SECTION 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

The objective of this U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) grant evaluation study was to examine project accomplishments, effectiveness, and lessons learned from selected TOP grants funded in 1996 and 1997 that were no longer receiving funds as of June 2000. A total of 48 TOP projects were eligible for participation in the study. Contacts were identified for all 48 grant projects and a comprehensive survey was sent to each by e-mail or fax. Forty-two (42) surveys were returned achieving an 89.3% response rate. The survey responses were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify key findings related to project outcomes, implementation, sustainability, technology, impact, evaluation, community involvement, and project dissemination. Eight key findings, supported by statistics, are documented in this report. The key findings are summarized in Table 1.0-1.

Table 1.0-1: Results of Key Findings and Statistics of Grantee Surveys

KEY FINDING	KEY FINDING STATISTICS
Outcomes: TOP grant projects improved services provided to disadvantaged and underserved populations, provided learning and training opportunities, and removed technological barriers. On average, almost all respondents indicated achieving outcomes at or above expected levels.	• 93% of respondents reported serving disadvantaged and/or underserved populations. • An average of 80-90% of the respondents reported meeting or exceeding each outcome. • 86% of respondents reported addressing technological barriers.
Implementation: TOP grantees proposed and implemented a wide variety of planning, access, technology, and training activities to achieve their objectives. Most projects were noted as generating spin-off activities, which are additional services not proposed in the original TOP proposal. The most common obstacles or impediments experienced were the underestimation of planning time, inadequate or under-qualified staffing, and lack of commitment and follow-through.	• On average, 80% of the responding TOP grantee organizations implemented their projects at a level that met or exceeded what was proposed. • 62% of respondents indicated the existence of spin-off activities that resulted in a total of $35.5M in additional funding across all projects. • 74% of respondents underestimated the amount of effort/time required; 57% noted inadequate or under-qualified staffing; and 50% indicated a lack of commitment and follow-through on the part of partners and/or community stakeholders.
Sustainability: Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents reported sustainability through 2000, and remain in operation. Factors cited for project growth and expansion included additional funding, private sector support, as well as staff and partner commitment and collaboration. Reasons cited for lack of project sustainability include personnel changes and lack of funding.	• 88% of the responding TOP projects remained in operation at the time of the survey. • One-third have expanded services since the grant period ended. • Five of the forty-two projects have ceased service.
Impact: TOP grant funding served as a primary enabler of project implementation, resulting in the projects' ability to increase their range of services and expand the number of people served, while accelerating project implementation.	• 67% of the responding grantees estimated that projects would never have been implemented without TOP funds. • Of the 33% respondents that felt their project would have been implemented without TOP funds, nearly all noted that the number of people reached by the project would have decreased, that the project would have been delayed, and that the range of services offered would have decreased.

Table 1.0-1: Results of Key Findings and Statistics of Grantee Surveys Continued

Community Involvement: TOP grant projects surveyed partnered with an average of 18 other organizations to achieve project goals.	• 98% of the responding grantee organizations partnered with other organizations, of which 62% developed new partnership relationships. • 64% of the responding grantee organizations indicated partnering with educational institutions. • 64% of the responding grantee organizations also indicated partnering with government agencies.
Technology: TOP grant funding enhanced various types of telecommunications technology and services offered to grantee project end users.	• 83% of the responding grantee organizations reported that their projects used digital services. • 77% of respondents noted that planned technology resource needs were met. • 69% of respondents helped end users obtain access to the Internet. • 64% of respondents indicated that their projects made personal computers available to end users.
Evaluation: The TOP grant projects surveyed used a variety of methods to measure end-user satisfaction levels, evaluate effectiveness of resources and services offered, and determine overall project benefits.	• 90% of the project data evaluated is related to end-user satisfaction and 81% to project benefits for end users. • 79% of respondents indicated that they had completed an evaluation report. • Participant observations (79%) and surveys (76%) were the most frequently cited methods of evaluation utilized for data collection.
Project Dissemination: Grantees strongly agreed that their projects would serve as replicable models to other organizations, and that innovations introduced by their projects could be adopted by other organizations.	• 96% of respondents agreed that their project innovation was advantageous, and 93% of project grantees indicated agreement that these advantages were easily documented, demonstrated, and communicated to others. • 95% of the responding grantee organizations indicated that their projects might serve as replicable models. • On average, thousands of organizations were receiving information on each project through Internet web sites and thousands more through marketing efforts and advertising.

The survey results indicated that TOP grant projects were highly effective in meeting their project goals as a direct result of TOP grant funding. To date, TOP has awarded 456 grants, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, totaling $149.7 million and leveraging $221 million in local matching funds. It was evident that the projects implemented with TOP grant funds served to improve the quality of, and the public's access to, education, health care, public safety, and other community-based services. In addition, project grantees shared lessons learned and valuable information regarding their projects with other organizations. The extensive partnering by grantee organizations led to the implementation of similar projects or project-related ideas by other organizations, further extending the effects of TOP grant funding.