3

chapter

Determining Program Focus

Introduction

Providing opportunity to use and/or learn to use computer technology is of course the fundamental rationale for a Community Technology Center. Learning to use a computer without some sort of ulterior goal in mind would be like learning to use a hammer without something to pound. Having access to computer technology means having access to a new set of tools—tools that can be used in myriad ways to help achieve work, life, and learning goals. Because computer applications range over such a vast area, it is useful for a start-up CTC to identify specific areas in which to concentrate its programming activities.

This chapter will discuss likely focus areas for CTC programming and the process that the Steering Committee should follow in planning CTC offerings. The data gathered through Mapping Community Resources (Chapter 2) will assist the Steering Committee in making intelligent decisions about the general nature of the CTC program, and will determine what should be specific offerings or concentrations, and, hence, what software will be needed.

While establishing an initial focus for the CTC and engaging in preliminary program planning are essential steps, the results must not be regarded as set in stone. It is more than likely that, as the CTC grows, focus areas may change or broaden. It is probably wise, in the beginning, not to try to accommodate every need or interest, but to leave room for constructive response once usage patterns emerge and active participant needs can be identified.

What are Likely Program Areas for a CTC?

Most CTCs will plan program offerings in two or more of the following areas:

- Public Access or Open Lab Time
- Pre-school and Family Activities

- Afterschool Activities

- Adult Education

- Elder Services

- Internet Access (this can be a focus as well as part of other offerings)

- Career Development and Job Preparation

- Job Placement

- Electronic Publishing (including video or multi-media)

- Electronic Commerce

Although each of these areas is discussed more fully below, none is exclusive of others. Overlap in terms of required software is anticipated. A description of each type of program area follows.

Public Access and/or Open Lab Time

Most centers will want to include some public access and/or open lab time.

- Public Access offers members of the community the opportunity to use computer and communications technologies to explore their own interests, to develop skills, and to discover what the technology can do.

- Open Lab Time provides those otherwise involved through structured classes with opportunities to practice what they are learning or to branch out into further explorations.

- Some centers ask for a voluntary contribution of a dollar or two from participants in open labs. This sum can help to defray the costs of printer paper and cartridges, and disks.

Important considerations for CTCs considering open lab time

- It may be necessary to designate some times specifically for children and other times for older teens and adults.

- It is important to schedule some times during the day and some in the evening.

- It is advisable to have introduction programs for the most popular software (see Chapter 5). These are available both as on-screen tutorials and in audio form (if you use the audio versions, get earphones for the users).

- This will normally be a heavy usage time with a variety of individuals each doing different things. Thus it is advisable to have a high concentration of staff or volunteers present: at least one for every ten users.

- If public access is to include internet access, more than one phone line or a high-capacity access line may be needed. Special rules limiting one person's access time may need to be instituted.

Examples of successful public access/open lab programs

- As of 1997, Prologue Alternative High School Inc. is one of the few public access technology centers in Chicago and the only one in the North Side Uptown community. Open to all Uptown residents and any Prologue student, the lab offers free public computer literacy classes and software training in evenings and on Saturdays, as well as unstructured public access time.

- DC Public Library welcomes members of the "homeless" population, some of whom now have a virtual address even though they may not have a street address.

- Carver Community Center is a settlement house in Schenectady, NY, whose Latimer Education Program provides extensive public access to computer technology with a chance for participants to learn computer literacy and skills at their own pace, in addition to job readiness training, and small business support.

- PTW/Harlem CCC was founded in 1983 on the concept of public access but quickly learned that free availability did not guarantee participation. Talking to children and family members in playgrounds, distributing invitational map-cards, and outreach through other community organizations were some of the strategies employed to inform the community of the opportunities available.

- At the Family Learning Center's Computer Center (Marietta, OH), community members use the resources to perform job hunts on the internet, write and print resumes, research school projects, research for personal satisfaction, improve keyboarding skills, design quilts, and play games. When the computer center is not open for public access, the Adult Basic and Literacy Education and Literacy Volunteers of America participants use the equipment in their work to improve their basic skills in reading, math, writing, and computer skills.

- Bytes for Belfast opened four centers for young people aged 16-25. All programs included drop-in sessions. Problems arose when staff had to refuse admission to youth under 16. This led to a reevaluation of center goals and an extension of policy.

Pre-School and Family

Pre-school and family programs include:

- Times when parents can bring young children and work together with them to explore appropriate software such as drawing, animation, and learning games.

- Opportunity to partner with a local Even Start, Head Start, or day care program that may not have access to computers.

Important considerations for CTCs considering pre-school & family programs

- The attention span of young children is limited, so such sessions should be short—a half hour or 45 minutes at most.

- Young children may not be able to reach the mouse or keyboard comfortably from ordinary chair height. If you don't have adjustable chairs, stock plenty of telephone books or pillows.

- Parents may need prior guidance in using the software to enable them to work effectively with their children. Plan on an introductory session or two for the parents.

Examples of pre-school and family programs

- In Perth Amboy and New Brunswick, NJ, TechnoTots offers a Computer Exploration program to preschoolers, Computer Basics and A+ Certification training for adults; and an extensive Open Access Program for community residents to use equipment in self-directed, self-paced activities.

- Founded in 1945, as part of the settlement house movement, Neighborhood House of Milwaukee emphasizes services to teens and to families with young children. Technology programs will include Youth Media Development, English as a Second Language/Job Readiness, Parent Support, Family Fun Night, and the Senior Technology Program.

- The City of Detroit Head Start Family Service Center (HSFSC) is funded by the US Department of Health & Human Services through the City of Detroit Department of Human Services to provide literacy, computer technology, employment, and substance abuse services to Head Start families in Detroit. It operates a computer lab that provides training courses and open lab access to Head Start staff and parents. Agency staff provides technical assistance to seven (7) other Head Start computer labs in Detroit. The HSFSC began development of the Detroit Technology & Computer Lab Coalition in November 1999.

Afterschool Activities

These can be structured for different age groups or offered as open lab time for children. In addition to giving children an opportunity to acquire skill with basic computer applications, some will enjoy:

- **Subject-Area Activities.** Commercial software that offers homework help, tutorials, and other activities covering subjects, such as reading, writing, math, sciences, and other subjects, is readily available (see Chapter 5 for evaluation guidelines.)

- **Games.** Games can be effective tools for getting children and young adults interested in learning more about computer technology. Exercise caution in choosing games—some are violent, others are mindless (see Chapter 5 for evaluation guidelines).

- **Exploring the Internet.** Once children are equipped with basic computer skills, they may wish to test and improve them by "surfing" the Internet, using the World Wide Web (WWW) as a research tool, or communicating with far-flung peers through electronic mail.

- **Multimedia Publishing:** designing personal web pages, constructing family or neighborhood profiles, creating project reports for school.

- **Music-making:** learning about and/or writing music and songs (may require additional hardware and software).

Important considerations for CTCs considering afterschool activities

- Know every child. Enforce sign-in and sign-out procedures. Be sure you can notify an appropriate person if special circumstances arise.

- Make sure all children know the rules of the center and where to find what they need.

- Young people working alone need frequent attention. To facilitate peer tutoring and collaborative learning, encourage two or more to work together at a single computer.

- Assign more knowledgeable children to work with the less knowledgeable.

- Provide ample space to move around, stow bookbags, coats, etc.

Examples of successful afterschool activities

- Plugged In (East Palo Alto, CA) offers two types of programs for children, teens, families and adults. They are: (1) core programs that are project-based and involve a multidisciplinary approach to both content and subject; and (2) computer projects/classes where the content and subject of the projects is technology and its applications. Examples of core programs include Drawing with Pedro, Group Portrait (storytelling), and Kidz Magazine. Computer projects/classes include Kids Basics (introduction to computers) and Kids Advanced (computer business).

- Malden Access Television Studio (Malden, MA) has offered a program for children brought to the studio by the local YMCA to learn animation software using Fractal Design, Dabbler, and D-Paint.

- The Clubhouse at the Computer Museum in Boston provides a place where young people ages 10 to 15 can use computers to create their own computer-based projects. Computer-using professionals and graduate students serve as mentors, offering educational guidance and inspiration to participating youth..

Adult Education

Establishing a comprehensive adult education program will involve far more than computer access. There will need to be classroom or tutorial space for non-computer-based learning and instructors with the experience and qualifications needed to teach these classes. Rather than developing an adult education program from the ground up, a collaboration or partnership with an existing program in the community may serve the goals of both. Adult education generally includes:

- **General Equivalency Degree (GED) training.** This is a program in which persons are taught certain skills to prepare them to take a test to obtain the equivalent of a high school diploma;

- **English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.** These programs teach people the basic skills to speak and understand English. The class concludes with a test measuring students progress towards fluency in the English language;

- **Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes.** These classes enable residents to develop the ability to read, write, and perform basic math. Learners progress to GED classes;

- **Life-long Learning Opportunities:** Extension courses, "Associate" degrees, Distance Learning; and,

- **Basic computer comfort.** These workshops introduce people to the keyboard, the mouse, how to turn the machine on and off, and some basic applications which will enable them to use the computer without supervision and prepare them for more advanced computer training in the future.

Important considerations for CTCs considering an adult education program or complementing existing services for adult learners:

- Many adults must bring their children with them. The CTC should establish simultaneous classes for the children and/or a play area.

- Some adults prefer to learn among other adults rather than in a class integrated with children. The CTC should, if possible, set aside teaching time specifically for adult instruction.

- Many adults work; accommodate these schedules.

Examples of successful adult education programs

- The Marietta Area Community Computing Center (Marietta, OH) offers ABE classes 4 hours per day on 10 computers in their Apple/Macintosh Center. The adults often return during public access hours to learn other software applications such as word processing, spreadsheets and graphics design.

- The Henry Street Settlement (New York, NY) offers programs for mentally challenged adults aimed at building their self-esteem, teaching them to work and play with other people, and helping them learn problem-solving tools.

- At the Brooklyn Public Library in New York, adult learners work together in collaborative, learner-centered projects using wordprocessing and other productivity tools to develop a foundation of knowledge of writing, reading, problem solving, and information and literacy skills.

Elder Services

Some older persons particularly enjoy:

- Mentoring younger people

- Games such as chess, go, or backgammon

- Telecommunications contact with relatives and friends

- Telecommunications and CD-ROM-based travel explorations

- Financial planning assistance

- Family tree programs and family history productions

- Health care and other services information

- Just "being part of" the communications age

Important considerations for CTCs considering elder services

Seniors often prefer to learn about computers in classes made up of other seniors. Offering "seniors only" courses may go a long way to making them pleased to be at the CTC and likely to return. In addition, like any other population, seniors learn better in smaller classes and need to be listened to.

Some seniors truly enjoy working with young people. Consider forming a senior volunteer corps to assist during lab times open to children.

Examples of successful elder service

- The Somerville Community Computing Center (Somerville, MA) offers a program for seniors only. One is a printshop class in which the seniors make cards and banners.

- SeniorNet is the world's largest nonprofit trainer of adults over 50 onc omputer technology and the Internet. It includes 170+ SeniorNet Learning Centers in 38 states as well as the largest on-line community for older adults at www.seniornet.org <http://www.seniornet.org>. The Learning Centers, which provide a friendly, pressure-free environment in which members can learn to use computers and share computing experience and expertise, are located in a variety of donated facilities including senior centers, school and college campuses, hospital, libraries and retirement communities. These Centers are administered by volunteers and offer classes focusing on computer skills such as word processing for writing letters and journals, spreadsheets for organizing financial information, databases for organizing information, and telecommunications for communicating with others and obtaining information over the Internet.

Internet Access

Along with the telecommunications explosion and the extraordinary proliferation of the World Wide Web (WWW) as a way both to receive and publish electronically delivered

information, a number of community technology centers have been established to provide, for those otherwise left out, access to these technologies.

Although the media touts Internet access as a route to information, most centers offering Internet access have found that the main attraction for their participants is either electronic mail (email) for initiating and/or maintaining contact with friends, colleagues, and relations in distant areas, and/or self-publishing (developing personal web pages: publishing stories, recollections, poetry, music, still pictures, and video to a world-wide audience).

The salient characteristic of this experience is the recognition that people who have heretofore been excluded for whatever reason from computer access need a degree of computer comfort with a variety of applications before they are willing to launch themselves into cyberspace. Hence, a CTC with Internet access as its focus must plan on offering introductory courses aimed at equipping its participants with basic computer skills.

Examples of successful Internet access programs:

- In Chicago, Street-Level Youth Media (http://www.iit.edu/~livewire/) provides Training and Access in Media Technology for at-risk urban youth, including open access; computer classes; school-age education; collaborations with other agencies; video and audio production; Internet access; and digital publishing.

- In New York City, Community Access (http://www.cairn.org) provides housing and support services for homeless people with psychiatric disabilities. The organizations provides several hundred people with email accounts, with logins available to any CA consumer who wishes to gain access. In addition to providing consumers with access to internal email and the Internet, each consumer is able to retrieve case notes written about him/her by his/her service coordinator, and make reply comments.

- In partnership with other local organizations, the Austin Free-Net (http://www.austinfree.net) in Texas has developed the East Austin Media Lab, a multimedia development center for disadvantaged youth. The design elements of the project include: open access periods at each lab; basic training on Internet/Web page development; intensive training and mentor/protege relationships for small groups of teens; and internships with local companies.

- Located in an impoverished housing project in Edinburgh, Scotland, the Craigmillar Community Information Service (http://www.ccis.org.uk/) is operating the largest free BBS dial-up network in the UK, with more than

1,000 individual users regularly visiting the office to use the "Cybercafé without the grub." CCIS is linking up with another CTCNet affiliate in the Boston area to promote cross-Atlantic communication among teenagers.

Career Development and Job Preparation

As with Adult Education (see above), a comprehensive job preparation focus will entail additional, non-computer classroom space along with instructors who have the experience and qualifications needed to conduct the classes. Job preparation generally includes both job skills training and job search activities. *Job skills training* includes classes teaching basic computer literacy, keyboarding skills, word processing, graphics applications, spreadsheets, databases and other office skills classes. *Job search activities* include resume writing workshops; classes teaching interviewing skills such as what questions to ask and what is likely to be asked; how to dress; workplace behavior training; and, how and where to look for a job.

Important considerations for CTC's considering Job preparation programs

The factor most likely to produce a successful job preparation program is the availability of real jobs to those who complete the program. If Job Preparation is to be a CTC focus, the Steering Committee should form an Employer Advisory Council that will match the types of training offered, software selection, and program emphasis to the types of jobs actually available in the community.

A technique proven to be particularly motivating in engaging young people in job preparation courses is to present them with promised employment after successful completion of the CTC course. An Employer Advisory Council can take the lead in lining up these jobs.

Examples of successful job preparation programs

- Jobs for Youth (Boston, MA). Industries, such as environmental technology and biotechnology development companies, send representatives to the CTC to establish computer classes for skills that are needed by the companies. Persons trained at the CTC in these classes are later hired by the companies.

- The Seward Adult Learning Center in partnership with AVTEC (Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center) is an adult basic education program serving local citizens plus students who arrive from all over Alaska to acquire computer literacy, basic reading, math and language skills.

- SER Jobs for Progress, Inc. was formed in 1972 as a joint effort by the two oldest and largest U.S. Hispanic volunteer organizations, the American G.I. Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to provide better opportunities to disenfranchised Austin residents. The organization is developing an Internet-Based Interactive Career Center.

Job Placement

As in the case of Adult Education, a focus on Job Placement cries out for a collaborative relationship with an existing community service. If a CTC offers job placement to complement its job training program, its activities will be similar to some of those available at employment agencies.

Important considerations for CTCs considering job placement

- The CTC would want to develop a database of available jobs in the community. Jobs can be researched through the Steering Committee and/or through neighborhood partnerships. Other sources might include newspapers and local, regional, or national electronic bulletin boards. The WWW contains pages such as CareerPath.com (http://www.careerpath.com), which enables searches of job listings from newspapers in eight major cities.

- Job Preparation students, as an activity, may wish to prepare a database of available local jobs and a second database of their own skills and desired types of employment.

- The Employer Advisory Council (see Job Preparation) can recruit local businesses to notify the CTC of vacant or soon-to-be vacant positions together with advance notice on the skills required for those positions.

- Job openings can be posted on a bulletin board, a community electronic bulletin board, and/or published in a CTC Job Listings Newsletter. Performing these tasks can be assigned to participants in the program.

- The CTC can organize and/or host a "Job Fair" with participants doing the research and implementation as a project. Alternatively, participants can be encouraged, and prepared, to attend job fairs sponsored by other agencies in the community.

Examples of successful job placement programs

- Jobs for Youth (Boston, MA) is closely linked with members of the business community who inform the CTC of any job openings for persons with computer skills.

- In 1996, the NOVA Private Industry Council of Sunnyvale, California and its partners unveiled Youth@Work, an on-line community service connecting employers with youth seeking work in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties (http://novapic.org and http://www.youthatwork.org). NOVA supports school staff in the use of the system and also maintains public access sites throughout the two counties where out-of-school youth who don't have home Internet access can use terminals free of charge.

Electronic Commerce

Electronic commerce is a term used to describe a variety of business activities that can be conducted at the CTC. These types of business activities include outsourcing, small business support, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.

- **Outsourcing** is an activity in which the CTC is hired by an organization or business to undertake a task it usually performs itself, such as payroll processing, data processing, and inventory. The CTC might be able to perform tasks for local businesses, certain government agencies, community-based organizations and schools for a fee, thereby employing CTC participants to do the work and earn revenue they share with the CTC.

- **Small business support** is an activity where the CTC is made available to CTC users to support their business operations, such as by using computers for accounting, tracking inventory, billing, advertising and so forth.

- **Self-employment** is an activity for which a CTC participant uses CTC facilities to perform work for a fee, such as designing fax sheets, producing brochures, providing technical assistance to establish a computer system, and/or creating homepages on the Internet. Individuals who use the CTC in this way should expect to recompense the center from their earnings.

- **Entrepreneurship** is a business activity created by a CTC member or former member in which the person establishes a business at home or at another location using skills learned at the CTC.

Important considerations for CTC's considering electronic commerce

- The CTC is likely to need new or additional equipment and the latest software in order to compete in the marketplace;

- Teenagers and young adults could work with the CTC in fulfilling business contracts, learning business skills, and developing relationships with the business community;

- Both the CTC and individuals would make money; and,

- The CTC must develop a system for sharing profits.

Examples of successful electronic commerce

- Plugged In (East Palo Alto, CA) has created a company, with a group of teenagers, called Plugged In Enterprises, that creates Web sites for corporate and individual clients, for a fee. At Plugged In, students learn technical skills, such as mastering multimedia programs and hypertext mark-up language (HTML), which enable them to offer a service. The students also learn business skills, including how to meet with clients, bid on contracts, negotiate agreements, and develop business plans. In the first two months of operation, Plugged In Enterprises grossed approximately $3,000.

- At Edgewood Terrace in Washington D.C., e.villages turned cyberspace access into direct economic opportunities for people otherwise dependent on government subsidies for their livelihood. The trainees perform database entry for private businesses and government clients, and work out of an office located in their neighborhood. In addition, students learn how to assemble, disassemble, and repair computers.

- Bytes for Belfast participants produce menus for local pubs, flyers for local businesses, and keyrings individualized with logos for company give-aways.

How Does the Steering Committee Determine a Program Focus?

The Steering Committee must now use the data obtained through the processes described in Chapter 2 together with the material presented above to determine the program focus for the CTC. It will be helpful to have a summary report of findings related to interests and needs of neighborhood residents together with a report summarizing complementary programs already available in the community.

It is probable that the data will provide good indication of what initial offerings or populations should be the CTC focus. Decisions should certainly be made in light of the data, but should not be regarded necessarily as final or "cast in concrete".

Making program focus decisions?

Suppose that the data relating to neighborhood residents' interests and needs indicates that a large percentage have only a grade school education or less, and have not had any experience using computer technologies. It would seem reason-

able to rank "Adult Education" high on your focus list. If, however, the Steering Committee is not ready to commit to a full-fledged Adult Education program, it might be possible to collaborate with an existing agency, providing computer accessibility to them in return for other services.

- The Somerville CCC was given space by the Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences (SCALE) so that SCALE students could acquire computer skills. It was agreed that when SCALE students and teachers were not using the center, it could serve other groups as well as the general public. This partnership led to the very comprehensive program now run by the SCCC including pre- and after- school groups, elder services, and public hours in addition to SCALE access.

It may be that the focus of the CTC parent agency dictates the general focus of the program but that the data can be used to determine other aspects of the offering.

- At The Clubhouse at Boston's Computer Museum, the focus of the CTC was known from the start. It would be a place where people could work with cutting edge technology. The question was, what sort of participant body should be the focus? The data were used to determine that a focus on teenagers would best suit both the program and the museum facilities.

A CTC, established as part of an existing program, may be presented with an opportunity or a need to expand, and thus have recourse to the community mapping data.

- At The Bridge (Jacksonville, FL), the CTC was introduced to enhance the job skills of pregnant and parenting teens. No community mapping process was undertaken until more recently when the opportunity to expand the program arose. The recent data indicated that a partnership with one of the local schools would provide access to students afterschool and would give The Bridge access to school services such as software licenses, technical expertise, and volunteers.

The Value of a Pilot Program

Notable in each of the above examples is a limited initial focus. Even if the data indicate a multiplicity of interests and needs, it is probably sensible not to try to do everything at once, but instead to plan one or two focused areas and add public access time. Suppose the data indicate that job training is a big interest and that there is considerable need for an afterschool program. The Steering Committee might decide to test a program that offers both of these together with a small number of public access hours.

A sound way to test the Steering Committee's decisions is to start a pilot program. A pilot program can be three computers in a local community center, a church basement, or in a corner of the public library. It can be supervised chiefly by a small number of volunteers. Operating such a pilot for three to six months gives a check on supply and demand and also provides an opportunity to talk with participants who will know more about ways in which they would like the program extended once they have had some opportunity to use computer technologies.

Other advantages of pilot programs are discussed in Chapter 7.

Documentation

Reports generated by work specified in this chapter will include:

- A summary of community interests and needs;

- A summary of partnership building efforts and results (Exhibit 2-2 provides a useful model);

- A statement of program focus areas determined by the Steering Committee; and

- Minutes of Steering Committee deliberations on the above issues.