

**Developing Sustainable Resource Streams in
Community Technology Centers Through Partnerships:
Best Practices for Building Partnerships -
Interviews with Center Directors**

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**The Role of Local Institutions in the Development of Internet
Infrastructure in Distressed Urban Neighborhoods**

James R. Bohland
Principal Investigator
School of Public and International Affairs
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, VA

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Zoraya Lee-Hamlin
Director of Economic Self-Sufficiency and
Technology Initiatives

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Dr. Francine Jefferson, Evaluation Specialist, Technology Opportunities Program

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Executive Summary

Community Technology Centers (CTCs) are designed to increase access to advanced information technologies by populations that would otherwise find them inaccessible. Despite their contributions to helping communities develop better access to new technologies, some Centers have not survived financially and others exist always on the margins of solvency. This research focuses on the issue of sustainability of Community Technology Centers located in disadvantaged communities in various settings—urban, suburban, or rural. This report is part of a larger research program funded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to address the question frequently voiced by many Center directors – “What do I do when the money from the original grant runs out?” The overall goal of the research project is to provide useful information to CTCs to help them achieve greater sustainability. Specifically, the research programs examine how Centers use community partnerships and collaborative networks to achieve resources and, thus, to achieve some greater degree of sustainability.

In the second portion of the research program, twenty-three Directors from Community Technology Centers were interviewed to ascertain how they approach partnership building. The purpose was to determine some “best practices” used by Directors to achieve sustainability through collaboration. The twenty-three Directors interviewed were selected from responses collected in a national survey of Community Technology Centers conducted in the first phase of the research.

The interviews reveal that five resource streams are pursued to varying degrees by Community Technology Centers to maintain financial solvency. They are:

- resources from partnerships and collaborations,
- resources allocated from a parent organization,
- contractual arrangement,
- statutory funding, and
- gifts and grants.

Although all five play roles in achieving financial solvency, Directors nearly universally emphasize the importance of partnerships in achieving sustainability. As to why partnerships are important, one Director summarized it simply - “[For] survival, we absolutely need partnerships.” Because of the importance of partnering, Directors approach the process both strategically and tactically. The eight strategic approaches evident from the interviews are:

- networking,
- building organizational capacity,
- promoting visibility,
- service brokering,
- diversifying services,
- being entrepreneurial,
- lobbying, and
- trust building.

As expressed by the majority of Directors, networking and organizational capacity building are the two most important strategic approaches. Every Center acknowledges the importance of “networking” as a strategy. Some develop formal networking approaches, while others are more informal in their tactics. All, however, emphasize that Centers must be connected to their communities and must develop a range of tactics for achieving the networking strategy.

The need to create organizational structures and processes that facilitate partnering and securing funds is also almost universally advocated. Many Centers, for example, use their Boards of Directors or Advisors extensively in networking and partnering. Additionally, Directors find it important to have a clear mission and strategic plan for their Centers to help identify potential partners that can help achieve their goals.

One comes away from analyzing the collective voices of Center Directors with a very positive sense about their practical understanding of the relationship between collaboration and sustainability. They understand what is required and have many innovative approaches to expanding their funding bases.

Introduction to the Research Program

Community Technology Centers¹ (CTCs) are effective in giving populations greater access to the advanced information technologies they would otherwise find inaccessible.² The growth and widespread geographic dispersion of the Centers bear witness to their invaluable contributions in many communities across the country. Despite their effectiveness and contributions to helping communities develop access to new technologies, some Centers have not survived financially and others seem to exist always on the margins of solvency. Center directors worry about how to exist on budgets that are not commensurate with the importance of the contributions of the Centers and how to find stable sources of funding.

This research focuses on the issue of sustainability of Community Technology Centers located in disadvantaged communities in various settings – urban, suburban, or rural. Specifically, the research addresses the question frequently voiced by many Center directors – “What do I do when the money from the original grant runs out?” Many Centers are funded initially by grants from governments, nonprofits, or private companies, but most of these grants are “start-up” funds designed to encourage new worthwhile initiatives. Unfortunately, as with most community-based organizations, CTCs discover it is much easier to fund new initiatives than to find resources to maintain core services.

¹ For purposes of this research Community Technology Centers are organizations that provide computer services to individuals free or at minimal charge. These services typically include Internet access, basic computer literacy assistance, advanced applications in computer technology, or additional related technology services.

² Chow, C., Ellis, J., Mark, J. and Wise, B. Impact of CTCNet Affiliates: Findings from a National Survey of Users of Community Technology Center. Newton: MA: Education Development Center, Inc. 1998. Mark, J. Cornebise, J. and Wahl, E. Community Technology Centers: Impact on Individual Participants and Their Communities. Newtown MA: Education Development Center, Inc. 1997.

Given the volatile nature of public funding and philanthropic giving, to survive financially community-based organizations must successfully tap into the resources present in their own community. The community development literature emphasizes that very point.³ To remain viable, local grass-root organizations must learn to mine the resources present in their own local communities. Similarly, the literature on “sustainable communities” emphasizes reliance on local resources and collaborative efforts among local groups to achieve desired ends.⁴ At a broader theoretical level, Putnam’s concept of “social capital” stresses the importance of local relationships, reciprocity among local groups, and trust building as critical ingredients in achieving livable communities in this era of reduced public investment in communities.⁵

Three common themes that are relevant to the questions posed in this research cut across these literatures:

1. To be a sustainable, effective community organization requires building upon the capacities of the local community.
2. Effective use of local resources requires formation and maintenance of partnerships and collaborations, be they formal or informal, among community organizations.
3. Although local collaborations are essential, external ties (partnership beyond the local community) must also be established to ensure a diverse mix of funding sources (portfolio of assets). “The strength of weak ties” is a concept

³ Minkler, M. (ed.). Community Organizing and Community Building for Health. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999. McKnight, J. and Kretzmann, J. Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets. Evanston, ILL: The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University, 1993.

⁴ See for example an early expression of this in Hancock, T. and Duhl L. Healthy Cities: Promoting Health in the Urban Context. Copenhagen: WHO Europe, 1986. Ashton, J (ed.). Healthy Cities. Buckingham: England, Open University Press, 1992. In the environmental literature an example is Environmental Protection Agency. Community Based Environmental Protection: A Resource Book for Protecting Ecosystems and Communities. (EPA 230-B-96-003). Washington, D.C., 1997.

⁵ The literature on social capital is sizable and growing. Suggested for review are: Putnam, R. Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Putnam, R. Bowling Alone. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. Fukuyama, F. Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity. London: Penguin Books, 1995

particularly critical in communities whose local capacities may be substantial but not fungible.⁶

Goals of the Research Program

The overall goal of the research project is to provide useful information to CTCs to help them achieve greater sustainability. To achieve this overall goal, three specific tasks or objectives are set forth below.

First, to understand the current role of partnerships in Centers, a survey of a sample of existing CTCs is undertaken. The survey provides data that can benchmark the size and composition of CTCs' networks of partners. The survey also enables us to profile Centers that are doing well in partnership building against those who are not doing quite as well.

The second objective is to understand the strategies and tactics used by Centers to establish successful partnerships. Personal interviews with CTC directors or other personnel are the source of information for this task. Centers' personnel to be interviewed are selected using information obtained from the survey mentioned above.

The final objective is to create instructional materials that can be used by CTC personnel to help them learn strategies and tactics for developing effective partnerships. Materials for the instructional aids are drawn from empirical data collected in the study and from the existing literature on community capacity building.

⁶ Granovetter, Mark S. and Swedberg, Richard. The Sociology of Economic Life. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001.

Report II

Developing Partnerships for Sustaining CTCs

Introduction

“If you are receiving a grant to establish a new CTC, then how are you going to sustain it once the funding runs out? You had better know up front or have some direction. Otherwise, you go through four years of intense struggle, which is what we have just gone through.”

Comments from CTC Director, Fall, 2001.

These comments from a Director of what many would perceive as a successful CTC articulate the frustrations of many CTC administrators. As the following accounts will clearly demonstrate, no silver bullets or airtight solutions exist to ensure sustainable funding, even for Centers that are viable, have high demand programs, and are well managed. CTCs that have established significant funding streams and partnerships must continue to work hard to sustain those sources or to find new ones, because economic downturns or changes in federal or state policies make for volatile funding environments. The cardinal rule for CTCs seems to be – Today’s funding stream is tomorrow’s dry streambed.

Methodology

The first phase of the study - a national survey of CTC Directors to ascertain basic characteristics, services, funding, and partnership information - is summarized in the first report of the study.⁷ A set of interviews from twenty-three Center Directors, conducted between May 2001 and September 2001, is the basis for detailed information about

⁷ Bohland, J. Developing Sustainable Resource Streams in Community Technology Centers Through Partnerships: Results of a National Survey. Washington, DC: National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2002.

strategies and tactics used for partnering. The structured interviews provide a basis for ascertaining what Centers are doing to ensure sustainability, and for placing their best practices into a specific local context.

Selection of CTCs for Interviews

Center Directors participated in structured interviews over the summer, early fall of 2001, and winter of 2002. Twenty-three Center Directors formed the data sources for the interviews. All twenty-three CTC Directors were drawn from the mail survey completed in Phase I of this study. The selection of Centers for inclusion in the interview pool was based on the following process. First, in the mail survey, respondents responded whether they were willing to engage in a more detailed interview. The 71 percent of those responding positively were stratified on three dimensions.

- number of partners enumerated in their survey response,
- organizational type – independent or affiliated with parent organization, and
- rural or urban location.

Based on these dimensions, a 2 x 2 x 2 matrix was constructed and two Centers within each cell were targeted for interviews.⁸ Since the study was designed originally to give particular attention to CTCs operated by the National Urban League, the remaining seven interviews were set aside for interviews with representatives from those Centers. A result of this process is that affiliated Centers in urban areas that serve African Americans are somewhat over-represented. Three Center Directors originally targeted for interviews were not included; they declined because of scheduling problems

Time, cost, and geography prohibited interviewing Directors in more than 23 Centers, but even with this limitation geographic coverage was valid (see Appendix II for

⁸ The number of partners was divided into those with five or fewer and those with more than five.

a list of Centers). Centers from every major region of the country, except for the states in the Rocky Mountain region, were represented. In addition, Centers with heavy representation of African Americans, and those serving primarily Hispanics and Native Americans, were included in the sample.

The interview instrument was pilot tested prior to use in the field (see Appendix I for a copy of the instrument). Only two individuals conducted the interviews, thus reducing interviewing bias. A day of training was held to review the instrument and to agree upon strategies for recording information from the interview, for following protocols throughout the process, and for achieving accord on the use and definition of the instrument's key concepts.

Interviews were conducted in person where possible and by phone in some instances to reduce travel costs. Some of the National Urban League interviews were off-site at the CTCNet conference in San Diego. Although mixing the modes of interviewing can create some biases, no evidence of that was apparent from comparing the length or content of the interviews. Care was taken with phone interviews to establish specific times for the interviews and to designate a rather large window of time to conduct them.

Respondents

In most cases, the Director of the CTC was interviewed except in some larger organizations where the Director of the computer lab was the respondent. In three cases, the Director and selected staff were part of a team that was interviewed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the interviewers. Written transcripts of the interviews were used by the principal investigator to identify common themes and to assess what the CTC Directors believed worked best for them in establishing partnerships that would help

to achieve sustainability. From the transcripts, commonalities were identified by grouping responses around consistent themes. Where appropriate, the words of the Directors were used verbatim. In other instances, a synthesis of responses was used to emphasize the analytical points.

Although most of the information collected in the interviews was non-controversial and positive in tone, in some cases the Directors provided frank assessments of the role of local governments, some nonprofits, and private firms. To ensure openness in the interviews, respondents were assured that no comments would be attributable to specific individuals or Centers. Without this assurance, it was feared that some individuals would see the interviews as an evaluation or performance assessment rather than a conversation about their success and failures. Also, it would be unfair to attribute comments when they may compromise the ability of a Center to work with another organization or even other units within the Center.

Fund Raising, Collaborating, and Partnering

The conversations with Directors highlight an important distinction between three related concepts – fund raising, collaborating, and partnering. Whereas there is a tendency to view the three as nearly overlapping circles, Directors make statements indicating that they see them as related, but distinctive, concepts that require different strategies or tactics. This distinction became evident in interviews when Directors would posit that – “We secure funds from ... sources;” “We have ... partners;” and “We collaborate with ... organizations and groups.” Directors would then generate three separate lists of organizations or agencies. It appears from their commentaries that Directors see the three as important but separate pathways to sustainability. The

pathways touch, cross and generally intertwine, but they nonetheless require different roadmaps to traverse. Said differently – while all collaborations require partners, not all partnerships are collaborative in nature, and not all fund raising comes from partnerships or collaborations.

Fund Raising

For many CTCs, much of their funding is not secured via mechanisms that are collaborative in nature involving cooperation with other organizations or agencies. Also, some Center Directors do not necessarily consider organizations providing funds as a partner because they (Centers) do not have equal power or decision-making authority as those who are allocating the resources.

From Directors' comments, four different funding streams not based on collaboration or partnerships were mentioned—parent organizational support, statutory funding streams, contracts, and grants and gifts.

1. Parent Organization Support

All CTCs affiliated with the National Urban League and most of those founded by the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) receive some level of financial support from their parent organization. In most cases, the level of funding constitutes the largest single portion of funds to the organization. Of particular note, however, is that all National Urban League and all HUD CTCs still require additional funds to remain viable. The parent organizations, particularly in the case of National Urban League Centers, are important not only because they can provide resources, but also because they have stature and national scope to leverage partnering at a broader scale than can an individual CTC. Because the National Urban League presents itself as a strong partner to AOL or Intel, national partnerships involving resources for individual CTCs can be established. For

instance, tangible benefits such as equipment/software resources transferred to individual PowerUp labs often result.

Because independent CTCs or those affiliated with organizations that are not national in scope cannot be players at the national level, it is essential to have organizations such as CTCNet that can offer these Centers access to national agreements that create resource streams. Programs such as the America Connects Consortium (ACC) are means for achieving the same advantages found with Centers that are affiliates with strong national parent organizations.

2. Statutory Funding Streams

In one CTC, funding is provided through a percentage from the franchise fees from the local cable company. By law, the CTCs in the community receive a fixed amount from each subscriber to the cable service. In another Center, support comes from a state law providing funding.

While statutory funding can provide a steady funding base, such arrangements are not without problems. Statutes are always subject to legislative renewal requiring CTCs and their supporters to engage in political lobbying on an on-going basis, a process that is time-consuming and potentially divisive. Where statutory funding exists, it may restrict Centers from seeking funding from other sources as part of the legislative arrangement. Centers presented with the option to secure funding through statutory means should carefully assess the arrangement for possible binding restrictions that could limit opportunities for additional growth and funding in the future.

3. Contractual

Several examples of contractual funding relationships appear from the discussions. Three of the Centers mention contractual relationships with their state

governments to assist in manpower training through their Centers. Although the relationships are with government, the arrangements are contractual rather than statutory because they are administrative rather than legislative in nature. All of those Centers with these contractual obligations believe that adding manpower training to the suite of services provided at the Center is an excellent means of expanding funding possibilities, not simply from the state but from federal and local governments, nonprofits that have training missions, and some industries. One Center believes that they receive funding from local industries because of their training mission. While a general social mission may seem noble, when a Center's mission is more clearly linked to a specific service like job training, it is more fundable.

A different type of contractual arrangement is with the local United Way. Rather than a contract for services, a formal agreement to accept funds from United Way does have obligations that are contractual in nature. One Center secures nearly half of its funding through United Way. This particular Center encounters no major restrictions from its affiliation with United Way. It is important, however, to be certain securing funds through United Way does not limit a Center's capacity to obtain other community funding.

4. Grants and Gifts

Grants and gifts are the single largest source of funding for CTCs. In theory, the distinction between the two is that grants specify objectives for the funds, e.g., programs for the elderly or the purchase of software, whereas gifts are more discretionary. Grants also typically require a formal statement of response to a formal request, i.e., a grant proposal in response to a competitive Request for Proposal. Gifts may have neither of those characteristics. In reality, the distinctions are seldom as clear. Some foundations

dispense their grant funds as gifts, some grants do not have competitive processes, and the levels of spending discretion may be restricted in some gifts and quite permissive with some grants.

Table I enumerates some grant and gift sources listed by Directors. The listing does not include all the grants or gifts received by the Centers because only those that were currently active were mentioned by Directors. The enumeration is not a “shopping” list but rather it illustrates the wide range of grant and gift sources currently accessed by CTCs. Some sources are local in nature; others are national in scope; while still others are regional or state sources. For Centers not included in the interviews, Table 1 may include former sources of funding, current funding streams, or perhaps potential opportunities.

Table I
Grant and Gift Sources for
CTC Centers

HUD	Knight Foundation	Gateway
AOL	Key Bank	Nations Bank
Intel	National Bank	IBM
AT&T	Women Business Institute	Verizon
Kroger	Motorola	Embassy of Saudi Arabia
Emory Foundation	YMCA	Harrah Casino
Time Warner	Universities	Public Television
Rotary Club	Microsoft	Gar Foundation
Xerox	Shell Oil	Local Public Schools
U.S. Dept. of Education	State Educational Agencies	JP Morgan Chase

Partners and Collaborators

At first appearance, no distinction between “partners” and “collaborators” seems apparent from the discussions with Directors. However, while they may use the words interchangeably, a careful analysis of their comments reveals that two different types of

relationships with other organizations are being described. The distinction between the two is critical because the behaviors and requirements for success of each are slightly different. Partnering requires a marketing and entrepreneurial acumen. A CTC Director must be able to identify the assets a CTC can bring to a partnership and leverage those assets in ways that makes others willing to engage in a joint enterprise where clear “rules” of reciprocity are established.

In one form of partnering, CTCs establish formal, reciprocal relationships with other organizations to seek resources generally from a third party. A frequent example cited the establishment of an association with another organization to write a grant or to seek joint funding on a project that benefits both the Center and the partnering institutions. As one Director notes, “We are always asked to be co-authors on grants because of the visibility we have and because of our mission.”

Directors also talk about partnering in a different sense. For example, “Partnerships occur when you sell a service, e.g., video taking, brochures produced from your software, etc., to other organizations as a means of securing dollars for you and a product for them.” Such arrangements may be done on an on-going basis as partners in a joint venture.

Thus, in partnerships the notions of visible and mutual reciprocity are central. “Partnerships have to be mutually beneficial,” as one Director emphasizes. Another notes, “You have to find partners that will benefit from an association with you.” The myopic view that partnering involves a one-way transfer of resources to the Center leads to frustration and lack of success in developing viable long-term partners. This sentiment is nicely expressed by a Director who advised – “Don’t waste time on trying to

develop ‘general partnerships’ where there is not a focus to the effort.” She ends her thought by stating that her experience has been that such general efforts fail for you and for the partner.

Collaborating requires a similar understanding of a Center’s needs and assets, but because working jointly with the Center initially may not produce tangible results, trust must be the foundation for the relationship. Other organizations must see a Center as trustworthy in the sense that its dedication to mission is abiding; its willingness to reciprocate in the future is accepted without reservations; and its reputation within the community is strong. Whereas partnerships are based more on a business model, trust is the foundation of successful collaborations.

Partnerships generally are formalized by specifying the “exchange” terms of a relationship; collaborations involve sharing of existing resources or information, or simply networking together to identify potential areas of mutual assistance. For CTCs, collaborative efforts include service swapping among partners, sponsoring joint events (job or technology fairs), informal agreements to have interlocking board members, or donation of services to a Center because the Center and another agency serve the same target population. Perhaps the best interpretation of collaboration is captured in the words of one Director – “It means you get to do stuff together and no one has any money.” Alternatively, as another Director states, “You can do things together that you could not do alone.”

Building on the importance of trust, several Directors express the view that collaboration can occur only after a Center has established its value and worthiness to others and is recognized as an organization willing to work together to resolve issues

important to the community in which it resides. Unfortunately from a sustainability perspective, trust is difficult to create, easy to destroy and almost impossible to rebuild if lost. Thus, Center Directors must nurture trust continuously and carefully if effective sharing relationships are to emerge.

Partnerships and Collaborations: Strategic Thinking

No single formula exists to ensure successful partnerships or collaborations, but the accounts from Directors do provide some useful practices for developing and sustaining partnerships and funding. After analyzing the descriptions of the experiences of the 23 Directors, one cannot construct a simple list of best practices in the sense of “do this and not that.” Rather what emerges from the conversations are two separate, but related concepts. First are concepts that can be viewed as “strategies” for partnering or collaborating. Strategies are “ways of thinking” about partnering, or as one Director describes it, “...having a vision of what you are trying to achieve in partnering.” In most interviews, Directors focus more on the strategic (although they seldom use that term) rather than on the specific means of establishing partners or instituting collaborations. It is rare for a CTC Director to not talk strategically about funding and partnership.

In addition to broad strategies, Directors articulate what can be called “tactical operations.” For a given strategy, Directors can cite ways in which they attempt to enact their strategic thinking. For example, the strategy may be networking, a common refrain, whereas the tactic consists of assigning board members responsibilities for networking. Tactics, thus, are the means to achieve one’s strategic ends.

Most Directors have a well-developed strategic sense of how to achieve sustainability. Common strategic concepts about partnering and sustainability emerge,

but the tactics differ within a strategic domain. These strategies relate to fund raising, partnering, and collaborating, in the way these concepts are used in this report. However, Directors rarely articulate separate strategies for the three pathways to sustainability. Directors use strategies to resolve more practical goals – how do I obtain the resources I need to sustain a program or how do I develop programs my communities desire. Whether the strategy results in statutory funding, grants, gifts, contractual arrangements, or increased donations from parent organizations is unimportant to Directors as long as the practical goal is achieved.

Eight strategies emerge from among the ideas presented in the interviews. The boundaries between the eight are not sharp, but the intent here is not to create a classification of mutually exclusive concepts, but rather to identify the strategic thoughts of Directors. Ambiguities exist because a simple descriptive framework cannot capture the interdependencies of the concepts. The successful Directors recognize the interdependencies between the eight and are able to work within those ambiguities to achieve their goals. The eight are as follows:

- networking,
- promoting visibility,
- service brokering,
- building organizational capacity,
- diversifying services,
- being entrepreneurial,
- lobbying, and
- trust building.

Strategy: Networking

All Directors acknowledge that networking with other organizations and individuals is critical to achieving some sustainability. Just a few of the comments from Directors illustrate the importance they attach to it.

”...constant networking.”

“...get out and do it. Must be visible and active within the network of organizations that you wish to partner with.”

Center Directors engage in both formal and informal networking. Where they are present, Centers belong to network organizations that have similar missions, e.g., Ohio Community Computing Center Network. In other cases, the network organization is based on the clientele served by the Centers, e.g., Chicago Neighborhood Learning Network. Other Directors use more informal networking to maintain contact with individuals and organizations they believe can benefit their Centers.

It is important to stress that community-building networks are dynamic, ever changing. They are hub-less in the sense that the network does not revolve around one organization within the network, but each organization has an equal role. Finally, networks are about sharing of information in an environment of trust. Participants who forget these axioms will be unsuccessful in gaining from or giving to the networks that have roles to play in achieving sustainability.

Promoting Visibility

It could be argued that promoting the visibility of a Center is a tactic employed to develop networks or partnerships. However, some Directors discuss enhancing Center visibility as having value in itself. One Director notes, “Without visibility, no one will be interested in partnering with you. If you are visible, they come to you for collaborations.” Another stresses, “Name recognition is vital. You have to get your

message to the community clearly and often.” Still another says, “Partnerships require lots of PR to establish your reputation so people will wish to partner with you.” Finally, as another Director eloquently states the case – “Don’t be quietly competent.”

Service Brokering

Swapping of services is a theme present in the voices of some Directors. Centers use a strategy of trading access to hardware, software, or a particular service in exchange for a benefit to the Center. If a Center is providing manpower training, some organizations that wish to place people into the programs may be willing to provide needed volunteers or resources, such as clothes for job interviews. A necessary condition for service brokering is for a Center to recognize it has important assets that other organizations can use or need. Once you recognize that you have something to offer, relationships with other organizations can be formed based on mutual reciprocity.

Building Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity refers to the ability to create structures and processes that enable an organization to manage change when external factors impact it. The capacity to manage change is not inherent in organizations, but rather it must be carefully built and maintained through numerous on-going efforts. None of the Directors refers by name to the notion of building capacity, but many of their comments indicate they grasp the concept and understand its relevance to achieving sustainability. Their comments highlight three particular dimensions of capacity building that are particularly germane to their ability to partner and collaborate.

Mission is critical to using partnerships and collaborations to achieve sustainability. As testimony to the importance of mission, only one of the Centers in the

group did not have a mission statement, and they were in the process of writing one. Moreover, nearly all of the Centers have retained their original mission even though in one instance the Center had been nearly ten years in operation. Mission is important for numerous reasons but none more so than that expressed by one Director – “If you don’t know your mission, you can chase funding activities that are not central to what it is you do.” Mission keeps you focused on developing networks and other activities that are important to the survival of a Center.

Planning is raised by Directors as a critical ingredient to construction of effective partnerships. For one Director, long-term financial planning is the key to success. Others are less direct but stress the importance of having an idea of what needs exist at a Center, identifying a list of agencies or people who can help, and targeting for partnerships those who have resources for those needs. Some Centers have formal strategic plans and argue for their value; however, others see planning as more of an on-going process, rather than a document, that guides the direction of a Center. In either case, a planning capacity enables Centers to move more incisively in directions important to their missions and to their eventual success.

The last element of organizational capacity stressed by Directors is the role of Centers’ Boards. Two types of boards are common. Boards of Trustees (or Directors) are found in the majority of the Centers. In addition, large Centers with multiple functions or Centers within larger parent organizations have Advisory Boards exclusively for the computer laboratory component. Not all Centers have Boards and not all Boards for Centers are used effectively, but in a number of Centers both types of Boards (Trustee or Advisory) are involved in strategic and tactical operations.

Diversifying Services

A strategy pursued by some Centers is to diversify the programs they offer. Although new programs require additional resources, new programs also increase the opportunities for new funding and partners. This strategy is best articulated by the statement from one Director – “Comprehensive sets of services enable you to search more broadly for funding that can lead to successful cost shifting or cost sharing internally.” Another notes the Center initially received funds primarily to increase access to the Internet, but they have expanded their programs and now they receive money from different sources than previously. The head of a large Center believes that many agencies and organizations are not as responsive to access issues as they are to job training and literacy programming. Money can be more easily acquired for the latter in some of the communities, according to several Directors. Work force preparation programs in particular are competitive for federal grants and in some states, they are important funding sources for Center activities. Simply put, says one Director, “You cannot rely on one source (of funding), you have to diversify.”

Being Entrepreneurial

Our greatest asset is our “entrepreneurial spirit,” indicates one Director. That individual stresses you have to be aggressive in seeking partnerships because “everyone is interested in partnering with someone and you want to be the one.” When asked to describe the culture of their Center, another Director responds – “incredibly entrepreneurial.” As a result, that Center has shifted from about 80 percent government funding to 80 percent from nonprofits and private sector firms. Still another Director

advises that you always ask for something when you visit a potential funding organization – be specific, but ask. “You have to recognize that you have something to sell, even if it is your name, and they may be willing to ‘buy’.” Still another comments, “we run like a business.” That Center creates products (Web sites, brochures, write proposals, etc.) that can generate financial support for itself.

Lobbying

For the two Centers funded from state or local legislative actions, thinking strategically about lobbying is important. Knowing how to build coalitions to ensure favorable actions by legislators is essential when statutory funding exists. The Center funded through a fee from cable subscribers, for example, finds it has to participate in state-wide lobbying to ensure that the state’s statute establishing this arrangement could not be changed by cable companies. Most Directors have little experience in lobbying, but find it a necessary skill if legislative action can significantly alter funding sources.

Trust Building

Trust building is perhaps the most important of the strategies for Center Directors, yet few consciously set goals to build trust or institute programs that nurture it. Trust has to be a value inherent in the nature of the organization and permeate every decision and action taken by the Center. It means, as one Director argues, “openness”, working together to make the community better. The importance of developing trust is particularly important for the populations and communities served by Centers. This is put eloquently by a Director who states –

One problem in these communities is the mistrust of government, mistrust of people that say they will help them, and mistrust of each other. So it is important to

establish trust and provide programs that they see are needed for them and to provide quality.

Directors must trust all potential collaborators before becoming active in their network. To that end, “be careful what partners you take on.” “You do not want to tarnish a good reputation that you have built within your community” is the advice of one Director. The consequences of a partnership gone sour can create a stigma that will make future collaborations more difficult. Thoughtful selection of partners and transparency in all relationships between collaborators are critical to success in this area.

Partnerships: Tactical Approaches

From our conversations with Directors, strategies are universal whereas tactics are contextually bound. Centers in urban and rural settings may think alike strategically, but the means for achieving strategic goals must be different because of their locations. In urban settings, for example, some Directors talk about being selective in building partnership networks. In rural communities, the concern is just finding partners who can assist in providing resources.

Whether a Center is affiliated with a parent organization or independent is also an important contextual factor in making tactical decisions about how to partner. Another important contextual variable is the mission of Centers – some are focused more on job training, others on providing access to technology. In addition, some Centers are family-oriented and others focus on children or on the elderly. In some instances, local policies or regulations place obstacles in the way of achieving strategic ends by certain means. All of these contextual factors shape the experiences and the opportunities for partnering of the individual centers and consequently, the tactics they use in partnering and securing funding.

The number of interviews is too small to cross-classify centers by all contextual factors and create a systematic pattern of tactical responses to strategies. However, the information obtained in the interviews and from the mail survey responses enabled us to understand some of the contextual effects important to each Center. Therefore, some sense of contextual factors was obtained and discussed in the accounts of Directors.

The tactics enumerated in the conversations with Directors are organized around the eight strategies discussed earlier. (See Table II for a matrix of strategies and tactics.) Because the boundaries between strategies are admittedly ambiguous, a number of the tactics are tabulated under several different strategic headings. For Directors not included in the interviews, the tactics of their peers may not be new or applicable given the particular community contexts in which their Centers are situated. However, it is hoped that some of the ideas raised by the interviewees will prove to be useful in the future.

**Table II
Matrix of Tactics and Strategies**

Tactics	Network	Enhance Visibility	Diversify Services	Service Swapping	Trust Building	Organization Capacity	Entrepreneur	Lobbying
Director Volunteers to Serve on Boards of Organizations that are Potential Partners	X							
Develop Well Designed Promotional Materials for Center		X						
Instill in Your Staff an Entrepreneurial Attitude Through Staff Development							X	
Add Work Force Training Mission if not Present and Highlight Those Programs in Your Marketing		X	X					
Identify and Organize Potential Lobbying Partners (Organizations and Citizens) Before Need Arises.								X
Joint Grant Writing (Don't be Discouraged by Rejections – Keep Submitting)	X							
Have Board Members Serve on Boards of Potential Partners	X					X		
Use Your Major Asset – You are a Community Organization and Many Potential Partners Need You to Show Community Involvement. Don't Hide Your Community Roots.	X						X	
Seed Your Board With Individuals Who Have Required Expertise						X		

Table II: Matrix Continued

<u>Tactics</u>	Network	Enhance Visibility	Diversify Services	Service Swapping	Trust Building	Organization Capacity	Entrepreneur	Lobbying
Use Community Fairs (Technology, Job, etc.) To Promote and Partner	X	X		X	X			
Develop an Introductory Set of Materials to Leave at All Events or With all Organizations. (Create a Organization Business Card – for All your Staff and Volunteers		X						
Write A Strategic Plan that Includes Goals and Objectives for Partnering						X		
Select Board Members on the Basis of Their Networks and Use Them Extensively.	X					X		
Have a Board Development Program (Formal Orientation, Board Information Guide, and Instruct Board on Center Facts). Board Members Have to Develop Pride in the Organization.					X	X		
Have a Regular Program for Inviting Community Leaders to the Center, e.g., First Monday of Every Month or Every Other Month.	X	X						X
Establish Programs to Honor Employees and Staff for Exceptional Performances					X	X		

Table II: Matrix Continued

<u>Tactics</u>	Network	Enhance Visibility	Diversify Services	Service Swapping	Trust Building	Organization Capacity	Entrepreneur	Lobbying
Have Programs That Enable Staff and Volunteers to Attend Professional Development Seminars	X				X	X		
Become a Member of the Banquet Circuit as a Speaker. Don't Wait for Invitations be Proactive	X	X						
Create A Particular Service or Product at your Center that You Can Market to Others, Either for a Fee or For Collaborations, e.g., Use your Software For Brochures, Printing, etc. Put your Name on it!	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Promote by Your Name and Not by Your Service. Develop a Brand.		X			X		X	
When Your Center is Highlighted in the Media, ALWAYS be Certain that at Least One of Your Partners is Mentioned in Some Way.	X	X			X			
Market Yourself to Potential Partners by Sending Information on Your Center and Follow-Up With Visits. Target Your Future Partners.	X						X	
Have Services That You Can Offer to Potential Partners in Exchange for Their Services	X			X				

Table II: Matrix Continued

<u>Tactics</u>	Network	Enhance Visibility	Diversify Services	Service Swapping	Trust Building	Organization Capacity	Entrepreneur	Lobbying
Focus on Families or Multi-Age Groups to Broaden Opportunities for Funding.			X					
Share Services Across Organizations that Serve Your Population.	X			X				
Do Not Compete With Other Centers in Your Community For Everyone Loses. Work on Joint Funding With Similar Organizations (A Local Network)	X				X			
Rather than Swap Services, Exchange Your Services for Publicity (Ask Organizations to Promote You in Bulletins, etc.)	X	X		X			X	
Obtain United Way Funding if Available							X	
Reserve Board Membership for Persons Representing Organizations With Whom You Have Long-Term Partnerships	X					X	X	
Join a Network Association if one Exists. Start one if None Exists in Your Area.	X				X			
In Addition to a Board for Your Organization Have A Technical Advisory Council. Broadens Participation and You Have Different Skills for The Two Boards						X		

Table II: Matrix Continued

<u>Tactics</u>	Network	Enhance Visibility	Diversify Services	Service Swapping	Trust Building	Organization Capacity	Entrepreneur	Lobbying
Establish Levels of Sponsorship – Gold, Platinum, etc. – and Publicize your Sponsors by Level		X					X	
Assign a Single Person to Take Responsibility for Establishing partnerships contacts	X					X		
Make Partnership Building a Responsibility of Everyone in the Organization¹	X				X	X		
Hire a Grant Writer – it May be Cheaper than Having to Hire Someone in Your Organization						X	X	
Hire a Consultant As a Partnership Scout	X					X	X	
Assign (appoint) Board Members responsibility for partnerships in specific functional areas	X					X		
Tie Your Funding Program to a National Goal to Create Focus That Resonates With Other Organizations		X						
Have a Clear Mission Statement and Use it as a Focus for Your Fund Raising Efforts		X				X		
Churches Are Excellent Partners for Space	X							

¹ This and the previous tactic are contradictory but the Centers that cited each report success. It illustrates the need to carefully assess your context before adopting a particular tactic.

Summary

All of the Centers that agreed to be interviewed understand the importance of partnering and collaborating. When asked about the advantages of partnerships, one replies – “[For] survival, we absolutely need partnerships.” From the time a Center is established, even if with a sizable start-up grant, Directors recognize that sustainability can only come through diversifying their funding pathways.

What is also apparent from the conversations with Directors is that they have a strategic sense of how to engage in partnership building. Eight are enumerated and discussed in this report, but two are more widespread across Centers.

Every Center acknowledges the importance of “networking” as a strategy. Some develop formal networking approaches, while other are more informal in their tactics. All, however, emphasize that Centers must be connected to their communities, organizations with similar missions, organizations that are potential donors, and public agencies that can be sources of support.

Organizational capacity building is also a common theme across Centers. The need to create organizational structures and processes that facilitate partnering and securing funding is almost universally advocated. For many Centers with Boards of Directors or Advisors, Board member participation in partnering is a tactic of considerable importance. Passive use of Boards does not contribute to aggressive networking and partnering. Having a clear mission and a strategic plan for moving that mission forward is a reoccurring practice advocated by a large number of Directors. A plan, however, should be a living document that can adapt when external factors change.

Centers use the other six strategies to more varying degrees. Only those who rely on statutory funding must concern themselves with building lobbying efforts. Not all Centers diversify their programs to expand funding opportunities, or develop products to sell or “swap” with potential partners. Also, considerable variability exists in how aggressively Centers pursue promotional and marketing efforts.

One comes away from analyzing the collective voices of Center Directors with a very positive sense about their practical understanding of the issue of sustainability. They understand what is required and have many innovative approaches to expanding their funding bases through partnerships and collaborations. However, the discouraging aspects of the experience is the recognition that despite their best efforts, they still believe they are always on the edge of surviving. Partnering helps bridge the sustainability gap, but as one Director comments, “Many people in our community are supportive but there is not funding.” In a similar vein, the Director of a rural community is rural and impoverished so there are few resources and our needs are low priority among those in the community.” How to provide support for Centers that struggle without an adequate local resource base is a question that will continue to plague CTCs in the future.

Appendix I
Interview Schedule

Interview Form for CTC Interviews

*A Land-Grant University – Putting Knowledge to Work
An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution*

Organizational Information to Record Prior to Interview

Name of Organization _____

Name of Person Interviewed _____

Title and Position of Interviewee _____

Date of Interview _____

Time of Day _____

Location of Interview _____

Personal Interviewer Information

Name of Interviewer _____

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CTCs

Thank you for taking this time to discuss your Community Technology Center. In our discussion today please feel free to add any comments as we proceed. You have already received a letter discussing the purpose of the interview and its use. Before we proceed do you have any questions about those issues at this time?

**If it is okay with you, I would like to tape record the interview as well as take notes.
(If no to tape recorder, proceed with notes).**

STATE AND LOCAL CONTEXT

First, I would like to obtain your opinions about those factors outside of your agency that have helped shape what you have accomplished, or perhaps have been unable to accomplish. For example,

Are there state or local policies or regulations that have impacted your agency?

Probe –which policies, and impacts positive or negative.

Local and State Policies

Examples of policies that would be relevant here

- Programs exist to fund technology centers at either the state or local level.
- Are there programs that reduce the connection rates for CTCs
- Local restrictions on use of public spaces for nonprofits.
- Tax policies that encourage (subsidies) or discourage (high rates) nonprofits like CTCs.
- Zoning regulations that limit access to good spaces.
- State or local policies that encourage businesses to donate equipment to nonprofits.
- State or local policies that emphasis training in information technology as priorities for children.

Are there particular state or local programs that you believe are important to the success of your CTC?

Probe –which programs and impacts positive or negative

Probe to determine whether there is an electronic community network and whether the CTC participates.

In general how would you describe or characterize your community's efforts to help citizens become more connected with information technology?

Probe for examples and rationale for their characterizations.

HISTORY OF THE AGENCY

If there are no other comments about efforts of the local community, I would like to briefly talk about how your CTC came into existence.

What were the events and circumstances that led to the creation of your CTC?

Probe here for:

Groups or organizations that were instrumental in forming the CTC.

Source of original funding

Size and characteristics (location, services, etc.) of the organization when it began.

Original mission and has it changed.

What role(s) was the CTC originally conceived to play?

What is the current mission of your CTC?

Probe for their mission statement. Obtain a copy if possible.

CURRENT ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

Now I would like to discuss with you how your organization is organized.

Please describe the organizational structure of your CTC.

Probe for organizational chart (if available).

Probe for the presence of a Board.

If a Board exists ask about its structure, its role, and how membership is determined.

How would you describe the “culture” of your organization?

Keep the definition of organizational culture available to use for probes.

Organizational Culture

Culture is one of those terms that's difficult to express distinctly, but everyone knows it when they sense it. Culture is comprised of the assumptions, values, norms and tangible artifacts of organization members and their behaviors. It is a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization. Can differentiate between dominant and subcultures, and strong v. weak cultures. You can tell the culture of an organization by looking at the arrangement of furniture, what they brag about, what members wear, etc. -- similar to what you can use to get a feeling about someone's personality.

Organizational culture differentiates the organization, provides a sense of identity to member, facilitates commitment, and enhances social system stability (social glue).

An organization's culture is not the espoused list of values developed at an offsite by the executive team. These are ideals; what the organization strives to be as an organization and what values it hopes to endorse. They may be different from the values, beliefs, and norms expressed in your actual practices and behavior – or its organizational culture.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

One of the important aspects of a community organization is the network that it creates with other organizations. In many cases, formal partnerships or collaborations develop between networks members. I would like to discuss how your organization is networked within your community and some of your partners or collaborators.

Describe the scope of the partnerships you currently have between your CTC and other organizations.

Probe as to number, type (government, nonprofit, etc), and scope (community, regional, state, etc.).

Probe as to whether the partnerships are deep or shallow (see description of deep or shallow below).

Deep or Shallow Partnerships

The difference here is in the number and the intensity of the connections between organizations. The shallowest of connections would be a single functional linkage in a relatively minor function. For example, organization A partners with organization B on co-sponsoring a single event. A deep partnerships is one in which there are multiple connections that are functionally more important. For example, organization A does joint funding raising with B, they share board members, and they share space. In assessing the “depth” of the partnerships, you do not need to make the judgment but you should probe for all possible connections between the organizations in questions. The “depth” can be ascertained from the response you receive.

What types of collaborative activities do you and your partners normally engage in?
Probes – joint funding, political networking, sharing volunteers, mutual support with agencies, etc.

What do you see as the advantages of partnerships for your CTC?

Probe as to what they use their partners for – finances, volunteers, local politics, networking, etc.

What advantages are there for other organizations to partner with you?
Probe – why should other organizations be interested in partnering with the CTC.
What do CTC bring to the table for other organizations?

Since partnerships seem to be important to your organization, what strategies do you use to develop collaborations?

Probe for different types of strategies – co-boards, use of board members, etc.

Probe whether the CTC is active or passive in developing collaborations, i.e., does it work to develop them or simply respond to opportunities as they arise.

Probe as to whether organization has someone responsible for partnerships.

SUMMARY AND WRAPUP

We have discussed a number of topic and issues as they pertain to your CTC.

In closing I would ask you if there are important elements of establishing and operating a successful CTC that we have not covered?

Probe for both a list and description of what they perceived to be the important aspects of a successful CTC.

What are the practices your Center has found to work best in establishing community partnerships?

What have you done that you could recommend to other Community Technology Centers to help them achieve financial sustainability? What are their particular strategies or practices that have been successful for you?

I would like to thank you for your time and willingness to help with this interview. We certainly will provide you with the report that will be forthcoming. Also, if you have questions or think of additional responses sometime in the future, please do not hesitate to call or write me at:

POST INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Length of the Interview _____

Was the Interview Taped? Yes _____ No _____

How would you characterize the respondent?

For example, was the person knowledgeable or did they give vague answer or rely on others for information? Were they comfortable in the interview? How did they react to you as an interviewer?

How would you characterize the interview?

Did the interview go smoothly? If not, what happened. Did you believe you had good rapport with the respondent? Did you have the attention of the respondent throughout?

What additional comments would you make about the interview that are relevant to our understanding of how the CTC is organized or run.

Appendix II
Computer Technology Center
Interview Sites

Centers Selected for Interviewing of Directors

Name	City
The Attic, Inc.	Vincennes, IN
Bloomsburg Telecommunications Consortium	Bloomsburg, PA
Center for the Study of Literacy/Oklahoma Literacy Clearinghouse	Tahlequah, OK
Cyberskills	Burlington, VT
Douglas-Cherokee Economic Activity	Morristown, TN
Liberty Learning Center	Cincinnati, OH
Margaret Fuller House	Cambridge, MA
Media Bridges	Cincinnati, OH
Wheatland Community Learning Center	Dallas, TX
Akron Urban League	Akron, OH
Baltimore Urban League	Baltimore, MD
Broome County Urban League	Binghamton, NY
Chicago Urban League	Chicago, IL
Greater Washington Urban League	Washington, DC
New Orleans Urban League	New Orleans, LA
Los Angeles Urban League	Los Angeles, CA
National Puerto Rican Forum Inc	New York, NY
Harlem Partnership Center, Inc	New York, NY
Greenview Neighborhood Network Center	Tucson, AZ