Collaborating Organizations

Hill House Association (HHA)

Patterned on the settlement house concept, the Hill House Association (HHA) was formed in 1964 through the merger of three long-standing Hill District agencies. Shortly thereafter, a centrally located facility known as Hill House Center was created to house many integral community services. The Hill House was the first agency in one of the City's predominantly low-income, African-American community to collocate health, welfare, recreation and community programs. Its multi-service model remains unique to this day. The Hill House Association's Neighborhood Development programs have served the Hill District community since the organization's inception. Hill House's Neighborhood Development services are focused on convening and enabling community residents and organizations to participate in the decisions that affect them, their families and their neighborhood. For well over a decade, the Hill House has been a leader in the areas of youth and workforce development, fatherhood services and technology deployment to Hill District residents and other predominantly low income, African-American populations.

Community House

Organized in 1916, the Community House is one of Pittsburgh's historic settlement houses located on the North Side of Pittsburgh. The Community House is home to 9 other 501(c)(3) organizations serving various needs of urban residents and functions as a hub for the development and delivery of projects and services to urban residents and children in the North Side's distressed neighborhoods. The Community House serves as a center for community learning and is a key contributor to educational partnerships with Carnegie Mellon University, neighboring Pittsburgh Public Schools, charter schools and parochial schools. Our advanced technological infrastructure and nationally acclaimed research based Community Literacy curriculum have established Community House as a leading educational innovator on a civic and national level. The mission of the Community House is to support *learning* in urban institutions and to address the digital divide by developing distance learning opportunities among schools, universities and community organizations.

Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC)

In 1975, the BGC was incorporated as a 501(c)(3), community development, non-profit corporation and today has a membership exceeding 400 paying residents, businesses, and friends. Our target service area focuses on the Bloomfield, Friendship and Garfield neighborhoods of Pittsburgh's East End. Since its origination, the BGC has initiated many programs directed at rebuilding this community and assisting residents in meeting their needs. Focused originally around community concerns about the ongoing deterioration of the neighborhoods the BGC has, over the years, expanded its initial role as advocator on issues of crime, city policy and services to commit itself directly to improving the quality of life in the neighborhood. For the past 18 years, the BGC has developed programs and activities to address economic, social and environmental conditions in our target service area. The BGC provides many services and programs to our community through four program areas: Real Estate Development, Economic Development, Youth Development and Community Outreach & Organizing.

Information Renaissance (Info Ren)

While not one of the three convening organizations of this proposal, Info Ren provides and manages the vital infrastructure, which enables the leading organizations' work through this proposal. Info Ren was formed in 1996 to address what its organizers saw as an emerging Digital Divide. In 1996, computers and Internet services were unevenly distributed based upon income, race and neighborhood. Even dial-up Internet connections, which are now almost universally available, were not available everywhere at affordable prices. The conclusion was inescapable that, in the absence of access to necessary infrastructure and services, communities would not be able to benefit from the expanding opportunities made available through the Internet. Equal access to information infrastructure would be as essential in the information age as streets, roads, bridges, water, sewer and electric lines were to the industrial age. Accordingly, Info Ren's mission is focused on two major tasks -- (1) to extend advanced

telecommunications infrastructure into all parts of the City (beyond the Central Business District on which traditional service providers focus) and (2) to help communities learn how to take advantage of the power of the Internet to enhance their efforts in education, economic development and political expression.

Specific Problems To Be Addressed

The Hill House Association, Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation and Community House are submitting this proposal to the Department of Community and Economic Development in support of our effort to mobilize community and faith-based organizations and to advance those same organizations' professional capacities to respond to the literacy quandary facing many of this city's lower income neighborhood schools and children. We will provide intensive community organizing, programming and technical support for this community-school partnership effort. The submission of this $500,000 Digital Divide grant request is made to support:

1. *Connecting 20 additional community and faith base organizations* across five of the City's lower income communities to a 60 megabit community wireless network.

2. *Hiring three competent, enthusiastic community coordinators* with technical backgrounds, dedicated to advancing a project-based learning agenda.

3. *Building a citywide coalition of organizations* to partner with the Pittsburgh Public Schools to address literacy issues.

In community technology's early efforts, community groups often struggled with the question of how to use the Internet in their programming. Now, however, leading organizations, such as the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, Community House and Hill House no longer struggle to find ways to force technology into their after-school education. They have crossed a threshold and gained a functional awareness of the power of technology. They use technology purposefully to add new dimensions to their programs. Significantly, too, the physical infrastructure required to conduct the educational programs brings the groups together into a community of learners and developers that creates a synergy supporting each others' work and creating new ideas.

This proposal is being submitted to create a multi-community, citywide collaborative to address three primary issues:

Literacy

Clearly, one of the most pressing issues facing many lower income city communities presently is literacy. At one of our partner middle schools, 200 of 225 children read below basic standard upon entering the 6th grade.

Access to Computers and the Internet

There is an apparent disconnect between urban lower income residents and access to the wealth of computer and technology resources. This lack of exposure puts many of the young people living in lower income communities at a distinct disadvantage with many of their more affluent counterparts.

Faith and Community Based Groups' Technology Infrastructure and Capacity

With the national effort to more fully integrate smaller community and faith based organizations into the local social service delivery system, there has been a growing recognition of the need to fortify their management systems and their technology infrastructures. Bottom line: the broader social service delivery system can't help individuals that it cannot access. Conversely, community center personnel who have gained the trust and respect of the hard to reach members of our community cannot fully assist them without providing upgrades of technology as well as training and support.

Proposal

This proposal recommends the following plan to address the limited access to technological resources and an identified problem in our city, academic underachievement. We are requesting funds to support three, Community Coordinator, staff positions and partial cost of infrastructure implementation. This proposal will accomplish the following:

1. ***Organize*** *a network of community agencies committed to serving a single mission to support literacy efforts of the Pittsburgh Public Schools*
2. *Build out a high-speed wireless network **infrastructure** to facilitate communication and resource sharing between agencies across the network*
3. *Implement consistent **programming** at community agencies across the city designed to mirror the in-school literacy curriculum*

1. *Organizing a network of community agencies committed to serving a single mission to support literacy efforts of the Pittsburgh Public Schools*

Overview
The three organizations submitting this grant will serve as 'convening organizations.' Each organization is committed to organizing a network of five community and faith based agencies in its respective neighborhood dedicated to addressing the unacceptably low literacy achievement of too many community children. Each convening organization is also committed to assisting with the identification of convening organizations and the establishment of community networks in two other city neighborhoods to reach additional populations of lower-income, inner city youth.[1]

Role of Convening Organizations
There are three discrete levels of organizing that need to occur: Community Group, Region and Agency. What is most interesting is that the success of each of these levels is interdependent on the other.

- Community groups would not have the capacity to use technology to engage with schools and other communities without the support of citywide and regional efforts like those that have produced the high-speed wireless access being beamed from the WQED tower and the Regional Enterprise Tower.

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[1] This grant will support all cost with the development of the organization and technology networks with the exception of Personnel cost for the latter two organizations. The original three convening groups will work with the recruited convening organizations to identify local funding sources for the community coordinator postions.

- Larger regional efforts would have little opportunity for application without the agencies' grassroots organizing of community groups like the efforts in the east end by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation.

- Children will only benefit from these connections between community/faith based organizations and schools if community groups are organized and trained to provide quality education services like those advanced by the Community House.

Each neighborhood will be coordinated by a single convening agency. Each convening agency will have responsibilities at all levels including:

AGENCY LEVEL
Identifying and piloting new project-based learning activities

- Prepare its infrastructure for innovative technology-supported literacy initiatives

- Involve all youth literacy agency staff members in *Community Literacy* training

- Integrate mobile computer carts and project-based learning initiatives into all agency literacy efforts
- Identify sources of surplus computers for placement in student homes facilitating access to school resources and assignments

NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL
Convening a neighborhood coalition of faith based and community organizations

- Partner with neighborhood schools to provide more and better learning opportunities for children.

- Work together to maximize resources and opportunities.

- Connect four groups within each their neighborhood to a high-speed neighborhood intranet to support partnering and facilitate efficient daily communication.

- Provide *technical assistance around technology and literacy programming* to church and community agency personnel.

REGIONAL LEVEL
Participate in larger citywide and regional literacy and technology planning efforts

- Support the efforts of Information Renaissance and 3RC to expand the community wireless network.

- Support the efforts to connect community groups to the Pittsburgh Public Schools through a wireless connection to the District's South Side Computing Complex.

- Identify and nurture technology and literacy coalitions in other city and county communities.

- Convene city, county and regional meetings to plan and coordinate technology and literacy efforts.

- Demonstrate project based learning "best practices."

Selection Criteria for Selecting Convening and Collaborating Groups. An oversight committee of representatives from each, currently participating organization will fairly assess and select potential candidates to join the collaborative effort. A workable model of such an oversight committee already exists and has functioned successfully to select five groups in the East End for the current networking activity taking place. Criteria for selecting partnering convening and collaborating organizations and the benefits of participation in this expanding collaborative agenda are as follows:

Criteria - Groups must be willing to:

➢ Strengthen formal relationships with schools in their communities (priority for groups working with Empowerment Schools as identified by the State).

➢ Create innovative programming that supports the Pittsburgh Public School academic agenda.

➢ Promote shared software between the schools, the community/faith based consortium and the individual organizations.

➢ Develop project based learning initiatives.

➢ Monitor and respond to community needs.

➢ Share and demonstrate best practices.

➢ Produce tangible outcomes for children, families and communities.

Benefits – Organizations will have the opportunity to:

➢ Participate in meetings with multi organizational representation to discuss ideas, successes, resources, new developments, etc.

➢ Attend professional training in technology supported, project based learning.

➢ Develop basic technical skills to troubleshoot common problems in the management of a networked computer environment.

➢ Leverage combined efforts and resources for advancement of individual organizational mission.

➢ Develop new partnerships with nearby organizations that are working on similar issues.

➢ Produce better measurable outcomes for target population with assistance of the collaborative consortium.

2. *Build out a high-speed wireless network infrastructure to facilitate communication and resource sharing between agencies across the network*

An Overview. Once network participants are identified and prepared to participate, convening groups will work with Information Renaissance to physically connect each agency to the high-speed wireless network infrastructure already being built-out on a small scale. This proposal seeks to connect an additional 20 agencies to the burgeoning network.

Infrastructure – Linking the Human and Physical Networks. The expanded programming proposed in this grant request is reliant upon the connection of additional community groups to an existing high-bandwidth wireless network managed by Info Ren. The network has its foundation in the Smart Building Project's (Regional Enterprise Tower) bulk Internet connection

and a series of wireless extensions. Three community groups, including Community House and Hill House, already have wireless connections from their sites directly to the roof of the Regional Enterprise Tower in downtown Pittsburgh and the network will soon be expanded to include a connection to the WQED tower.

The value of such an interconnection is enormous. It will enable community and faith based groups in the network to communicate with any other participating organization over a high-bandwidth network. The interconnection will make possible a whole new range of partnerships and joint programming. Beyond programming, the network's goals are to make high-bandwidth connections affordable to small organizations and, at the same time, to be financially sustainable without ongoing subsidies.

The network minimizes the costs to be borne by users by funding the project's capital costs with public and foundation funds. The network uses user fees to fund recurring costs, which the network minimizes through bulk purchases and shared services. Each user shares the same high-bandwidth Internet connection, the peak of which is generally available to individual users due to the bursting, intermittent patterns of Internet use. The keys to financial sustainability are, therefore, two-fold. Public and foundation funds are necessary for capital costs, and a sufficient number of users are required to absorb the recurring costs at prices low enough to be affordable.

Surplus Computer Distribution through Network. There presently exists in Pittsburgh a new program headed by Three Rivers Connect (3RC), a non-profit technology organization, which receives surplus government computers that may be distributed to low-income families and community organizations. In one round, the three lead convening organizations and 3RC worked to distribute about 200 computers to 20 organizations. This allowed the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, for instance, to distribute its systems to 20 youth in their employment program and to 10 adults and senior citizens through a training program. Utilizing the proposed network, we are confident that with new shipments scheduled to arrive throughout the year, we will be able to distribute approximately 1,000 of the surplus systems to families and community/faith based agencies.

Technical Assistance. Organizing communities around a single convening organization, a single wide-area network, and a unifying mission, presents an opportunity to share human resources in meeting the network's needs. There has been a basic model that has worked exceedingly well in advancing the capacities of the groups submitting this proposal. The Model: Strong agency commitment to technology assisted programming supported by infrastructure development and expert technical support. Many of the groups, particularly those smaller organizations, lack the financial and human capital to successfully incorporate technology into their programming. Computers, new or surplus, are of little value if they aren't being used and maintained. High speed Internet connectivity is not required to simply do word processing or to play solitaire. Each organization's staff members must be trained and supported to both maintain and use these new tools of the technology era. This "brave new world" of community technology deployment and use requires several key levels of technical proficiency, which include:

➢ Each organization needs to have a staff or volunteer who at a minimum is interested in technology and its uses to support programming.

➢ Each community needs people working across agencies who understand the abilities of community and faith based organizations to integrate technology into their missions and operations. Ground level, community based technical support people are essential.

> ➢ The high end, technology skills possessed by the Information Renaissance staff. Without this support, it is quite likely, that all of the existing successful models would have either never materialized or would have ultimately failed. Possessing and maintaining a high bandwidth, wireless Internet connection is at best a risky proposition. Without the technical support of technology experts like those at Information Renaissance

As mentioned, included in this request is funding for three new staff positions, one at each of the convening agencies. Each of the positions will have the same basic job description, which includes the overriding responsibility of providing technical support – not only to the hub organization where they are employed – but also to other community, and faith based organizations within their particular targeted communities and ultimately to the other communities identified to participate in this initiative.

This proposal would not be a very responsible one without the inclusion of these staff positions. Building out a large wireless network infrastructure to connect many smaller, organizational networks, all using varying machines and serving varying purposes, would pose a significant challenge to the average community and faith based agency staff. Not all of these relatively small organizations can be expected to have or hire someone to troubleshoot their technical problems.

Further, each of their efforts will be shared with the other technical staff persons to avoid duplication of efforts and to share knowledge. Each Community Coordinator will also be supported by a group of high school technology students who will be trained to audit agencies' current technology capacities, assist the coordinator and agency staff to create and implement a technology plan and provide ongoing technical support.

The new Coordinator staff members will also be responsible for educating organizational leadership and staff to help themselves with common troubleshooting activities, thus empowering many individuals in the network to learn new skills and serve their own needs. This grant will support all cost with the development of the organization and technology networks with the exception of Personnel cost for the latter two organizations. The original three convening groups will work with the recruited convening organizations to identify local funding sources for the community coordinator positions.

3. *Implement consistent programming at community agencies across the city designed to mirror the in-school literacy curriculum*

An Overview. Once the human and physical network is in place, convening organizations will continue to develop technology-supported programs to address literacy needs of community youth. All participating agencies across the city will implement virtually the same program activities for this effort. Utilizing the newly hired Community Coordinators at the three lead convening organizations, and building off of present work to develop effective program activities which parallel and support the curriculum of the schools, the network will be in position to offer the School District and children a unified continuum of academic service delivery.

Technology Supported Literacy Programming. Some statistics from schools represented by the three lead organizations include the following:

- 74% of Fort Pitt students receive public assistance (highest elementary school rate in the district) and 84% of Fort Pitt students live in single parent households. Only 11% of

fifth grade Fort Pitt Elementary School students scored above the Pennsylvania State Average in mathematics testing.

- Only 1% of Peabody and 8% of Schenley students performed to standard on NS Math testing in 2000.

- 58% of Arsenal Middle School students received out-of-school suspensions at least once during the school year.

- 89% of the incoming 6th grade class at Milliones Middle School did not read at basic standard.

Groups throughout the city provide after school and summer programs for youth. Regrettably, most of these programs are not delivering curriculum that directly parallels the efforts of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. These efforts, often done in isolation, while adding value, lack a singleness of purpose that is needed to help our children who are struggling most with their academic studies.

Each of the convening organizations stands teetering on the brink of an exciting new paradigm. One, in which community groups cooperate and convene around common pedagogy, one where community educators can stand as peers with their school partners in the effort against academic underachievement.

The keys to increasing student literacy rates are to provide students with a solid foundation of basic skills and to motivate them to learn. A fusion of literacy education and technology can help to accomplish this goal. It has been shown to engage students and fire their imaginations. It can be used to stimulate young minds in profound and lasting ways. Numerous research studies on the impact of technology on student achievement have demonstrated this finding with remarkably similar results. A review of these studies supports the following conclusions:

- Students, especially those labeled "at risk," learn basic skills - reading, writing, and arithmetic - better and faster if they practice those skills using technology.

- Technology engages students, and as a result they spend more time on basic learning tasks than students who use more traditional approaches.

- Technology offers educators a way to individualize curriculum and customize it to the needs of individual students.

- Through the use of technology, students can use a variety of communication media to express their ideas more clearly and powerfully.

- Technology can decrease absenteeism, lower dropout rates, and motivate more students to continue on to college.

- Students who regularly use technology take more pride in their work, have greater confidence in their abilities, and develop higher levels of self-esteem.

By connecting these organizations, and many others doing wonderful work, through a high-speed network architecture, it will be possible to maximize recourses and focus efforts on child literacy and other pressing community issues.

Software Synchronization. Community Coordinators will be working with agency partners and school personnel to discern those programmatic activities that will best support the curriculum

used by the schools to improve literacy. Beyond identification of such activities, the Community Coordinators will be responsible for assisting with the effective implementation of these activities across their targeted neighborhoods. An important example currently being developed includes use of the proposed network to share software programs across communities, thus providing a unified effort and consistent educational delivery. Leadership at the convening organizations have already held discussions with school administrators and manufacturers of literacy and career development software for this purpose.

Current Environment

For more than two years, a movement has been growing in the Pittsburgh region. Many groups including foundations, government agencies, schools, community groups and others have come together in many different venues and with varying degrees of success to address technology and its uses within communities. The INET Working Group and the Regional Community Technology Collaborative, among others, have advanced the community technology infrastructure and programming agendas.

The exciting byproduct of all of these efforts has been a growth of community leadership around technology and a burgeoning and robust grassroots, neighborhood technology movement. There have been many products born out of these efforts. There are endless examples of infrastructure enhancement efforts occurring throughout the city and region. The development and upsurge in preparedness of community agencies over the last two years has been profound. Most assuredly, groups are at different levels but, by and large, community organizations are moving forward. In the case of Hill House Association and Community House, each has upgraded to a 10-megabit wireless Internet connection beamed directly from the Regional Enterprise Tower. Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation along with four other groups in the city's east end will receive 60-megabit connections from the RET within the next month.

The movement has also engendered a much deeper understanding of the challenges that lie ahead. Having technology is meaningless without the ability to integrate its use into the mission of community organizations to better the lives of their neighborhoods and residents. There has been a growing recognition of the literacy crisis facing many of our community's children and schools and an acknowledgement of the need to expand the capacity of community out-of-school programs to deliver high quality literacy instruction.

The submission of this Digital Divide grant request is the culmination of years of partnering efforts by a broad based coalition of including the foundations, government, residents, school staff and district administrators, students, community and faith based organizations of all sizes and focus to:

1) Bring technological resources into low-income Pittsburgh communities,

2) Utilize these resources to build technological and academic skills of youth and families in these inner-city neighborhoods,

3) Build a citywide coalition of organizations to partner with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and

4) Advance the potential programmatic and organizational impact of available and emerging technologies.

The three lead organizations submitting this proposal, Hill House Association, Community House and Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) have been leaders in the community technology revolution presently flourishing in the City of Pittsburgh. In addition, each

organization has been providing quality youth programs for many years, is a strong community advocate and has championed extensive collaborative efforts for the betterment of their respective communities for decades.

Resulting from these and other efforts, community groups are realizing countless shared benefits for their respective communities. Most notable examples of such powerful partnership efforts include:

- A 10-megabit wireless Internet connection beamed to Community House and Hill House Association from the Regional Enterprise Tower.

- A project that will connect five East End organizations, including BGC, to high-speed wireless Internet infrastructure within the next month.

- A multi-agency project funded by the Heinz Endowments in support of several community/school, economic development, and real estate development initiatives.

- An initiative that links youth to free government surplus computer systems and free dial-up Internet access.

- A robust network of community group-neighborhood school partnerships.

- A pending proposal to the a local foundation to develop technology supported learning activities focusing on helping community youth reach academic rubrics used by the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Outcomes

Our vision for this proposal is a city wide collaborative of technologically equipped organizations dedicated to partnering with public schools and parents in their communities, developing technology supported, project based learning programs to develop a unified, consistent effort to support the schools' literacy curriculum.

This proposal hinges on several key points of focus as illustrated below:

- *Construct a Wide Area Network (WAN) infrastructure* to connect participating organizations to each other, and to the Internet. The network connections create new capabilities to interact with and supplement the resources and efforts of the schools in our communities.

- *Provide greater access to computers and technology* for children and families in Pittsburgh's low-income communities.

- *Organize 25 community and faith based agencies* which are dedicated to youth development and school accountability/improvement.

- *Utilize technology-supported Project Based Learning* activities to raise achievement levels and improve basic skills of children in our low-income inner city communities.

- *Demonstrate a seamless educational delivery system* between schools and after-school and other community and faith based programs that may hopefully lead to the use of servers and interconnections for students to utilize the same software at school and out of school – literacy programs, career development programs, homework and research projects are all potential examples we are working to develop.

- *Distribute surplus computer systems to 1000 low-income families and organizations* through the proposed network as part of the federal government's surplus system and a local organization, which is already set up as a distributor of the equipment.

Projected Schedule and Key Milestones and Dates

This proposal is focused on building a coalition of community and faith based organizations, physically networked together, to work collectively and within our own communities across the city on supplementing the schools' efforts and resources to improve the academic performance of our youth in the city of Pittsburgh. We propose the following timeline based on a Grant Period of July 1, 2002 through June 31, 2003:

Prior to Grant Period:

Jun 2002 – The BGC and four other community groups in the East End will join the Community House and Hill House in receiving wireless equipment to support high-speed Internet access through Information Renaissance.

During Grant Period:

Jul – Sep – Identification and recruitment of participating organizations by the convening agencies, to participate in this effort. Assessments of these agencies' ability to interact with local schools, involve parents, manage project based learning programs and implement a technology plan

– Identification of two convening organizations in two city communities beyond the North Side, Hill District and East End which are already involved

– Recruitment and hiring of each convening organizations' Community Coordinator

– Coordination of meetings with organizations participating in the network to facilitate development of a cohesive vision and plan

Oct – Dec – Site visits and assessments of line-of-sight to determine best manner in which to connect the various sites to the wireless network

– Provision of assistance to the two new convening organizations as they mobilize to connect with agencies in their communities

– Distribution of surplus computer hardware will begin and be on going

Jan – Mar – Recruitment of participating organizations in the two new convening communities

– Research and purchase of best equipment to be used in the wide area network build-out

– Education of participating organizations' staff and leadership on the management of a technical, networked environment and basic computer maintenance

Apr – Jun – Installations of wireless networking hardware on buildings of community organizations throughout the city

– Education of participating organization's staff and leadership on project based learning

Conclusion

These efforts will produce an innovative model of technology utilization infused into educational programming, community organizing, and cross-community collaboration to address a significant problem facing all of our communities. This represents, in our estimation, the next logical step in a journey that has the potential to reshape the way children are educated and the way that schools and communities partner. By bringing together parents, educators and project leaders we can make significant strides towards ensuring our youth are receiving every opportunity to perform to their fullest abilities. We seek to create a new paradigm of service delivery, one where community educators can stand as peers with their school partners to battle academic underachievement, one where a child can access the same software at school, church, community center and home. There are endless possibilities for success but equal chances for missed opportunities if groups are not trained, mobilized and equipped to respond to the current and future challenges that confront our communities.