

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS NOVEMBER WEBINAR START PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

**Moderator: Michele Higgs
November 18, 2008
3 p.m. EST**

Operator: Welcome to the Neighborhood Networks Monthly conference call. Today's call is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the conference call over to Ms. Michele Higgs.

Michele Higgs: Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks November conference call. This month's call is a Webinar designed to guide you through the process of completing a START business plan and submitting it to your HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator. We will also cover the center assessment and evaluation and the value of using START to advance your center through the Center Classification process.

Our speakers are Project Manager Steve McLaine and Program Development Manager Silvia Benavides, two people who have given shape to this process.

Before we begin the START process, let me tell you about our new centers. We have 12 this month: AHEPA 421 Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Florida, Grace House Neighborhood Networks Center in New York, Willows Community Center in Maryland, Ford Education and Training Center in Maryland, Shady Grove Community Center in Maryland, Benson Manor Neighborhood Networks Center in Georgia, Ingleside Neighborhood Networks Center in Georgia, Fairfield's Manor Neighborhood Networks Center in Georgia, Gratiot Woods Coop in Michigan, Fellowship Computer Center in Connecticut, Charlestowne at Cavalier Neighborhood Networks Center in Virginia, and Bishop Taylor Manor Community Center in New Jersey. Welcome to the Neighborhood.

START is just one of the resources available through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative to help guide your centers to success. You can access START by visiting the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. On the Web site, you will also find out what's current, learn about funding opportunities and special events, and you can connect with your peers.

Let me also remind listeners that a transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks. You can access it at the bottom of the homepage.

Remember, if you have questions about START, success stories, special event ideas, or general questions about the Neighborhood Networks Initiatives, call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743.

Try online networking with your peers through the Neighborhood Networks online message board. Just go the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and click on the Neighborhood Networks online networking link to the right under the green banner labeled "Helpful Tools".

I am sure that many of you have had the opportunity to attend our Regional Technical Assistance Workshops or RTAWs and were dazzled by the creativity of the presentations. We are planning now for the upcoming RTAWs and you should be too. Now is the time to review your budgets and start considering the funds you'll use to get to the RTAWs. Remember, the experience and exposure you get at the RTAW is free; you just have to get to the location and secure a hotel room.

Further, we would like to invite you to post topics or even present a session at our upcoming RTAW. Contact Neighborhood Networks on the toll free-line at (888)312-2743 and we'll take it from there. For those of you who would like to share your ideas and input about the RTAW

content, please join us for the focus group call in December. Information will be e-mailed to all centers and posted on the Web shortly.

Now to today's presentation about START; this introduces our experts, Silvia Benavides and Steve McLaine. But before Silvia gets started I would like to ask Michelle to instruct our callers on how to use the Web features of this Webinar. Michelle?

Operator: To log on to today's Web site, go to www.visioncast.com. You will be prompted for the meeting ID, which is w4316421; the meeting key is A431642. And now, I will turn the call back over to our speakers.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you so much Michelle and with that I will turn it over to Silvia. Silvia?

Silvia Benavides: Thank you. It is a great pleasure to talk about START. I am going to go through the PowerPoint presentation as well as the different sections of START. We're also going to visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site and see what a START business plan looks like.

Silvia Benavides: Our learning objectives for START are how to create and modify a center profile; how to create a login account; and then we'll walk through the steps for developing a business plan using the online business planning tool. In addition to previewing a report, we'll learn about submitting it to HUD and completing an annual center assessment and evaluation.

We also have a feature that lets you update or add a user in START. If you have a center director or coordinator, you can add them to the management section of START. We'll also show you how to change the fiscal year for the business plan and how to complete a Model center application request.

You should benefit from creating your profile and the business plans assessment online. You can submit all of those documents to HUD directly from the online business planning tool.

START has quite a few benefits for centers. One of the benefits is the center can define its mission, which facilitates success; develop a budget for the center; plan operations for the center; request and achieve advanced Center Classification status; track programs and organizational performance; identify local and national partnerships; evaluate the center's performance for each fiscal year; and manage the center's programs and activities.

Many of you probably have a copy of the START workbook and user guide, which helps you collect the information for the online business planning tool. You can collect the information first and then enter it into the system, or you can input each section as you go. To access the START tool, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

We'll enter the START business planning tool where I'll show you the START features. Once you access www.neighborhoodnetworks.org, click on the START business planning tool, then click on the Neighborhood Networks Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, which brings you to the Neighborhood Networks at Work site. There are options for center users, HUD Coordinators, and HUD Staff. The centers need to click on the center users' option.

If you are a new center developing a business plan for a community center, the first step is to create a new center profile. Click on create a center profile, and then complete the information on the form, especially the sections that have asterisks next to them. Those are required sections. Enter the name of the center, the center address and contact information, and then the property information. Under the property section, there are three required sections; the Section 8 number, the FHA number and the REMS number. However, you only need to enter one of the three, and then continue to fill the property management agency information.

Once you have finished completing the form click submit, and it will be sent to the HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator in your area. He or she will be able to review it and approve the form or the center profile.

For center users, I will show you how to create a login once you've completed your center profile. Click on request a login account. Next, select your state; your center will be listed in the dropdown menu. Enter your e-mail address and create your own user name and password.

The fiscal year is the current fiscal year. For instance, if you are completing it now, the fiscal year is 2009, so select the 2009 fiscal year and then click submit. Once you click submit, you will be taken to the center's business plan page where you begin entering the information to complete your business plan.

We'll look at a completed business plan and then through the sections that need to be completed. So you select this page, then the name of the center. I'm going to use Gold Star Community Learning Center. Then you enter your login and your username and then submit it. This is the welcome page for your Neighborhood Networks center.

There are different tools available. You can input any center events in the event calendar. You can update your profile, conduct your assessment, or complete a Model application.

Now we'll enter START business plans. This is where you find the sections that need to be completed to save and submit the business plan to HUD. We'll begin the process by entering your mission statement. Under each of the categories, there are subcategories. When you select the category then you'll be able to see the subcategories. As you progress, you can expand it all or you can collapse it and complete each section.

We'll click on START to begin the process and then enter your mission statement. This is where you enter your mission statement. Once you're finished, click done and save. Once you save it and click on it, you'll see a white check mark, which lets you know that section is completed.

It's the same for the other sections. Input the information, and click done and save when you're done. You can always return to a section if you don't have the information. Then just click save for whatever information you input, so that you don't lose that information when you exit the system.

Under the center's process, there are: new mission statement; benefits to stakeholders; identify community resources; staffing; who you are serving; who the center is serving; and the property demographics. We may not have enough time to review each one, but I just want to point out each of the sections and then the subsections.

The next section is budgeting and fundraising. There is a budgeting worksheet where you enter expenses.

In the budget, there is the startup, which is the cost for the opening the center, followed by the three year projections. It doesn't have to be your exact cost, but you need to show projections for the first of the three years. START calculates the second and third year, based on the percentage selected.

For the source of funding, it's very important to show the fundraising being conducted to sustain the center. It is really important that you indicate other sources of funding. Save for startup and then for the next three years.

Next is planning for center operations; planning for the center's space requirement, preparations for your center accessibility, and the center operation timeline. For instance, when you are going to hire staff, when you are going to get the equipment, and when the center is going to be open.

The next section, organization and management, is about the structure of your center.

In the program and planning section, there is a resident survey. It's important that you ask your residents about their interests and what programs and activities they would like offered at the center. Here, you input the results of your survey and it calculates a percentage automatically.

Michele Higgs: Silvia, may I make a comment?

Silvia Benavides: Yes.

Michele Higgs: I think would be helpful for center staff to note that START calculates for you.

Silvia Benavides: Yes.

Michele Higgs: I think it's really important. A question I had was you mentioned a number of occasions that you need to click save and done. Would you mention again how important that is, please?

Silvia Benavides: Yes. We've had centers that input or completed all the information online, forgot to click save, and lost everything. If you don't click save, you will lose the information. That's something that you have to remember. Every time you change something, no matter how minor the change is, you have to save it. Completing your business plan is not hard; you probably already have the information. It's just a matter of inputting it into the system. And the great thing is that if you don't have time to input the data, we'll be glad to do it for you. We love to help centers complete or update their business plans, because that way they have all that information readily available when they need it.

Michele Higgs: I'm going to just jump in for a moment. While we have been giving you a lot of information about the START business plan, there's nothing to be afraid of about START. Because as I mentioned a little while ago, a lot of this is technology; it's an online plan. Many of the calculations that need to be made are made for you as you go along. And with a lot of information that you are inputting, START actually fills in the bottom line for you. Even when you complete your START business plan and send it off to your HUD Coordinator, they receive an e-mail saying the business plan is on its way. So there are several steps involved, but START does a lot of the work for you.

Silvia Benavides: Yes, that is correct. I already was able to log in to the test site that I previously mentioned. If you are unable to access it, you can go to the login page on the center user, click on the state of New York, select the center name, which is Gold Star Community Learning Center, and it says, test only. Then enter the user name, which is Gold, and the password, which is Start. Once you get to the welcome page, click on START business plan. It will take you to the main page of the START business plan where all the sections are listed. If you are unable to follow me, you can always call me on the toll-free line.

We have staff available to help any center, any property owner or manager that needs assistance from 8:30 am to 5 pm Eastern Standard Time.

I want to explain the annual objective section. It's very important that each center fills in this information, so that you can see how your center did this year, and make projections. Let's say you were going to assist 24 adults with obtaining jobs. You can input that information, and when you complete your assessment, the projections will be transferred into the assessment, and then you can enter the actual numbers.

This section is vital for your attempts to advance to the next level. Steve is going to talk to you about that a little later in the call. The marketing and outreach section is where you track center

partnerships. In the partnership profile, you list the organizations that are potentially resources and partners. There you can input that contact information so you have all that information available when you want to contact them. It's important to keep that up-to-date.

The next section is the partnership tracking log. Every time you contact an organization, you can log the action that was taken. Last, there's funding commitment, where you input the funds you should receive from an organization, whether it's in-kind or actual funds. This will enable you to track the funds you receive for the center.

The next step is the business plan report. Once you complete all the sections in START, you can preview the business plan. You will see the information you enter before you submit it to HUD. You can preview it, and you can print it, so that you can give to your supervisor to or the management to review before you submit it.

Next is saving the business planning report. Here, you create a business plan report with all the information that you have entered and then submit it to HUD. When you click to save, it will ask you if you are sure you want to create a business plan report. Once you select it and answer OK, it will create a report. Then you have the option of submitting the business plan to HUD for review and approval by clicking on submit to HUD.

Michele Higgs: Thank you so much for that presentation Silvia.

Michele Higgs: As Silvia mentioned earlier, there are staff available at the toll-free line, which is 888-312-2743, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time, to help you with your questions and help you complete your START business plan.

But now that Silvia has completed her presentation on START, I'd like to ask Steve McLaine to take us through center assessment and evaluation and its importance to the Center Classification process. Steve?

Steve McLaine: Of course. I'm going to be somewhat brief and just give you an overview of Center Classification, the process that was developed by HUD to reflect the overall maturity and impact of the entire Initiative.

Let's talk about how Center Classification started; its benefits; the three levels of Center Classification; Designated, Certified, and Model; START's role center assessment and evaluation, the Model request form, and the different assistance that's available.

Center Classification began in 2005 when HUD introduced a process that was designed to recognize centers and the work that was being done across the country for Neighborhood Networks. There are three levels of Center Classification, Designated Center Classification, Certified Center Classification and Model Center Classification, and the benefits are many.

What we're trying to do is to give centers a pathway or the overall blueprint of how to achieve success, how to reach success for outcomes, and how to become sustainable organizations for the residents that they serve and the surrounding communities.

One of the benefits is success. It's been 14 years of successfully delivering technology access and other resources to American communities. The Center Classification standards were designed to build off of the success these centers have experienced throughout the years. We have incorporated their successes into our Model standards to make sure that centers can enjoy the same levels of success. We want them to have success in aiding residents and in increasing the market value of the property where the centers are located.

Another benefit is the rewards. We have a lot of centers that have advanced through the Center Classification process and are working in grant applications, press releases, and marketing materials. They make sure to utilize their classification standing to show that they have achieved goals. They are exciting centers that are interested in achieving success on their own and working with other communities.

Those of you who have attended our RTAWs or National Conferences may have seen plaques awarded to centers that have attained Certified Center Classification status and Model Center Classification status. They also receive notoriety on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, are highlighted in our publications, and receive opportunities to serve as national partnership pilot sites, as an example of the heights that Neighborhood Network centers can achieve. For one of the successful Model centers, CWA Cayce Learning Center, the director promoted its Model status in its marketing campaign, used the center's Model status to get exposure in the local media, gained national media attention, and noted her center's Model status when submitting and receiving grants.

Overall, Neighborhood Networks is establishing a strong identity for the Initiative through Center Classification. It is important for Neighborhood Networks to establish its relevance to overall communities. And it is also important for external organizations to understand that Neighborhood Networks is committed to success, and committed to setting standards for excellence.

This unified approach positions Neighborhood Networks in the same breath of worthwhile organizations such as the Boy Scouts, United Way, and other organizations. You deserve that same recognition and that same relevance that those organizations enjoy. And that's our goal.

Joseph Mayerhoff from the Certified Kraus Computer Learning Center reported the Center Classification shows the center has HUD's approval, and that gives people a level of comfort. Your staff deserves that recognition, as well. So we want to make sure that staff are rewarded for

their efforts. We know how hard you work, and how difficult your jobs are. So, we're more than happy to do whatever we can to make sure that you are receiving recognition for what you do.

Let's talk a little bit about the three levels of Center Classification. Designated Center Classification establishes minimum achievable standards for Neighborhood Networks centers. The Designated center possesses the tools for creating effective programs and services to support the self-sufficiency of residents of FHA-insured and -assisted properties, as well as the sustainability of the center.

To become a Designated center, you have to have a HUD-approved business plan, which shows the importance of what Silvia was just discussing, and at least one computer with Internet access. These are the basic opening requirements for Neighborhood Networks centers. So, as soon as a center opens, it becomes a Designated Neighborhood Networks center.

When the Center Classification system was first introduced, all centers were classified as Designated and Certified based on determined requirements, sort of a grandfathering process. Since that time, the requirements for opening have mirrored the Designated center requirements, so all centers begin at that level of operation.

The next level is Certified Center Classification, which would be Neighborhood Networks centers that have achieved and exceeded Designated status, and actively operate programs designed to support resident self-sufficiency. Centers wishing to advance from this level of certification must have already attained Designated center status, been operational for 12 consecutive months, and have completed a HUD-accepted START assessment and evaluation.

The great thing about Certified Center Classification is that it's an automatic process. As soon as you complete and submit a center assessment to your HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator

and have it marked as completed by that Coordinator, your classification automatically changes from Designated to Certified Center Classification status.

It's important to note that this procedure happens literally overnight. There is no extra work on your part, and it really rewards you for taking the initiative to track and evaluate the outcomes of the work that you've done. It's exciting seeing your work rewarded as you receive a plaque and a letter denoting your status, and the center name is added to the honor roll on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

Also, the property owner and management agent of the center receives a letter denoting the status. It's really quite simple. One of the most enjoyable parts of our conferences is to see the pride in the center staff's eyes when they receive their awards in front of their peers. So we are really excited about helping centers complete assessments to reach this level, and we want to make sure that they can receive those awards at the upcoming RTAWs later this year.

The top level of classification is Model Center Classification, is based on the achievement of Designated and Certified levels, and there are also Model standards that must be met. We take Model standards very seriously, not in a punitive manner, but to make sure that a center that receives a Model designation deserves that honor, especially because they represent excellence for the entire Initiative. So there are nine Model standards, seven which are mandatory.

The first standard is a period of operation where a center has to be operational for three years; the second is resident involvement; the resident survey should be conducted once every three years. START has the ability to assist with that, with the data that you can enter into START.

The third standard is program guidelines; they should be provided for each of your programs, written curriculum or program guidelines. Standard four is tracking, evaluation, and reporting. That is intended to make sure that you are tracking and evaluating what you are doing. As we

said before, the center assessment and evaluation form meets that standard, so you are already one step ahead as soon as you complete it.

Standard five is partnerships. The center is engaged with at least two partner entities and needs some sort of written agreement, either a Memorandum of Understanding or Letter of Agreement. For funding, the sixth standard, the center should have submitted a minimum of three proposals in the past three years. We'd like to see copies of those proposals or sample materials from other fundraising efforts. For the final mandatory standard, center environment, the center should have the following characteristics: high-speed Internet access, up-to-date and working equipment, accessible workspace, security features, should be open for at least 30 hours weekly and should be attractive and clean. Including simple photographs will convey that you're meeting those standards.

There are two other optional standards, 501(c)(3) status and a Board of Directors or similar governing body. We would like to see copies of minutes for the latter. With the Model Center Classification request form, you will complete the formal application. It shows that you've met those goals and provided supporting documentation in a three-ring binder. Then that material is forwarded to our staff, and your HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, who will also review the materials and conduct due diligence. The Neighborhood Networks National Director will ensure that we're all in agreement and determine that you are a Model center.

We've seen various types of applications, and different material submitted. There is no one particular way to do it. We just want to make sure that you're meeting the standards. If you're not, we'll definitely work with you to meet the standards and there is technical assistance available to reach those goals. We'll talk about that a little bit later.

You'll receive an even bigger plaque than Certified centers and we look forward to presenting that to you at the next RTAW as well.

To review our six-step process, complete and submit the START business plan for approval; complete and submit a center assessment and evaluation using START; gather the Model Center Classification supporting documentation; submit the Model Center Classification request form using START; submit the Model Center Classification supporting documentation; achieve Model Center Classification status; and receive your awards. It's really a rewarding process. We're pleased to work with centers to help them attain Model Center Classification.

For additional information and assistance, you can call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at 888-312-2743. There is a Neighborhood Networks Center Classification guide that's available online at neighborhoodnetworks.org. Our staff is available to provide a classification tutorial onsite as well as over the phone remotely to do whatever we can to help you in this process, and make sure that you are receiving the rewards that you deserve. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Steve. I want to remind you of the resources that we have available for you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative.

If you still have questions after the call, you can go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and post questions on Neighborhood Networks online message board or view the Web site, where you find abundant resources and current information. You can always speak with staff at the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line, at 888-312-2743. And don't forget to start planning for the RTAWs.

Don't let a limping budget keep you from missing this event. Get creative; see if there is a way that you can join us. We're welcoming your ideas for topics for this year's RTAW. Please call the toll-free information line at 888-312-2743 or sit in for the focus group calls that will be held in early December. Details will be available on the Web site and will be e-mailed to centers.

I thank all of you joining us today. Thank you again to Silvia Benavides and Steve McLaine for taking us through the START business plan and showing us not only how START works but how it can work to help your center advance to Model Center Classification. We look forward to working with all of you this year. Thanks again to all of our callers. In December, we'll discuss how to harness the power of partnerships. Look for your announcements and join us for that call on December 9th at 3 pm Eastern Time. Thanks again. Take good care everyone. We'll talk to you next time.

END

CHAT Question and Answers

During the Webinar the two questions below were asked in the Chat feature.

Sarah Richey-Johnson:

What state was used for the test center?

Response:

New York.

Lee Harrison:

Whom can I contact to obtain more information to obtain Model center status?

Response:

Please contact a Neighborhood Networks Program Development Specialist by calling the Neighborhood Networks toll-free line at (888) 312-2743.