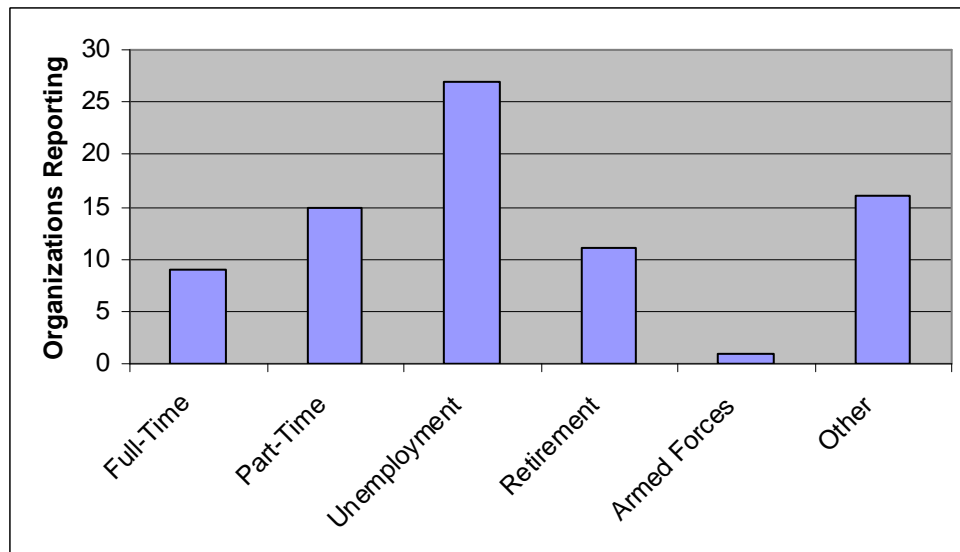
Profile of Service User

The service providers who participated in this evaluation described the typical service-users that participated in the program funded by or originating from the ICTF funding.

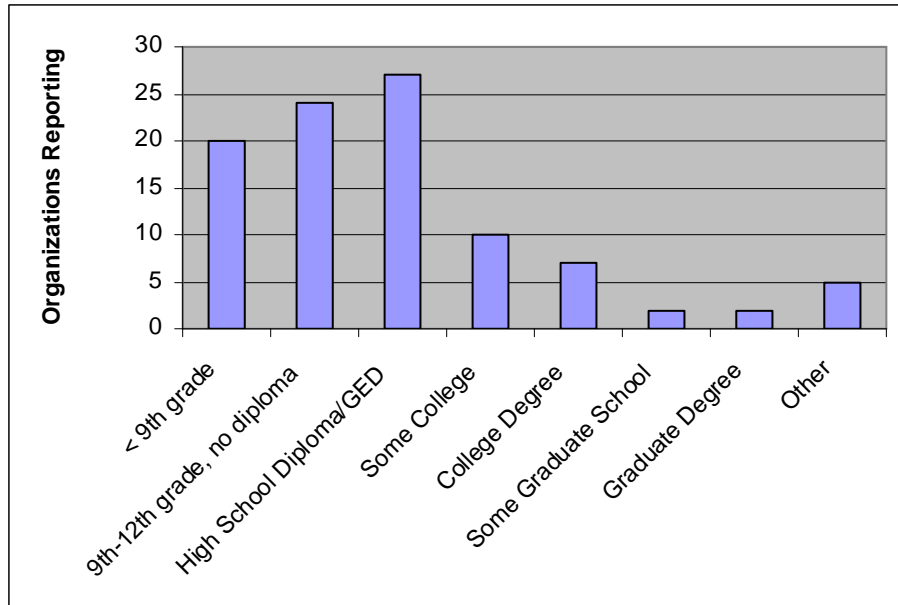
Age of Typical Service User



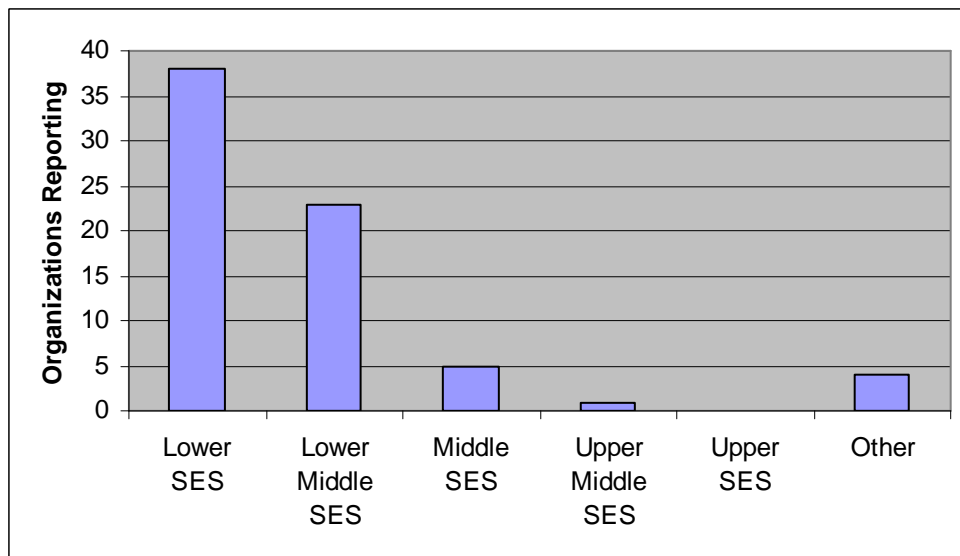
Employment Level



Education Level



Socioeconomic Status



The original ICTF grant “*Request for Proposals*” mandated that the technology programs serve disadvantaged individuals in Illinois who would benefit the most from the program. As indicated by the demographics collected from the grantees, the programs primarily served Illinois individuals who were at an economic and educational disadvantage as indicated by the low number of individuals who had attended college and had full-time jobs. Based on perceived financial resources, most service providers categorized service users in the lower two socio-economic statuses.

Qualitative Data Results and Discussion

Funding

While a vast majority of ICTF funded programs achieved success, many were stymied by restrictive funding opportunities that were extremely time limited and only covered particular aspects of programming (i.e. staff, hardware, and direct service time). These limitations offer organizations little to no resources for overhead or administrative expenses, which are needed to fund staffing for development activities. Without staff to identify and pursue more funding, especially in light of what little funding was and is available for these types of services, more programs are left under-funded or unfunded. Programs that do not receive the needed funding are restricted in a number of facets. In the most drastic scenario, the organization must terminate the service program. If other funds are acquired or reallocated, the programs are often pared down, with limited services, staffing and hours due to decreased resources following the end of the initial grant. For example:

- One program was able to create a new laboratory with current technology equipment, broadband internet and a staff member to lead classes. After the funding from the ICTF grant closed, the organization could no longer conduct classes in the laboratory and the computer sat dormant for a significant amount of time. Some time later they were able to gather additional funding but then they had to surmount the further problems of starting anew in finding staff, advertising the program and recruiting participants. The lapse in the funding created unnecessary problems that could have been resolved by a steady distribution of funding.

Staffing

As a cornerstone of community programs, staffing is critical to the success of services. Staffing issues can greatly inhibit the success of any given program. The often low levels of funding for staffing within funding for community technology services are typically not enough to pay competitive wages for instructors. Thus, staff turnover is common as inadequate funding leads to disrupted programming, instruction and general assistance. These problems were found throughout the organizations receiving ICTF funding. For example:

- The staff of a program affiliated with a community college had to be cut in half when one source of funding ended. The course instructors became contract employees instead of continuing with a full-time position. While the instructors were extremely dedicated, they were unable to devote the same time and resources as instructors in full-time staff positions. Thus students received a decreased quality of services, which in turn impacted the success of the program.

Staffing problems were common among the ICTF grant recipients and resulted in a number of negative impacts on the programs.

Levels of Financial Support

The type of financial support a program needs is dependent on the level of services they have achieved thus far. Start-up programs initially need basic supplies, software, staffing, hardware and an adequate facility. Once organizations have stabilized, their programs continue to require basic funding support but also need funds for updating equipment, instruction, and supportive services. The more mature programs may need all of these, in addition to funds to work on policy changes, organizing, coordination, and capacity building with other technology programs. (See Figure 1). For Example:

- One organization used the grant to begin a technology center to serve multiple functions in the organizations. The funding provided them with approximately 20 new computers, printers and high-speed internet access that could also be used by the staff members. Prior to the ICTF grant the organization staff had dial-up internet access on one computer thus limiting the effectiveness of office functioning.
- An organization with a more established technology program used the funding to integrate technology into an existing child care program. They were able to improve the communication between the off-site child care providers and the organizations and ultimately make more efficient use of their staff and financial resources. While the organization still needed new staffing and hardware, they also used the funding to train individuals, support their current program, and update the services they were already providing.

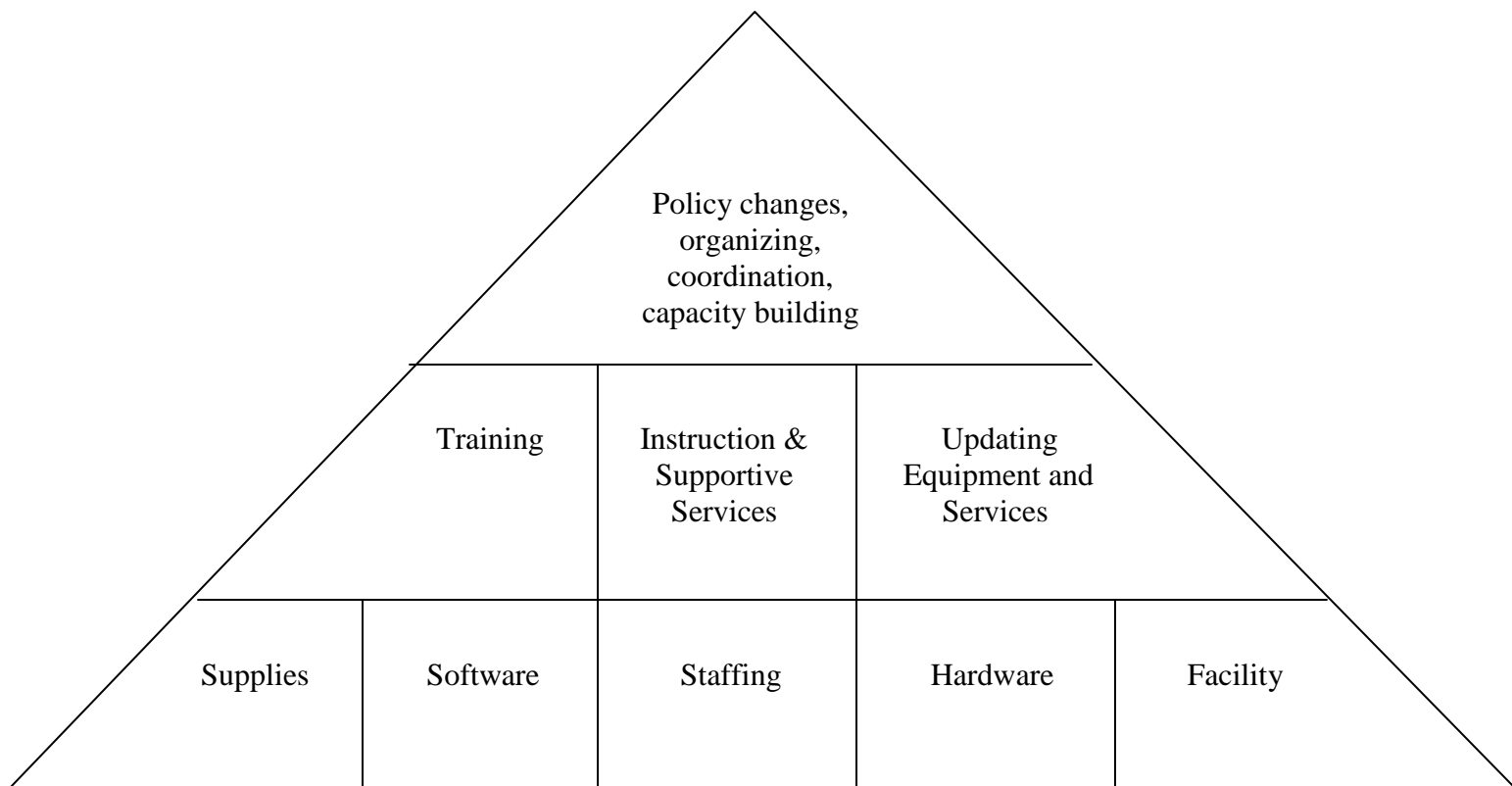
Integration of Technology and Organization Ideology

The ICTF grant addressed a need for effective technology programming that continues to affect still pervades society today. The findings of this evaluation of this initiative indicate that technology should be used as a tool for schools/colleges, e-businesses/small businesses, development/entrepreneurship, job training, communication, and access to the global market rather than simply as an end in and of itself. Many of the ICTF funded programs used this approach to implement and sustain their program. For example:

- One program focused on empowering ex-offenders to gain employment. By learning the basics of technology as they build resumes and search and apply for positions through the internet, service users also garner skills used in their future fields of employment.
- Another program focused on creating a youth program to teach students methods for building websites for non-profit programs and community development through use of website development programs. Upon completing the program, students have gained the skills to use technology but also know how to apply their skills in an educational and career track.

Both of these programs integrated the organization's client empowerment ideology rather than treating technology as a separate set of skills.

Figure 1.



Recommendations

As technology rapidly changes and becomes increasingly incorporated into society, community technology initiatives must parallel these transformations. The need for sustainable and flexible funding that integrates into the organization goals stands at the forefront of the necessities for the community members. Without community-based technology programs, the individuals will remain behind those with access while more continue to fall behind. With this knowledge, we must move beyond recognition of a digital divide into action to address the disparity. Below are our recommendations for methods to begin these changes.

- Convey the next steps needed to increase successful accessibility to technology in Illinois. Loyola CURL in partnership with Illinois Community Technology Coalition will create a policy report that will provide key information to those who advocate, advise, and shape policy as it relates to public support needed for community technology initiatives.
- Communicate the need for greater funding for projects incorporating technology to both private and public sector funding sources, while simultaneously increasing communication about new funding sources to service providers. At this time there are few funding sources that target projects and programs which incorporate technology. Many sites and service providers interviewed were dependant on a small number of restrictive funding sources.
- Conduct a broad needs assessment and evaluation of service impact research to further understand the needs of the community and the amount of funds needed to implement suggested technology programs.

- Conduct research to assess the impact of services integrated with technology versus stand alone technology programs as well as alternative models of technology delivery.

Preliminary findings of this evaluation indicated that programs are most successful when technology is clearly integrated with other services to serve a larger goal for the client or community (i.e. comprehensive job training, including technical training and training in how to utilize newfound skills to apply for and maintain employment).

Appendix A

Service Provider Questionnaire

Program Survey: Describing the people and services of your program

Please answer the following questions about you program funded by the ICTF grant.

1. Please give a brief description of the services provided by the program funded by the ICTF grant?

2. Please describe your program's employees and volunteers responsibilities in assisting the service users.

3. Were any workshops for the service users' education and development scheduled? If so, briefly describe their topic and the typical number of people attending.

4. Were specific groups targeted to benefit from the program? If so, what population?

5. Describe any requirements placed on community members to gain access to the services. Were there any application procedures? Were services immediately accessible?

6. How many computers were available for use by program participants? _____

7. Did each computer have Internet access? In no, what percentage did? _____

8. How many people used your center in the course of a week? _____

Service User Demographics

What is the age range of the typical service user?

- Under 18 years old
- 18 to 25 years old
- 26 to 35 years old
- 36 to 45 years old
- 46 to 55 years old
- Above 56 years old

What is the employment status of the typical service user?

- Full-Time Employment
- Part-Time Employment
- Unemployment
- Retirement
- Armed Forces

What is the education level of the typical service user?

- less than 9th grade
- from 9th to 12th grade, no diploma
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college
- College degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate degree

What was the Socioeconomic status of the typical service user?

- Lower Socioeconomic Status
- Lower Middle Socioeconomic Status
- Middle Socioeconomic Status
- Upper Middle Socioeconomic Status
- Upper Socioeconomic Status

Please feel free to use the back of this sheet to include any additional information about your program.

Appendix B.

Chicago Communities Hosting Organizations

Chicago Communities	Organizations within Community
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Albany Park	1
Auburn Gresham	1
Austin	1
Chicago Lawn	1
Dunning	1
Grand Boulevard	1
Greater Grand Crossing	1
Humboldt Park	2
Hyde Park	3
Irving Park	1
Lincoln Park	1
Logan Square	2
Lower West Side	2
Riverdale	2
Roseland	2
South Deering	1
South Lawndale	1
South Shore	1
The Loop	3
Uptown	3
West Englewood	1
West Garfield Park	2
West Town	1

Appendix C.

Evaluation Team

Aparna Sharma, M.A., is the University-Community Research Coordinator at CURL and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Applied Social Psychology at Loyola. Aparna was a member of the BP-funded “Building the Capacity of Community Organizations to Conduct Participatory Evaluations” project, which worked with thirty community organizations from 1999 to 2001. Her experience in evaluation projects has helped her gain knowledge of how to work with different organizations, ranging from child advocacy organizations to homeless service providers, in garnering active participation in all aspects of a community research, including designing evaluations, facilitating collaborative environments for research, and submitting research results for presentations and publications.

Amy Kerr is a Graduate Fellow at CURL and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Applied Social Psychology at Loyola. Amy has experience in designing and conducting social psychological research on disadvantaged populations that provided a base for developing community research and evaluation designs. Her other research interests involve predictors and methods of reducing the stigmatization of people with mental illness

Tanya Kellam, Licensed Social Worker, is currently the Director of Community Education at Korean American Community Services (KACS) in Chicago, IL. Prior to her work with KACS, Ms. Kellam gained experience through clinical work in the foster care field, case management in a family shelter and in the field of subsidized child care, and qualitative and quantitative evaluation research addressing new methods of service for co-occurring issues of domestic

violence and substance abuse in women. In her current role as the Director of Community Education at KACS, Ms. Kellam works with youth and adult programs dealing with computer and language literacy.

Kristie Baumgartner, Public Relations and Grant Administrator for Alton Community Unit School District #11, serves as a founding member of the Southwestern Illinois Technology partnership. The Partnership recruits and secures resources to bridge the digital divide in Southwestern Illinois. Baumgartner has also developed numerous technology consortiums in the Downstate Illinois' education sector that have provided technology funding and training for thousands of regional students.

Maureen Hellwig, received her PhD in Public Policy from the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois, Chicago in 1993. As program coordinator of the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG), since 1997, she has been able to combine her 25 years of experience working with community-based organizations on neighborhood issues with her academic credentials, to carry out PRAG's mission to promote university/community collaboration. Specifically, Dr. Hellwig has worked on issues related to: community access to technology, housing and financial cooperatives, workforce preparation, community access to healthy food, environmental compliance and industrial retention, public utilities and consumer rights, community empowerment through neighborhood organization, and the role of settlement houses as community change agents. She is also the Graduate Program Director of Loyola's Chicago Studies program.

Jeremy A. Joslin graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2001 with a BA in Psychology. After completing his MA in Applied Social Psychology from Loyola University

Chicago, he left the university for a job in the non-profit sector. He is now a Victim Advocate with the Illinois Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

The Center's Director, Philip Nyden, Ph.D., will head this evaluation research team. Dr. Nyden is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Urban Research and Learning Loyola University Chicago. In the late 1980's he helped to establish the Policy Research and Action Group (PRAG), a group of Chicago-based community leaders and university-based researchers, which has been building a collaborative network to bring community knowledge and perspectives to the research process. In 1996, he was instrumental in establishing Loyola CURL, a non-traditional research center at Loyola University that develops and conducts all of its research in partnership with community-based organizations. The significance of this collaborative work and connections to projects in other cities is discussed in Dr. Nyden's co-authored book *Building Community: Social Science in Action* (Pine Forge Press, 1998).