

Technology Necessary to Make Nonprofits More Efficient

The nonprofit sector plays a key role in providing services to low- and moderate- income communities and promoting community development. The use of information technology has the potential to help nonprofits fulfill their missions more effectively. However, many nonprofits lack the resources and support to make use of technology.

There has been a tendency among nonprofits to spend on programs first, rather than on technology, in part reflecting funders' traditional preferences, said Michael Beneke, director of communications for NPower, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization designed to help other nonprofits in the Puget Sound area use information technology to deliver their services more efficiently and effectively. However, foundations are beginning to see that technology is a necessity.

Mr. Beneke offers the following advice to nonprofits: first, assess the technology you currently have. Next, develop a technology plan that will take into account your mission and budget. Finally, incorporate the technology plan into a grant proposal to request the funding necessary to implement the plan. Because most nonprofits don't have in-house technology staffs, it may be necessary to hire a consulting firm to help develop all three steps as well as execute the plan.

NPower, which started in March 1999, offers services that include consultations on technology assessments and planning; hands-on assistance with building databases, launching Web sites, or wiring Local or Wide Area Networks; technology training classes; a volunteer matchmaking program that links nonprofits needing technology help with volunteers, and print and online libraries of technology resources.

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NPower recently announced a partnership with Microsoft that will enable it to develop NPower affiliates in other large cities that exhibit a need for the type of services that NPower provides. Microsoft has made a \$25 million commitment (cash and software) to seed the new programs, which will need to raise funds from local supporters as well. NPower affiliates will either be set up within existing nonprofits or operate as independent entities.

With strong support from NPower, a NYC-based group comprised of representatives from Andersen Consulting, Chase Capital Partners, the Chase Manhattan Bank, Flatiron Partners, and the Robin Hood Foundation have proposed the formation of NPowerNY. In addition to offering services patterned after those offered by NPower, NPowerNY would pilot a training program to produce a technology workforce focused on the needs of nonprofit organizations, and it would develop a localized version of TechSoup.org, a portal that provides information to nonprofits on the effective use of technology.

More information about NPower is available at www.npower.org

Please note:

The ORCA CRA Sunshine workshops that were originally scheduled for the fourth quarter of this year will instead be held in 2001. For more information, please contact John McAteer at 212-720-2789 or John.McAteer@ny.frb.org.

Bank Links

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Bank Links

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ORCA
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A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS OFFICER

In our society, economic success is increasingly dependent on the ability to obtain and disseminate information. Consequently, those without access to the latest technology and the ability to use it will be left behind. To raise awareness about this "digital divide" and to explore community and

technology and who doesn't, the digital divide also exists based on how people are able to use technology once they access it and whether they understand the information that the technology is giving them.

The divide between those who have Information Technology skills (IT) and those who do not has important labor market ramifications. The tremendous growth of the IT industry has created a huge demand for IT workers. It is estimated that by the year 2006, half of all jobs in the U.S. will be in the IT sector or will require IT skills. Those on the wrong side of the digital divide cannot take advantage of these job opportunities.

Finally, a critical issue in empowering low- and moderate-income communities is the digital divide between nonprofit organizations and private corporations. Nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in promoting community development, and initiatives are needed to support their ability to utilize technology to fulfill their missions.

Many banks have already taken initiatives to help bridge the digital divide by supporting programs such as refurbishing used computers for distribution to nonprofits, schools, and low-income families; training teachers to use technology in the classroom; and teaching computer skills to low-income individuals. Some banks are also using their resources to wire families to local community institutions.

However, as can be seen from the issues raised in this newsletter, a great deal more needs to be done. The digital divide is a complex, multifaceted issue, requiring innovative approaches. Beginning with this newsletter and continuing with our conference series, we hope to foster creative thinking and collaborations that can bring new resources to the development and implementation of solutions to this urgent problem.

Elizabeth Rodriguez Jackson
Community Affairs Officer

Overcoming Digital Divide Key to Community Development

economic development strategies to bridge the divide, the Office of Regional and Community Affairs (ORCA) is devoting this issue of BankLinks to the topic. In addition, during the coming months, ORCA will be sponsoring a conference series in the New York region that will promote further discussion.

The digital divide is, in part, a question of access to technology. Those with lower levels of education and income and those who reside in inner cities or isolated rural areas are less likely to have access to computers and the Internet. But beyond the issue of who has access to tech-

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Libraries as Points of Access to Technology

Day after day for nearly a year, James Vaz visited the Brownsville Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. Each day, his routine was the same. He worked on his resume, searched the Internet job postings, e-mailed his resume to prospective employers, and set up interviews online.

The branch, which is located in the midst of housing projects, served as Mr. Vaz's personal office. The hard work eventually paid off, and one day Mr. Vaz, who has completed two years of college, got the computer-related job he had been seeking.

"I don't know how he would have done this job search without us being here," said Linda Cohen, branch librarian. "He needed the technology. How do you look for a job without the Internet, e-mail, word processing, and the ability to print your resume? We have everything here."

Like Mr. Vaz, the vast majority of adults who come to the Brownsville Branch use the four computers connected to the Internet, Ms. Cohen said. These individuals take advantage of the jobs posted on the Internet by the City University of New York, New York State Department of Labor, and privately run sites like Monster.com and HotJobs.com. They also find the test schedules for City jobs, and can download applications at the branch.

Mr. Vaz is an example of how Brooklyn residents have been accessing the information superhighway through the Brooklyn Public Library's 60 sites in the last two years. In 1998 it was estimated that less than 10 percent of the 2.5 million people living in Brooklyn had computers and less than half of them had Internet access, making the Library the only place where many people could use the latest technology.

But the access didn't come easily. The Library had to fight to wire the neighborhoods in which it has a presence. To accomplish its mission, the Library negotiated with Bell Atlantic, now called Verizon, to build the infrastructure of high-speed lines to connect the Library's branches, many of which were located in low-income areas outside the phone company's original business plan. The Library and Bell Atlantic together invested \$12 million in the infrastructure improvements.

The sites in the Library's network, which also includes several Brooklyn cultural institutions and some schools, are now connected to each other by dedicated T-1 lines that feed into multiple T-3 lines that feed into the data center operated and maintained by Brooklyn Public Library's central branch. The use of these high-powered, fiber-optic communications cables makes data access easier and faster.

"I'm a professional librarian by training, and I believe very strongly that it's important for libraries to embrace the information technology revolution," said Martín Gómez, executive director of Brooklyn Public Library, explaining why the Library implemented its technology initiative.

"As more and more information becomes digitized, it seems the most logical thing for this library to do and to provide public access to those who don't have it at home," Mr. Gómez said. "The basic need is there to make information available to those who wouldn't otherwise have access to it."

Funded by grants from Microsoft and local government, the new communications infrastructure required Brooklyn Public Library to run millions of feet of cable into its branches. Most branches, some built around 1900, had few electrical outlets and still used rotary-dial phones, so entire electrical and phone systems had to be installed.

On the branch level, the Library has created Technology Resource Centers in all of its 60 sites and installed more than 800 computers. Each workstation has access to the Internet, the Online Public Access Catalog, Microsoft Office Suite, and multimedia software (e.g. CD-ROM encyclopedia programs with video and sound).

One of the byproducts of the introduction of computers in the libraries is that teenagers have returned in great numbers to use the technology, Mr. Gómez said. Another change brought about by the new environment is that some patrons never check out books, but only use the Internet: checking their e-mail, reading the latest news, searching for a job, or conducting research for homework.

"It can be life-changing for many of the people who use it," Mr. Gómez said of the computer and Internet access.

To assist the staff in adjusting to the new technology, the Library offered a training program and an aggressive "train-the-trainer" program, so that those who were comfortable with the new technology could help those who weren't. E-mail addresses were assigned to every employee, from senior management to the custodial staff, and e-mail etiquette training was introduced so that the system would be used efficiently and effectively. Mr. Gómez suggested that organizations undergoing similar technology changes "constantly pay attention to how they are adapting and offer a training program that can be adjusted and fine-tuned for various staff members."

In the next phase of its technology initiative, the Library plans to create the Brooklyn Knowledge Network, which will give additional Brooklyn organizations, including community centers and schools, high-speed Internet access through the Library's network at reduced fees. The project will be funded in part by a \$6 million grant from New York State's Advanced Telecommunications Project.

More information about Brooklyn Public Library is available at www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org.

COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY CENTERS PROVIDE ACCESS

Community Technology Centers (CTCs) have played a key role in helping bridge the digital divide. CTCs are neighborhood centers that provide free access to computers and the Internet, as well as programs that help people learn how to use the technology.

Located in schools, libraries, community centers, community colleges, housing facilities, churches, museums, job training centers, shelters, stand alone technology sites, and other community settings, the CTCs serve as a primary means of bringing technology to residents of underserved communities. The training programs provided by CTCs vary widely, ranging from turning on a computer to designing a Web page to online job searching.

CTCNet (www.ctcnet.org), a national network of CTCs, boasts approximately 400 affiliates. However, many more CTCs exist, and the numbers are growing. The U.S. Department of Education administers the Community Technology Centers Program, which awards grants for the establishment or expansion of CTCs that "provide access to computers and technology for individuals in economically distressed urban and rural communities" (see <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/CTC/index.html>).

DIGITAL DIVIDE AT A GLANCE

- Urban households earning \$75,000 or more a year are 20 times more likely to have Internet access than rural households at the lowest income levels, and more than nine times as likely to have a computer at home;
- Only 6.6 percent of the people with an elementary school education or less use the Internet;
- In schools, only one-third of U.S. educators feel they have the skills to integrate technology into their teaching;
- 74 percent of high-income classrooms have Internet access, whereas only 39 percent of low-income classrooms have Internet access ;
- Today, high-tech workers earn 78 percent more than the overall working population average;
- By the year 2006, 50 percent of all jobs will be in the IT sector or will require IT skills.

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education



Content on the Internet: Revolutionary for the Haves, Inaccessible for the Have Nots

For many Americans the Internet is a revolutionary tool that makes available a broad range of resources. But what if those using it have limited literacy, can't read English, or are looking for job, housing, and child care resources specific to their communities?

The Children's Partnership, a research and policy center with offices in Los Angeles and Washington, DC, conducted a study that asked these questions. They found that low-income communities aren't taking full advantage of the information superhighway because the content on the Internet doesn't seem relevant to them and doesn't address their needs.

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"Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans," published by The Children's Partnership in March 2000, discovered four content-related barriers to the Internet—lack of local information, literacy barriers, language barriers, and lack of cultural diversity.

Researchers for the report held focus groups with a total of 107 low-income technology users on the east and west coasts representing a diverse mix of age, gender, and ethnicity. The researchers also conducted interviews with directors of community technology programs and other individuals with expertise in the provision of online access and information.

The researchers found that adults from underserved communities want to receive the following information on the Internet, but that such resources are not often readily available:

Practical information focusing on their local community such as:

- Local job listings including jobs requiring entry-level skills
- Local housing listings
- Community information

Information at a basic literacy level such as:

- Preparation for securing a high school equivalency degree
- Online resources as opposed to print materials
- Online learning materials with multimedia components

Content for non-English speakers such as:

- Online translation tools
- Online instructional materials
- Information in native languages

Cultural information such as:

- Cultural exploration and development
- Ethnic and local cultural interests
- Health information and other vital information geared to particular racial and ethnic groups

The Children's Partnership is a national policy and strategy center that undertakes research, analysis, and advocacy to place the needs of America's nearly 70 million children and youth, particularly the underserved, at the forefront of emerging policy debates. For a full copy of the report, see www.childrenspartnership.org.

HarlemLive: Harlem's Online Publication by Teens

A little more than a year ago, 17-year-old Melvin Johnson was a high school drop out who spent his free time on the street. That was before he got his GED and began working for HarlemLive, a non-profit Internet publication based in East Harlem and staffed by approximately 50 New York City teenagers.

Cited by The Children's Partnership as an example of an innovative cultural site that addresses the needs of underserved users, HarlemLive showcases talent and incorporates emerging technology to report on the local community. The Web site has been "recognized nationally for its contributions to the online world of youth of color, receiving praise from international as well as national leaders," according to The Children's Partnership report, "Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans."

In addition to providing relevant content, HarlemLive provides skills development. Through his experience at HarlemLive, Mr. Johnson discovered he was a talented journalist, Web designer, and public speaker. He now has a paying job as a Web designer.

Mr. Johnson first came to HarlemLive to learn basic HTML skills, but after the program's staff members recognized his talents, they identified an advanced technology class for him to take last spring, said Richard Calton, founding director and publisher of HarlemLive.

Mr. Calton said Mr. Johnson is just one example of how the HarlemLive program exposes young people to career paths open to them and gives them hope for a better life. He readily gives many more examples of talented students in his program who began flourishing after working at HarlemLive.

"I feel children need many avenues to express their talents and ideas," Mr. Calton said "All of us have something to offer, we just need to be given the direction and encouragement that will allow us to grow. I hope HarlemLive becomes a means for the youth to explore their interests and demonstrate their talents to a worldwide audience."

Mr. Calton, who spent 10 years as a New York City teacher working with students to produce newspapers, plays, books, and more, started HarlemLive in 1996. The young people in the program range in age from 13 to 19 and develop skills as journalists by covering events, issues, and people in the Harlem community, and as Web designers by putting the Web site together.

Recently, HarlemLive featured by-lined articles about a type of poetry called "Freestyling," a Book Fair in Harlem, and first-person accounts of trips to St. Lucia to renovate a church and to Egypt, all illustrated with color photos.

"The way we do things makes the kids feel empowered and that their work is appreciated," Mr. Calton said. "They feel really good about themselves. They feel that they're stars. This goes out to a worldwide audience and they get recognition for it."

Before they are accepted into the program, students are required to fill out an application, are interviewed by the student staff, and undergo a month-long trial period. The key to the selection process is the student must be motivated and be willing to contribute to the final product.

To put the Web site together, the HarlemLive student staff uses the facilities of Playing2Win, a community technology center in East Harlem, including a computer lab that is funded by Columbia University's Institute of Learning Technologies, which hosts the site.

For more information, see the site at www.HarlemLive.org.

WEB SITES MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE UNDERSERVED

In "Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans," the Children's Partnership identified the following Web sites as good examples of how the Internet can be used to help with everyday needs such as child care, education, jobs, and transportation:

Community Resources

General Community Information

<http://www.nhlink.net/employe/index.htm>

Local Job Information

<http://www.eastbayworks.org>

Web Sites for Limited-Literacy Users

Voter Information

<http://www.otan.dni.us/cdtp/vip/welcome.html>

Content for Early Readers

<http://www.pbs.org/literacy/>

Multilingual Content

Health Information in Spanish

<http://noah.cuny.edu/>

Vital Information for Immigrants

<http://www.immigration-usa.com/spanish.html>

Cultural Content

Harlem Live

<http://www.harlemlive.org/>

La Plaza Telecommunity

<http://www.laplaza.org/>

San Francisco High-Tech Training Program Results in High Paying Jobs

MediaLink, a training program for Web developers created in 1997 by the Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC), has trained nearly 300 low-income San Francisco Bay area residents, placing graduates in jobs that have resulted in dramatic increases in income.

The average annual salary of MediaLink participants at the time of their acceptance to the program is \$12,000; those who graduate earn an average of \$37,500 per year. Ninety-seven percent of those who enter the program complete it.

"MediaLink currently averages about 90 percent placement," said Kris Palmer, associate director of BAVC. "We see high demand for our graduates and we have very strong relationships with employers."

Graduates of the program are placed in jobs in dot-com businesses, as well as corporations, banks, brokerage houses, and academic institutions, Ms. Palmer said, because of the high demand for people to work on their Web sites.

BAVC, a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, offers professional training programs to which local employers send their employees. The MediaLink training program targets low-income San Francisco Bay Area residents who are underrepresented in the new media industry—women, people of color, and second-career workers.

Ms. Palmer finds that the personal histories of MediaLink graduates are irrelevant to the employers and that graduates of the program are attractive to businesses because of the skills they offer. "Employers don't even know they're from low-income backgrounds," she said.

MediaLink's training program teaches Internet-related computer skills, as well as soft skills such as how to interview for a job and what the work culture is like. The basic curriculum consists of 1) Computer Training; 2) Job Readiness and Search Skills; 3) Working with a Client; and 4) Building a Professional Web site. The technical skills include training in HTML, JavaScript, Web-based graphics, animation, and project development. The job readiness skills include resume development, building a personal Web site to serve as a portfolio, and interviewing techniques. During the 480-hour training, students build a Web site for an existing company or organization.

Students meet for 30 hours a week over the course of 16 weeks, not including homework assignments and lab work. In addition, they meet with a job developer several times during the course of training and develop a job search strategy. The job developer also provides counseling and identifies additional training opportunities after the graduate is placed in a job.

While MediaLink is designed for underserved adults who are among the working poor, it isn't a welfare-to-work program. Before entering the program, students must have some computer skills, which they can learn at courses offered at community-based centers. To be accepted to the MediaLink program, prospective students must undergo a competitive assessment process that includes a written application, computer basics test, and interview.

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Ms. Palmer said that as a nonprofit it's a challenge to stay on top of the industry and afford to buy the latest technology. However, she believes it is essential to make the investment because students must learn on the most sophisticated equipment in order to get placed in high paying jobs.

Another challenge is recruiting teachers to train students because they are paid a nonprofit rate rather than the industry standard for trainers. The key is to find people who love to teach or to train technical people to teach the classes and address the special needs that low-income individuals might have.

Ms. Palmer offered the following advice to nonprofits interested in developing high-tech training programs. First, the training program should have strong connections to local businesses to ensure that students are being trained using the latest tools—hardware and software—because technology becomes obsolete so



quickly. Second, the training program should maintain relationships with community-based programs that offer basic computer skills and recruit students from those programs who want advanced skills.

BAVC was founded in 1976 to serve the nonprofit sector with low-cost technical assistance, equipment access, and training on the newest communications technologies. More information is available at www.bavc.org.

EXAMPLES OF MEDIALINK JOB PLACEMENTS

AGE	ETHNICITY	INCOME AT INTAKE	NEW POSITION	NEW ANNUAL SALARY
46	Caucasian	\$15,758	Sr. Quality Assurance Engineer	\$72,000
37	Hispanic	\$12,000	Technical Consultant	\$50,000
29	Caucasian	\$23,500	Interaction Designer	\$67,000
37	African-American	\$10,212	Tech-I	\$32,500
44	Hispanic	\$34,000	Web Graphic Artist	\$76,800
37	African-American	\$8,000	Web Site Editor	\$54,000
27	African-American	Unemployed	Computer Lab Assistant	\$23,400
37	Hispanic	\$7,684/Disability	Software Instructor	\$12/ hr