



**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Multifamily Housing Programs**

Neighborhood Networks Center Classification Guide

Updated 2010

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
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What Neighborhood Networks centers need to know about... *Center Classification*

In June 2005, HUD's Multifamily Neighborhood Networks Initiative introduced a three-level center classification system to provide well-deserved recognition to Neighborhood Networks centers at all levels of development and achievement. The system recognizes three levels of achievement: Designated, Certified, and Model. START plays a key role in the center classification process.

Why center classification?

Center classification is a performance ranking system that offers standards to successfully manage and operate a Neighborhood Networks center. Center classification encourages Neighborhood Networks centers by both acknowledging their current accomplishments and presenting "model" examples of potential and possibility. The system is supported by HUD and designed to show a unified approach to empowering residents of HUD properties and surrounding communities through standards of performance. Benefits include:

Success. While no two Neighborhood Networks centers are alike, nearly 15 years of successfully delivering technology access and other resources to America's communities has revealed a number of factors that lead to center sustainability and success. The standards used for Designated, Certified, and Model center classification are based on those factors. By following the center classification guide, centers will be more likely to succeed in both aiding residents and increasing the market value of the property where the center is located.

"Model Center classification conveys national recognition by HUD. Having advanced through the three classifications underscores our ability to function as a quality resource for residents and the local community. Through our programs and services, residents acquire the tools needed to achieve the academic and technological skills that are critical to their ultimate success in today's very competitive job market and in life. As we journeyed through this process, Neighborhood Networks provided invaluable oversight and guidance via technical assistance. We had to examine our goals and strategies while keeping in mind the overall mission of the Arbor Park Village/TILI Learning Center."

[Iris Anderson, program director, Arbor Park Village Learning Center, Model center classification, Cleveland, Ohio]

Rewards. Achievement of Designated, Certified, and Model center classification status is a useful tool for public relations, and is often included in grant applications, press releases, and other marketing materials. Additionally, Multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers achieving Certified and Model center classification receive special recognition during Neighborhood Networks Week, on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, opportunities to serve as national partnership pilot project sites, and highlights in Neighborhood Networks publications. Centers also receive awards for achieving each level of center classification.

"As a result of the learning center achieving Model center classification, there has been significant participation from the community in the center's programs and services. More parents come to the center for job assistance, GED classes, computer classes; and to learn about financial assistance so that they can further their education. Also, more kids are attending the afterschool program and both parents and children are involved in the typing classes. There is also considerable involvement in the center's special events, such as Awareness Day."

[Katrina Billups, program manager, Dauphin Gate Network Center, Model center classification, Mobile, Alabama]



Identity. Classification sends a distinct message to the outside world: Neighborhood Networks is a national Initiative of like-minded organizations committed to empowering residents of multifamily housing and the surrounding communities through high standards of performance. The unified approach inspires residents, potential partners, and other external stakeholders to participate in this focused and worthwhile Initiative.

“Center Classification shows that your center has HUD’s approval, and that gives people a level of comfort. Your staff deserves that recognition, as well.”

[Joseph Mayerhoff, assistant vice president, Kraus Organization LLC, Kraus Computer Learning Center, Certified center classification, Brooklyn, New York]

The Three Classifications

- **Designated** center classification establishes minimum achievable standards for Neighborhood Networks centers. This designation denotes that the center has the tools for creating effective programs and services to support the self-sufficiency of residents of FHA-insured and -assisted properties and its self-sustainability.
- **Certified** center classification signifies that centers have achieved and exceeded Designated center classification, and actively operate programs designed to support resident self-sufficiency.
- **Model** center classification is based on a combination of achievements of Designated center classification and Certified center classification standards, and achievement of mandatory Model center classification standards. Model Neighborhood Networks centers exemplify excellence for the entire Neighborhood Networks initiative.

Classification Requirements

Designated Neighborhood Networks centers must have:

- A HUD-approved START business plan.
- At least one computer with Internet access.

Centers wishing to advance to **Certified** center classification must have:

- Designated center classification.
- A HUD-approved business plan using START.
- Been operational for 12 consecutive months.
- A HUD-accepted START center assessment and evaluation.

Model center classification is based on:

- Achievement of the Designated and Certified center classification standards.
- Achievement of Model center classification standards (refer to the Model center classification standards on the next page).



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There are 10 Model center classification standards, eight of which are mandatory. The chart lists each standard along with an explanation and the related supporting documentation that is required to apply for Model center classification.

Standard	Explanation	Documentation Required
Standard 1, Period of Operation (Mandatory). The center has been operational for three years.	The center has been open and offering programs and services for three years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ One HUD-approved START business plan. ➤ Three HUD-accepted assessments.
Standard 2, Resident Involvement (Mandatory). The center conducts resident surveys at least once every three years. The survey results are used to guide the choices of center programs and services.	Sufficient input from residents (the target population) is required to determine the programs and services they would value and use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ An initial resident survey (data entered into START). ➤ A follow-up resident survey (completed within three years and data entered into START). ➤ Listing of programs and services offered within the past three years.
Standard 3, Program Guidelines (Mandatory). Training and other programs include written curricula or program guidelines.	Programs and services offered should be guided by a written curriculum or program guidelines to ensure structure, organization, and outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A copy of each program curriculum or guideline. ➤ Written class description explaining learning objectives and expected (or achieved) outcomes.
Standard 4, Tracking, Evaluation and Reporting (Mandatory). The center has a system that tracks, evaluates, and reports the results of its program activities. The results are used to improve program performance and outcomes, and increase resident participation. <i>NOTE: The START center assessment and evaluation form meets this standard.</i>	Systems should be in place to track, evaluate, and report program outcomes; to determine whether outcomes meet expectations or whether improvement is needed; and to increase resident participation. For example, workforce development programs should track and report the types of jobs obtained by participants. When afterschool programming is provided, parent and school input should be sought to assess student needs, grades, test scores, and overall progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Written summary describing program outcomes. ➤ Description of the center's system for tracking, evaluating, and reporting on its programs. ➤ Description of how information collected is used to improve performance and outcomes and increase resident participation. ➤ Program/Services participation logs (sign-in sheet)
Standard 5, Partnerships (Mandatory). The center is actively engaged with a minimum of two partner entities.	The center should be actively involved with at least two partner entities by entering into and maintaining partnership agreements that specify roles, responsibilities,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A minimum of two written partnership agreements specifying roles, responsibilities, and services to be provided.



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Standard	Explanation	Documentation Required
	and services to be provided during a specific time frame.	
<p>Standard 6, Funding (Mandatory). The center engages in fund development to increase financial sustainability, and has submitted a minimum of three proposals in the past three years.</p>	<p>The center should use a variety of fund development mechanisms to finance current and future operations. The center should demonstrate the capacity to develop proposals to secure equipment, operate programs, maintain staff, and meet other center needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Copies of proposals submitted during the past three years. ➤ Sample materials from other types of fundraising efforts.
<p>Standard 7, Center Environment (Mandatory). The center environment has the following characteristics: (a) high-speed Internet access; (b) up-to-date and working equipment and operating systems; (c) accessible work space and equipment; (d) implemented security features; (e) operational for at least 30 hours weekly; and (f) attractive and clean physical facilities.</p>	<p>The center environment, both facilities and equipment, should reflect the dignity and respect afforded to the learning process. Residents and equipment should be secure. The center should operate for a sufficient number of hours to allow residents ample use of the facility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Operating statement that discusses items stated in the standard. ➤ Interior and exterior photographs of the center.
<p>Standard 8, Web Site Creation, (Mandatory). The center has a Web site.</p> <p><i>NOTE: The START Web site creation tool may be used to develop a center Web site to meet this standard.</i></p>	<p>The Web pages will provide information in an easy-to-use format about service providers and supportive service programs in each center's local area, e.g. workforce training programs, educational institutions and services, health-related services and health providers, and other supportive services that can help residents improve their educational, health, and economic status.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Web site URL. ➤ Links to the Web pages and other useful links. ➤ Active Web site marketing programs and services. ➤ Screen shots from the Web site. ➤ Date the Web site went live.
<p>Standard 9, 501(c)(3) (Optional). The center has obtained 501(c)(3) status or is aligned with a 501(c)(3) organization.</p>	<p>The 501(c)(3) status permits the center to seek and receive grants, contracts, and tax-deductible donations, thereby increasing opportunities for sustainability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Copy of 501(c)(3) letter of designation from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or copy of 501(c)(3) letter of designation from IRS for organization with which center is aligned. ➤ Letter of alignment from that organization (if applicable).



Standard	Explanation	Documentation Required
<p>Standard 10, Governance (Optional). A board of directors or similar body provides center governance.</p>	<p>A volunteer body representative of all center stakeholders should guide center operations and the center's director. The board should have regularly scheduled meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ List of governance body members and their affiliations. ➤ Copies of recent meeting minutes.

Center classification six-step process

The Neighborhood Networks Initiative has developed a six-step process for Neighborhood Networks centers to achieve the highest level of center classification, Model center classification.

Step 1: Receive HUD approval of START business plan. The center must have a HUD-approved START business plan to achieve Designated center classification.

Step 2: Obtain three HUD-accepted center assessments. The center must have one HUD-accepted center assessment and evaluation to achieve Certified center classification. Two more HUD-accepted center assessments are required for the center eligibility to apply for Model center classification.

Step 3: Gather Model center classification supporting documentation. Collect supporting documents for each Model standard listed above.

Step 4: Submit the Model center classification request form. The Model center classification request form is submitted online through START.

Step 5: Submit Model center classification supporting documentation. The supporting documentation must be submitted in a three-ring binder for verification. Mailing instructions are available on the Model center classification request form. Eligibility for Model center classification is also reviewed by the HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator and the Neighborhood Networks National Director.

Step 6: Achieve Model center classification. After meeting all Model center classification standards and other due diligence, the center receives a Model center classification award and is recognized as a centerpiece of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. The center is also added to the Model center classification list featured on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

“Our mission is to improve self-reliance through educational, employment, and professional opportunities. We felt that receiving Model status was more validation that our center is indeed a success.”

[Carolyn Harris, center director, Community Network Learning Center, Model center classification, Huntsville, Alabama]

“As a result of achieving Model center classification, the center has received free press, advertising, more donations, and additional volunteers. People want to be part of something that is great. This produces more community involvement for the Neighborhood Networks center.”

[Jennifer Williams, senior property manager, Interfaith Homes, Model center classification, Neighborhood Networks Center]



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“Achieving Model center classification enhances the center’s image in the surrounding community. Both our residents and our partners are also impressed that Dartmouth Square Computer Learning Center has been recognized for attaining a nationally-recognized measure of high performance.”

[Sonya L. Manners, executive director, Dartmouth Square Computer Learning Center, Model center classification, Inkster, Michigan]

Additional information and step-by-step instructions on advancing through the Neighborhood Networks Center Classification process are available in the START Workbook and User Guide. Interested stakeholders may also visit HUD’s Multifamily Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org or contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center’s toll-free number at 888-312-2743 for assistance with applying for advanced center classification status. The hearing impaired may access Neighborhood Networks via TTY by calling the Federal Information Relay Service at 800-877-8339.