

1 chapter Timeline and Process

What is a Community Technology Center (CTC)?

A CTC is a community service, social action, and/or educational facility where computers and related communications technologies are available to people who otherwise might have little or no opportunity to use or learn to use these technologies. A CTC may be an independent agency dedicated to this mission; it may be a program within a larger multi-service agency; or it may be a program designed to enhance the overall mission of a service agency with a specialized mission.

Each CTC has its own unique qualities, yet all share a commitment to technology access and a belief that a CTC can be a means for participants to increase their self-sufficiency. A successful CTC offers opportunities to improve education levels, gain job-related skills, and build personal and community capacity. It can offer a place where participants gather together and link with the entire community. An important criterion for success will be the degree to which the CTC becomes an integral part of its community. Participants can and should take part in the planning process and have a real role in directing and sustaining center operations.

How is a CTC Created?

The start-up process for a CTC generally moves through the following steps:

1. Form a CTC Steering Committee to serve as the governing body for the CTC or as an advisory committee to the agency's existing governance structure.
2. Engage in a process of community mapping to identify interests and needs of prospective participants along with assets and strengths available through other community enterprises and community members themselves.
3. Form partnerships and develop commitments for assistance from members

of the community (e.g., space, volunteers, funding, equipment & furnishings, etc.).

4. Research and structure program offerings in response to identified needs and interests (e.g., adult education, afterschool sessions, job preparation, elder services, family and pre-school programs).
5. Initiate a pilot program through which to test the planned programming structure and to further refine conclusions relating to community interest and need.
6. Consider and plan for the operational needs of the CTC (e.g., space, hardware, software, personnel, and resulting financial requirements).
7. Develop a business plan mapping the CTC's operational and financial assumptions so interested parties and funders can buy into the effort.
8. Engage in whatever additional fund-raising, space and equipment acquisition, staff and volunteer recruitment is necessary to make the plan operational.

NB: Do not plan to start full operations until the Steering Committee is satisfied that the CTC has sufficient backing to stay in operation for at least 12 months.

How Long Will it Take to Create a CTC?

The time required to create a CTC depends upon many variables, such as staff, computers, participants, space, and available funds for operations. For example, a CTC can be established within a short time if a supervisor, hardware, and space is readily available. In general, however, it is likely to take at least a year to establish a CTC. This timeframe assumes that Steering Committee members have constraints upon their time, such as full-time jobs and families, which means that the time given to the CTC will be limited.

The following is a *suggested* timeline for the creation of a CTC, beginning with the decision to proceed:

Months 1-4

- Form the CTC Steering Committee (see below).
- Conduct the first meeting of the Steering Committee; establish subcommittees of the Steering Committee.

- Institute mapping of neighborhood institutions (see Chapter 2).
- Conduct the second meeting of the Steering Committee, including new members identified through community mapping.
- Gather in-depth information regarding intended constituency needs and assets (see Chapter 2).
- Formalize Steering Committee membership to reflect information obtained in community mapping and constituency needs and assets.
- Determine governance structure for the CTC and, if necessary, initiate process for obtaining non-profit status.
- Design a fund-raising plan (see Chapter 8).

Months 5-8

- Hold Steering Committee meetings once a month.
- Determine the programmatic focus of the CTC to reflect identified needs and interests of the community (see Chapter 3).
- Build partnerships with neighborhood institutions.
- Develop all elements of a business plan (see Chapter 9).
- Implement the fund-raising plan.
- Design a strategy for ongoing operations and initiate a pilot program.
- Find space for the CTC.

Months 9-12

- Hire a professional to run the CTC.
- Identify software programs for the program needs of the residents.
- Acquire computers and software.
- Rehab and move into space.
- Welcome the assistance of volunteers with initial orientation sessions.
- Open the CTC.

How Should a CTC Steering Committee Be Formed?

One of the most important tasks that the CTC will undertake is assembling the Steering Committee. Assembling the Steering Committee is important because the CTC organizer rarely has all the experience needed to establish a CTC. The CTC organizer can marshal the expertise needed by recruiting and selecting people who possess the necessary skills and experience to develop and grow a CTC.

Therefore, at a minimum, the Steering Committee should consist of the CTC organizer, representatives from the proposed CTC constituency, representatives of the local business community, representatives from the educational community, and one or more professionals. The number of members of the Steering Committee is a function of the CTC needs. As key neighborhood institutions, as defined in Chapter 2, are identified, their representatives may be added to the Steering Committee.

This section will discuss the roles and basic tasks of each Steering Committee member.

Prime mover organizer

This is the person whose idea it is to establish a CTC - the agency head or an employee, a community activist, a teacher, an owner/manager of property. The organizer pulls the pieces together and makes, or delegates, key decisions about how to make the CTC operational.

It may be that the initial prime mover becomes the Center Director, or, when a Center Director is hired, delegates the bulk of the operational decisions to the Director. In the latter case, the relationship between the Prime Mover and the Center Director becomes collegial, similar to that between a CEO and the Board Chairperson (see the Staffing section of Chapter 4).

Community representatives

The CTC is being designed to serve residents of the immediate and/or the surrounding community. The voices of these people must be heard on the Steering Committee from the beginning. Tenant organizations, neighborhood associations, local religious institutions, community service agencies, PTAs, etc. are good sources for community representatives.

Community representatives serve as the liaison with the intended CTC participants. They publicize the development of the CTC in and for the community, and their experience serves to inform the Steering Committee of the needs, interests, and assets present in the community.

Business community representative

Representatives from the local business community can bring special skills, expertise, and possibly other business support. For example, a local technology company representative may be able to offer knowledge about computer hardware and software; a corporate representative from a human resources company may offer expertise in staff development and training; and an employment services representative could help with job preparation and placement.

Professionals

The CTC will need a variety of professional advice and/or service at various stages of its development. For example, an accountant is needed to set up the accounting system. Tracking and reporting of income and expenses is important for several reasons. First, if federal funds are being used to start the CTC, the CTC may have to have an **independent accountant** certify that the costs of the project were what the CTC said they were. This certification will be difficult and costly without an accounting system in place that generates regular income and expense reports.

Second, the accounting system will assist the organization in keeping within its budget. Third, funders will want to see the CTC's track record. The records generated by the accounting system are an important piece of the track record. This accounting system should be computerized and the staff must receive training in its use.

The CTC should consider obtaining the services of **an attorney** to assist in the establishment of the CTC. The kinds of activities for which a lawyer may be needed include:

- establishing the CTC as a nonprofit corporation under state and federal law;
- entering into subcontracts or partnerships;
- reviewing leases and/or obtaining variances from the local planning body as necessary for use of the proposed space as a CTC; and
- reviewing any insurance policies.

A **marketing/public relations professional** can also provide a valuable service to the CTC in the creation of a marketing and community outreach plan, and as an advisor on the issue of developing a strategy for the long-term future of the CTC. These professionals have the following expertise: ability to write press

releases and place them in newspapers; experience writing grant proposals; and access to local media organizations such as television, radio and cable stations. Marketing/public relations professionals may include a public relations company executive, a public relations specialist from a local corporation, or a professor of public relations.

Representative of the educational community

Representatives from the educational community (local schools and their PTA's, community colleges, colleges and universities, libraries, museums, and adult education programs) will be valuable members of the Steering Committee. Educators not only will know what the school system offers but also may provide entry to the other systems as well. The educational community also may be a valuable source of volunteer instructors, professional development opportunities, and so forth.

Other members

After several months, the Steering committee may discover a need for adding new members. For example, people with knowledge of equipment acquisition, fundraising, and hiring may be valuable. In addition, as neighborhood institutions with resources that the CTC can tap into are identified by the Steering Committee (see Chapter 2), representatives of these potential partners should be added.

Examples of Steering Committee representation

- The Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts lists Bell Atlantic, Motorola, and Polaroid representatives as members of its Board.
- At the Somerville Community Computing Center, Wayne, a volunteer in the public access program, became a Board member, and drew on his experience working in a college placement office for a series of workshops for SCCC participants on how to do interviews and follow-up letters.
- Again at the SCCC, the Director of Technology for the Somerville Schools served on the Board and was able to barter acquisition of hardware and software along with computer maintenance through the school system for availability at the center of time for classes from schools that had no computer labs.

What Will the Governance Structure of a CTC Look Like?

One of the first issues the Steering Committee must address is that of governance. Committee members must agree upon a framework under which the CTC will operate and they must specify the nature of the decisions that are to be the responsibility of the different components of that framework. There are multiple options. The most likely include:

- **Governance by an existing non-profit agency.** If the CTC is to be an addition to offerings of an existing service agency, no separate governance structure may be needed. On the other hand, it is strongly recommended that the agency establish a sub-committee of its existing board or a separate advisory group, similar in membership to that recommended for the Steering Committee, to assist the Center director in handling issues peculiar to CTC operation. Such issues might include outreach and program promotion, hardware and software donations, technology-skilled volunteers, resource identification, and fund-raising opportunities.
- **Governance by the community.** Here, the Steering Committee develops organizational documents (such as articles of incorporation, bylaws, a mission statement) that are required for the establishment of a nonprofit entity that is tax-exempt according to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. This entity would then be governed by an elected board of directors (constituted similarly to the Steering Committee) whose primary responsibilities would be to make sure that the CTC:
 - is clear about its purpose;
 - has enough money; and,
 - does what it is supposed to do.

An alternative to launching a new non-profit corporation or similar entity is for the Steering Committee to seek a collaboration with an existing non-profit that is willing to serve as **fiscal agent**. Having a fiscal agent buys time for the Steering Committee to proceed with planning and operationalizing the CTC before becoming bogged down in the technicalities of setting up a formal governance structure of its own. The disadvantage is that the fiscal agent charges a fee to cover the expenses incurred, usually between 5% and 15% of the gross revenues earned by the CTC.

- **Governance by the property owner or manager.** If a property owner or manager is the primary catalyst for the creation of the CTC and/or providing a majority of the financing, he or she will make the decision as to

whether the CTC will be will be under the management control of the for-profit enterprise or independently run under the auspices of a non-profit organization, which might either be one that is established specifically for this purpose or, perhaps, an existing nonprofit that provides other services to residents. In making this decision, the owner/manager must recognize that for-profit entities seldom qualify for donations or grants that are tax-deductible for the donor. Property owners often find that governance by a non-profit organization helps ensure stronger ties to the community, increasing the program's likelihood of success.

Whether the Steering Committee of the CTC is constituted as a Board of Directors or as an Advisory Board, it should meet on a regular basis. It should consist of between 5 and 15 people to allow for orderly meetings and constructive work to be performed. Sub-committees should be constituted to allow inclusion of non-members. The Board/Committee's major responsibilities, both in the organization and implementation phases, are policy development, fiscal oversight, and fund-raising. Its major CTC contact is the Center Director.

Documentation

The process described in this chapter should result in the production of certain items that will be necessary in formulating a business plan (see Chapter 9) and assist in the day to day operation of the center:

- a list of Steering Committee members with their affiliations, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses;
- minutes of all Steering Committee meetings;
- a timeline for opening the CTC together with a preliminary list of tasks to be addressed and the designation of those responsible for follow through (this timeline will be added to and made more detailed as plans for the CTC progress); and
- a description of the proposed governance structure for the CTC, along with any documents required for non-profit status application (should that be the determined governance structure).

It is assumed (but nevertheless stated here) that technology available to the Steering Committee includes databases, spreadsheets, word processing, and telecommunications capability.