

# 4 chapter

## Staffing

### Introduction

No other single factor is so important to the success of a CTC as the quality of its staff and volunteers. Resourceful, friendly, helpful, reliable staff are essential to making the CTC a place people want to come to, be in, and return to.

The Steering Committee may wish to engage a staff person to work with them through the setting-up stages of operationalizing the CTC. Their choice may be a person who will be the CTC director or coordinator; alternatively they may decide to take on a community outreach director first. Both are logical choices.

In considering its staffing plan and in thinking about the individuals who will, in the long run, be the reason the CTC succeeds, the Steering Committee should bear in mind these essential qualities:

- Interpersonal skills are more important than technical expertise. Technical skills can be learned, bought, volunteered, but the ability to relate easily with a wide range of people, to give them confidence, to recognize and appreciate the abilities they already have — that is the gold.
- Staff should be able to converse in the languages predominantly spoken by participants. Otherwise both parties are at a disadvantage. If a center serves a variety of non-English speaking people, perhaps bilingual volunteers can be found to assist communication.
- Flexibility is key. Staff will need to relate easily with people in many different age groups, people having a variety of interests and needs and abilities, and people with vastly different expectations of the CTC and of themselves.
- Common sense is essential.

## What are the Tasks?

Before plunging into a staffing plan or even making a first hire, it is wise to consider all the tasks that make up successful CTC operation. In CTCNet's experience, these fall roughly into five categories: Administrative, Community Outreach and Development, Direct Services, Facilities and Equipment, and Clerical Support.

### 1. Administrative

- Program development, management, and assessment
- Fiscal accountability
- Liaison with governing/advising bodies and funders

### 2. Community Outreach and Development

- Cultivating and sustaining relationships with the community
- Promoting collaborations within the community and beyond
- Overseeing public relations and development planning
- Researching, writing, and follow-up for grant proposals and other funding

### 3. Direct Services

- Educational activities
  - Teaching/supervising classes and public access
  - Orienting individuals, volunteers, and groups
  - Creating and facilitating special projects
  - Counseling re jobs, health, personal issues
  - Preparing for, and documenting, all of the above
- Reception
  - Welcoming visitors and participants
  - Answering and routing phone calls
  - Monitoring sign-in/sign-out procedures
  - Providing information about CTC activities & classes
  - Scheduling orientation sessions

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#### 4. Facilities and Equipment Maintenance

- Site management
  - Security
  - Housekeeping
  - Refuse removal
- Technical support
  - Trouble-shooting hardware problems
  - Arranging repair and maintenance
  - Storage of back up supplies
  - Registration, warranties, and insurance
  - Recommendations for future purchase

#### 5. Clerical and support services

- Generating publications and announcements
- Assembling and organizing mailings
- Sorting and routing incoming mail
- Updating bulletin boards and CTC information packets
- Maintaining inventories
- Record-keeping and filing related to finance, attendance, scheduling, resources, etc.

This is an imposing list and, even so, may not include all the tasks required for successful operation. The Steering Committee should brainstorm additional tasks and responsibilities to ensure that the final list is all-inclusive.

For a pilot program or small center, all tasks may be the province of a single paid staff person supported by a judiciously selected group of volunteers and, of course, the Steering Committee itself. Larger operations require a greater number of paid staff. Consider, too, the possibility that participants themselves may, in time, take on operational tasks.

## Preparing the Staffing Plan

Once the tasks have been determined, but before an actual plan is laid out, the Steering Committee must consider a number of other factors:

### *Budget*

What makes staffing a CTC so difficult is that so many centers are shoestring operations. Among CTCNet affiliates, few have more than two paid staff, and several survive with a part-time coordinator and volunteers. Regardless of the stringency of the budget, CTCNet does not recommend staffing a center entirely with volunteers. There **must be one person who is responsible for the overall management and direction and is empowered to make operational decisions.** That person should be paid a salary with benefits and accorded the respect owed to a professional.

Ideally, a CTC will have at least one staff person in each of the above task areas, and perhaps a number of specialists in the “education” area of “Direct Service”. The PUENTE center in Los Angeles is a high end example with space and staff to serve close to 2000 people of all ages every day.

At the opposite end of the scale is the Somerville Community Computing Center (SCCC). This is a low budget, but still relatively high volume operation. It employs a part-time (50%) coordinator and a consultant for community outreach and fund-raising. The rest of the staff is either volunteer or paid by other community groups that use the center (with orientation and training provided by the part-time SCCC coordinator).

### *Security*

Budget limitations are not the only factors influencing the staffing plan. Another is the security of the space. The SCCC, with its 40+ computers, is located in three inner rooms of a secure building that maintains its own security force. Thus, supervision of classes and open hours can be done by volunteers without the presence of any paid staff. Because the Playing To Win Harlem Center, on the other hand, is a storefront operation in the heart of a low-income neighborhood, and cannot ask volunteers to take sole responsibility for the security of the space or the occupants at any time, a minimum of two paid staff must be present during all center open hours.

### *Size of center and hours of operation*

The third major determining factor is the size of the center and the usage hours

projected. In CTCNet's experience, in order to provide effective help and guidance, one staff person (paid or volunteer) should be present and available for every 10 computer stations (between 10 and 20 participants) in use. If the center is not located in a building that houses other active services (i.e. if there is no one who can be easily summoned in an emergency), it will be advisable to have two staff persons on duty at all times that the center is open to participants.

Once these factors have been taken into account, the next steps are quite simple.

1. Take the task list (a spreadsheet is useful) and opposite each task create four columns headed "Paid Staff", "Volunteer", "Steering Committee/Board", and "Participant".
2. Move through the task list indicating for each task the type of personnel to whom it can be assigned. NB: You may have checks in more than one column for a given task.
3. Sort the tasks into these four categories.
4. Take the list for each category and sort once again according to necessary skills. For example, the volunteer category may contain reception, clerical, and teaching tasks. Different skill sets are required in each, so you will need to re-sort this list according to skill set.
5. The resulting lists will define the required staff and also provide the basis for developing job descriptions for each position.

## Qualifications

### *Administrative tasks*

In addition to documented experience in the areas itemized in the task list, persons employed for administrative tasks should be articulate, comfortable with budgets and accounting procedures, and have a developmental attitude toward staff supervision. They should also view technology as essential to the execution of their tasks since they will, in a real sense, be serving as role models for CTC participants.

### *Community outreach & development*

The ideal candidate here is someone with the zeal of a community activist, experience in community development and fund-raising, with excellent communications skills (both verbal and written). Initiative and follow-through are key qualities.

### ***Educational activity***

Here you will be looking for someone with experience in basic technology applications, a learner rather than a teacher, a person who may reply to a question with a question rather than an answer. Imagination and creativity are essential ingredients. The person will need to have the capacity to both develop projects for participants and work with the fund-raiser to develop ideas for directions the CTC can take “educationally” which can be turned into proposals. The head teacher is unflappable, straightforward, a no-nonsense person who does not rely heavily on didacticism.

Many centers will start out with a minimum number of software packages. The head teacher will need familiarity with these, but also must possess the kind of creativity that can turn a word processor into a coloring book project for a low reading level participant.

At CTCNet we often use the “gardener” analogy. A gardener is not interested in producing replicas of him/herself. A gardener cannot impart knowledge to a plant. Instead, a gardener uses his/her knowledge of plant culture to feed, weed, prune. A gardener is interested in the health, growth, and fecundity of his/her charges. A gardener provides space in which each plant can achieve maximum success according to its own nature. Instructional staff with this sort of philosophy tend to be more successful than others.

For personnel at their centers, the Lansing Housing Authority uses the word “coach” for both paid and volunteer teaching staff. The concept is similar, with the context one of athletics rather than horticulture.

### ***Reception***

The qualifications for this position are quite obvious: friendliness, patience, human interest, unflappability, a sense of order and decorum. In most cases, the reception people will be the “front” for the center, the first encounter most participants will have. They will also manage the telephone and provide information about the center. If volunteers are recruited for this position, training in telephone response may be necessary since some residents have little experience with using a telephone. Role play is a natural for preparing a volunteer for this position.

### ***Facilities & equipment***

A number of the tasks in this category can be farmed out, either through steering/advisory committee members (e.g., computer maintenance, trash pickup,

janitorial services) or through the facilities management. What cannot be farmed out is the constant picking up and putting back of software, paper, disks, files, etc.

Regular inventory checks are likewise essential since otherwise it may be hard to tell if anything substantial is missing. A CTC without someone who takes these tasks seriously can quickly become not only a mess, but a prey to people who pick up whatever they can (e.g., mouse balls, disks, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, books, pens, etc.).

### *Clerical and support services*

Qualifications in this area are fairly standard and coincide with generally accepted qualifications for clerical positions. In CTCNet's experience, if a person is hired, or a volunteer recruited, for these tasks, an orientation and training period is essential. Perks that can be provided include scheduled time to improve technology skills, use the internet, etc. Experience with the clerical and support services within a CTC can also constitute a rung in the training ladder for participants in any job-training program housed at the center.

### *Summary*

Many of the qualifications described above are admittedly qualitative—difficult to specify as bulleted items in a job description. Yet it is these qualities of personnel that will be important for sustainability of the CTC.

## **Recruitment: Resources and Hiring Process**

The Steering Committee will probably want to recruit and hire the senior personnel. Assembling the rest of the crew can then be the responsibility of those hires.

## **What Staffing Resources are Available?**

### *Salaried*

As stated above, at least one person must be salaried. Although administration may seem like the “biggest” job, actual daily interaction with participants at the center is more probably the arena in which success or failure of the CTC will be determined. Participants as well as management will feel more comfortable knowing who is in charge (where the buck stops). They will also appreciate

seeing a familiar face, being greeted or having regular contact with the same person. In most CTCNet centers, the administrative and head “teacher” tasks are performed by a single individual.

If a sponsoring agency already employs a “Human Services Director” or equivalent, it is conceivable that that person could take on either the administration or the head “teacher” role, where the rest of the tasks are performed by volunteers or steering/advisory committee members.

### *Volunteer*

Many tasks can be handled by volunteers. Some tasks will require technology skills or expertise, but many will not. Community residents can be considered for a variety of duties including instructional supervision but also reception, clerical, outreach, escort services, evaluating software, housekeeping, etc.

In considering potential volunteers, the resources available through the center’s advisory board or steering committee should not be neglected. Appropriate tasks are those that do not require regular daily or weekly scheduling. Individual members or subcommittees can handle such areas as technology planning, acquisition and repair, community outreach and participant recruitment, grant writing and solicitation, public relations, etc.

Lastly, center participants themselves often make the best volunteers. Once the center is in operation, consider establishing a youth corps, a senior corps, or a mentoring corps from amongst the most avid center users.

### *Local sources of potential staff and volunteers*

**The immediate residential community:** Since the most important criterion for staff is that they know and understand the community and be able to relate well with their participants, and to communicate with them in their language of choice, it is natural to look first at the resident community for potential candidates.

One manager recently said to CTCNet, “I would never hire a resident, and I’m not interested in resident empowerment.” CTCNet would not welcome this person’s center into our affiliated body.

**Educational Institutions:** Colleges and universities (technology, education, library services departments; job placement bureaus and internship programs) are a rich source for staff. It’s important to bear in mind, however, that students are often transient.

Many high schools (public and private) have community service programs.

The local PTA may be the best source of staff/volunteers among parents in the community.

**Religious Institutions:** A number of national projects in this past decade have funded computer offerings through religious institutions. Should there be such in a targeted community, people who have led or participated may be candidates for staff or volunteer positions.

**Other Community Service Organizations:** The outreach/community mapping tasks should have identified a number of these organizations that use or teach people to use technology resources.

**Computer “User” Groups and Cyber-Cafes:** These will usually post job-offerings and volunteer opportunities on their electronic and actual bulletin boards.

**Local Government Agencies:** The Mayor’s Office for Volunteerism, the Human Services Department, the Senior Services Division—all these are worth exploring.

**Corporations and Small Businesses:** Again, representatives serving on the Center’s oversight (steering/planning) committee may provide liaison.

**Local and Regional Newspapers, Radio, and Cable TV Stations** will often offer free space to non-profits for job postings and calls for volunteers.

Lastly, one could consult local employment agencies, but generally that means paying a fee.

## Hiring Process

*Step 1: Develop job descriptions for each of the paid staff positions. Job descriptions should contain:*

- a brief description of the CTC and its mission or purpose
- position description, title, and supervising authority
- duties and responsibilities
- qualifications

- salaries and benefits
- application deadline
- request for references

N.B. If the position requires writing (reports, grant proposals, PR materials), it is advisable to request a writing sample from the applicant.

### ***Step 2: Institute the search***

The Steering Committee may want to constitute a search sub-committee. Additional members of this committee may be recruited from among neighborhood residents and from partnering neighborhood agencies or institutions. If the position requires a bilingual person, some member of the Search Committee should be fluent in that second language.

- All Steering Committee members will be expected to circulate the job description(s) to their own constituencies.
- Job descriptions should be placed in newspapers, posted on community electronic bulletin boards and to other CTCNet affiliates, and circulated to neighborhood institutions, producers of community newsletters, local businesses, and employment agencies. In this latter case, inquire in advance about fees for placement.
- A word-of-mouth network is important, particularly since it is highly desirable to be able to make the hire from the community itself.

### ***Step 3: Making the decision***

The Search Committee will:

- Cull potential candidates from resumes submitted and recommendations made
- Check references through personal telephone calls
- Schedule initial personal interviews with members of the Search Committee, and
- In the case of senior personnel, schedule an interview with the entire Steering Committee.

Because an extensive pool of persons experienced in management and teaching in CTCs is still a thing of the future, the Steering Committee should consider asking candidate finalists to meet with a group of participants, take on the role of instructor of the pilot program during an hour or two, and/or to prepare a formal written response to a potential issue arising at the CTC.

In the early days of the Playing to Win Harlem Center, asking potential teachers to “audition” by conducting a guest workshop paid repeated dividends. A young man who seemed shy and nerdy in interview blossomed when interacting with center participants. Had it not been for this encounter, he might not have been hired. Another candidate with strong teaching credentials found it difficult to function in such an informal hands-on environment and withdrew his application.

#### ***Step 4: Sealing the bargain.***

Certainly needed with paid staff, and recommended even for volunteers, is a letter specifying the hire (or commitment), including the responsibilities, the remuneration and benefits (if any) and indicating any trial period during which either party may sever the relationship without penalty (it is important to specify such a trial period, especially for volunteers).

## **Personnel Policies**

If the CTC is going to have employees, it must develop personnel policies. This is true whether there are one or ten employees. Personnel policies set out the legal responsibilities of the employer and the benefit packages available to employees. They also spell out grievance procedures and any performance review process. CTC policy with regard to promotion, pay increase, and severance is also normally included. While the entire content may not be applicable to volunteers, volunteers should receive a copy of the personnel policies and the relevant areas should be discussed with them.

#### ***Legal responsibilities***

If the CTC pays an employee, such action triggers certain obligations under state and federal laws. To ensure that it is meeting its obligations, the CTC should contact the local IRS and state employment tax offices to find out the CTC’s filing obligations. The Steering Committee should also contact the State department of labor or department of commerce/business to find out the CTC’s obligations concerning unemployment insurance, workmen’s compensation, disability, and other labor practices.

## ***Benefit packages***

The CTC must consider whether to offer benefits to its employees. Benefits can include health, dental and life insurance and vacation and personal leave. No matter what the benefit package arrangements are, a written policy should be prepared and distributed to the employees to whom it applies. The Steering Committee should be aware that benefit packages can cost the CTC an additional 15%-25% of employees' salary. These costs must be reflected in the CTC financial projections (see Chapters 8 and 9).

## ***Grievance procedures***

Although one hopes that the occasion never arises, it is a good idea to be prepared for grievances that may be lodged by participants against staff, or by volunteers against staff or participants, or by staff against volunteers, peers, or superiors.

Grievance procedures should set forth a formal series of steps that must be taken in the process of lodging and settling grievances. These steps must include:

- Documenting the grievance in writing.
- Submission of the documented grievance to the appropriate superior.
- Discussion of the grievance with the superior for the purpose of settling the grievance (this discussion should also be documented and signed by both parties).
- A system for submission of the grievance to the next higher authority in the event that initial discussion fails to settle the matter.
- Specification of the "last court of appeal"—the person or group whose decision on the matter will be final.

## ***Staff assessment***

An annual performance review is the most common type of staff assessment. However, it is not perceived as helpful by many people. Increasingly, human resource professionals prefer a style that features continual feedback to the employee in order to reinforce good performance and stop poor performance quickly. Under this "coaching" concept, the year begins with the employee and the supervisor or Steering Committee meeting to set goals for employee performance in the coming year. These goals are related to the overall goals of the CTC as well as to the specific assignment of the worker and his or her stage of professional growth. Goals must be agreed to by both the employee and supervisor.

As the year moves forward, the supervisor should frequently let the employee know how he or she is doing. Praise is important as well as constructive criticism. References to the mutually agreed upon goals should be a regular part of these conversations. Adjustments should be made in the performance standards and goals as the year goes by.

The supervisor should take on a greater role in the employee's achievement of his or her goals. If the employee's performance has not been satisfactory, the supervisor should help the employee get on track. If progress has been good, both can enjoy the success, and presumably the CTC's goals are being met as well. Quarterly or annual reviews should be routine meetings and few surprises should arise. If feedback is constant (even daily, in some cases), these more formal reviews are typically used for adjustment (up or down) of the goals and performance standards for the employee for the year. Proponents of this system believe it is a very effective means of staff assessment for an organization that wants continually to improve its performance.

### *Conditions for severance*

In the best of all worlds, personnel will be reliable, will relate well with participants, and will perform ably the tasks they have agreed to perform. It is nevertheless important to specify actions that will lead to a required probationary period or even immediate dismissal such as:

- Physical or verbal abuse of participants or fellow workers
- Theft or destruction of CTC property
- Introduction of inappropriate or illicit software
- Sexual harassment
- Drug use or dealing

## Orientation

A structured orientation program is important for any new staff. Such a program should include:

- A warm welcome
- Introduction to the mission and goals of the CTC
- Introduction to Steering Committee members, other agency staff or any CTC staff already on board

- An opportunity to become familiar with CTC resources - where things are kept, what software is available, what procedures are in place.

**One CTCNet affiliate devised a hands-on strategy:**

Stage a scavenger hunt. Provide each pair of participants with a blank map of the CTC space and a list of things that are to be located. Ask each pair to locate the items and label their maps accordingly.

This procedure had the virtue of being fun, acquainting the volunteers with CTC resources, and serving as a role model of the kind of hands-on learning experiences that CTC staff hoped the volunteers would provide for participants.

For volunteers, the orientation should provide an opportunity to meet with their specific supervisor to discuss their assignments, establish an individual schedule, and review and countersign the commitment letter.

## Staff Development

Because contentment of talented and able staff is vital, and because the CTC probably does not offer the highest salaries, staff development is an essential activity for the CTC. Staff development includes a) opportunities for further education, and b) increasing job satisfaction. Topics for further education should include enhancing knowledge and skills on computers, learning software packages, and discovering the newest developments in computer technology. Techniques to increase job satisfaction include giving employees and volunteers more responsibility, adding more activities, developing flexible hours, providing job sharing, and matching jobs with individuals' interests.

Volunteers work without pay, but not without rewards. The most important rule concerning volunteers—thank them frequently and appropriately. Means of rewarding volunteers for their services can include:

- an annual volunteer recognition dinner, picnic, or social event at which an award certificate or gift is given to each volunteer;
- personal time on the computers;
- Internet time for personal use;
- a mass transit pass for personal use;

- free tickets to sporting, cultural, or recreational events; and,
- paid expenses to CTCNet's annual conference and/or regional meetings.

Affiliation with CTCNet affords a number of opportunities for staff development. Through telecommunications linkages with other CTCs, staff can share problems and solicit suggestions; through regional meetings and the National Conference, affiliate staff can participate in and/or conduct workshops, plan collaborative projects, and exchange information with others in similar centers.

One of the primary staff development services CTCNet offers its affiliates is the Community Technology Leadership Institute. Launched in 1999, the Institute provides a focused three-day learning experience for center directors, education coordinators, multi-project coordinators, and related program administrators. Drawing on the experience of CTCNet's project leadership, key affiliate staff, and carefully selected outside resources, the Institute helps participants make explicit their critical program objectives, assess client needs, map community assets, appreciate alternative educational and program approaches, link organizational planning and decision making to their specified client needs and program objectives, identify appropriate community and professional collaborations, and develop achievable action plans for program and financial sustainability.

Participants for the Leadership Institute are selected through an application process, usually beginning at the start of the new year.

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## Documentation

- Task List and Staffing Plan
- Job Descriptions for all positions (paid and volunteer, full- and part-time)
- Personnel Policies: Benefits, Grievance Process, and Performance Review



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## **Exhibit 4-1:**

### ***Guide for Developing Volunteer Job Descriptions***

**Job Title**

This will be the volunteer's identification. Give this as much prestige as possible.

**Major objective**

A short concise statement, reflecting the ultimate goal of the service to be performed.

**Qualifications**

Include all things necessary for the effective performance of duties, listing requirements from physical to human qualities desired. Be careful not to over qualify the position, you could lose some excellent volunteers due to stringent educational requirements. Specifics such as a car, proper insurance, if needed, etc., should be noted.

**Responsibilities**

As specifically as possible, list each duty and responsibility of the job.

**Orientation/Training**

This includes the nature of, specific content needed in, and the approximate hours for orientation and training, identifying persons who will conduct the training.

**Time and Place**

This should include the exact duty hours, which days of the week and the place where the volunteer is to perform the services. **BE SPECIFIC.**

**Commitment**

The minimum number of months you need from the volunteer based on your investment in training and supervision becomes the minimum length of commitment for the volunteer. A maximum time commitment should also be specified.

**On the Job Supervision**

Name of the supervisor or the position of the supervisor. In most cases, this will be the staff person with direct responsibility for the service. Include schedule of supervisory sessions.

**Benefits**

List any available benefits to the volunteer, e.g., free parking, coffee, mileage reimbursement and insurance.

**Frustrations**

Those aspects of the job which can be frustrating, e.g., the record keeping.

**Satisfactions**

Those aspects of the job which can give the volunteer real satisfaction and learning.

