

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
October 29, 2008
3 p.m. (EST)

Operator: Welcome to the Neighborhood Networks monthly conference call. Today's conference is being recorded.

At this time I would like to turn the conference over to Michele Higgs.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Tomeka. Happy New Year and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks October conference call. I'm Michele Higgs and today I'm joined by Technical Assistance Coordinators Cheryl Dixon and Jonathan Rogers, as well as Brian Franke, who is the senior project coordinator for partnerships and consortia development. Together, we represent the technical assistance team that works with you to address the needs of Neighborhood Networks centers around the country.

Today's call is entitled "Technical Assistance, the Key to Success in Self Sufficiency." I opened this call with a greeting of a new year, and indeed, it is a new year, a new fiscal year, and a whole new year of activities and opportunities for Neighborhood Networks centers. But I'm not going to give up any of our speaker's secrets right now.

Instead I'm going to turn the floor over to the National Director for the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, Ms. Delores Pruden. Delores, would you please kick off this call?

Delores Pruden: I would love to Michele, thank you very much. Hello to everyone. And as Michele said, welcome to this first Neighborhood Networks conference call of the 2009 fiscal year.

For Neighborhood Networks, the beginning of the fiscal year, October 1, 2008, is the beginning of a new contract year. During this year, HUD, through its Neighborhood Networks contractor, the DB Consulting Group, will provide technical assistance to Neighborhood Networks stakeholders that will help sustain centers. Technical assistance will be provided via conference calls, onsite visits, conferences and workshops, and various publications. And this year, HUD is planning to introduce interactive virtual learning. You will hear more about this activity and the upcoming workshops during the spring of 2009.

As the conference call announcement stated, technical assistance is one of the key components of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. The technical assistance process is designed to increase centers' and residents' sustainability. Hundreds of Neighborhood Networks centers and several Neighborhood Networks consortia have benefited from receiving onsite technical assistance. This call will discuss technical assistance for centers and consortia, and the positive outcome Neighborhood Networks stakeholders can expect as a result.

I will now turn the presentation over to the technical assistance team. We look forward to working with you throughout this year. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thanks Delores for joining us. And we appreciate you getting this call started.

Today's call will be presented to you by the people who know Neighborhood Networks best, the technical assistance staff members. I'll introduce each of our speakers along with the roles they play in just a moment.

But first I want to welcome our newest centers and remind them of the resources that they acquire as Neighborhood Networks centers. This month there are 11.

- St. Sophia Apartments Computer Learning Center in New York.
- Delaware Manor, Neighborhood Networks Center in Michigan.
- Providence of Bloomington Enrichment Center in Indiana.
- Delhi Senior Community Neighborhood Networks Center in New York.
- The Atlantic Terrace and Community Neighborhood Networks Center in Washington, D.C.
- Lend-a- Hand Neighborhood Networks in Iowa.
- Chateau Cushnoc Neighborhood Networks Center in Maine.
- Ridge Brook Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Tennessee.
- General Chauncey Hooper Neighborhood Networks Center in New York.
- Eagle Ridge Neighborhood Networks Center in Pennsylvania
- The Federation Square Computer Center in Connecticut.

Eleven centers. That's a great way to start off our year. Welcome to all of you. Welcome to the Neighborhood.

Let me tell you about the resources available to help you guide your center to success. First, we'll talk a bit about START, the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool. START is an online resource that helps you contemplate your residents' needs, determine the resources in your community that can address those needs, and helps you track the partnerships that can attend to those needs.

START is a key to developing partnerships and can serve as the institutional memory for your organization, creating the foundation upon which you can organize your activities. You can access the START business plan by visiting the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. On the Web site, you can also learn about funding

opportunities and special events and connect with your peers. Let me also remind listeners that a transcript of this call will be available on the Web site in about two weeks, and you can access it at the bottom of the homepage.

Remember, if you have questions about the START business plan or resident surveys, success stories, special event ideas, or general questions about the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, you can call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line, which is (888) 312-2743. Also try online networking through the Neighborhood Networks online message board. You can share information with other centers and post news about your center. Although it is not a real-time resource, you can post your information and then revisit the board in about a day or so to see the responses you've received.

Just go to 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".

And let me tell you about something else new this year. I'm sure many of you have had the opportunity to attend our Regional Technical Assistance Workshops, or RTAWs, and have been dazzled by the creativity of the presentations. Well, we're planning now for the upcoming RTAWs and we would like to invite you to propose topics or even present a session. Just give us a call on the toll-free line, (888) 312-2743, and we'll take it from there. For those of you would like to participate in focus group calls to share your ideas and input about the content for the RTAWs, focus group calls will be held next month and information will be e-mailed to all centers and posted to the Web site shortly.

Now, today's call is to familiarize you with the process of technical assistance and all that it means for your Neighborhood Networks centers. We've broken the topic down into two sections;

technical assistance, which will be presented by Cheryl Dixon and Jonathan Rogers, and consortia, which will be presented by Brian Franke.

Every autumn you hear from technical assistance coordinators (TA coordinators) announcing the nomination period of onsite technical assistance. Well, there's a reason for that. When centers engage in self- assessment with the guidance of a TA coordinator they get to study the effectiveness of their activities. Plus center staffs learn what Neighborhood Networks resources and community resources they can utilize to help their centers and residents attain self sustainability.

So with that, I'm going to turn the call over to Cheryl, Jonathan, and Brian. We'll start with Cheryl who's going to give us an outline of the technical assistance process.

Cheryl Dixon: Thanks, Michele. Good afternoon. I'd like to say welcome to everyone that's been a part of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative and a special greeting to center representatives. We know how much you do to support the Initiative in sustaining your centers and improving the quality of life for residents and we thank you for your hard work and achievements.

I thought that I might start with a rundown of what to expect from this discussion on technical assistance pertaining to Neighborhood Networks centers. First, I'd like to talk briefly, and particularly for new centers, about what technical assistance is and how it can help your center, then talk about the nomination process for receiving onsite technical assistance for those centers eligible to receive it. Second, I'll discuss the kind of information you can begin to gather to complete the required nomination forms.

I hope that you will be better able to understand the benefits of receiving technical assistance, a free service available to Neighborhood Networks centers. So we'll begin by defining technical assistance. The Neighborhood Networks technical assistance process supports center staff in

the development of programs and services. It helps build a center's capacity to operate efficiently, measure performance, establish vital partnerships, and create programs that will lead to employment and self-sufficiency for residents.

Technical assistance is provided within specific categories, including local partnership development and maintenance. Partnership development is the process of identifying and building relationships with both individuals and organizations that provide resources for the center or its residents. Neighborhood Networks centers can develop a variety of programs and services by partnering with local community organizations, businesses, and even educational institutions.

During onsite technical assistance, the TA coordinator will train the center staff on asset mapping to identify resources aligned with your center's mission and work with center representatives to conduct partnership meetings and formalize partnership agreements.

Another category of technical assistance is workforce development or expansion. Technical assistance is provided to help centers develop employment or educational resources to enable residents to become more competitive in the local job market. The TA coordinator will research employment trends within the center's immediate area and work closely with workforce development agencies to develop or expand the programs that most effectively fit the needs of center participants.

Centers may develop many types of workforce development programs, such as general educational development or GED, English as a second language, or ESL, resume writing, job search, job training or workshops, such as "Dress for Success." These programs are established both on the property and in partnership with outside agencies, such as the Department of Labor's One-Stop Career Centers.

A third category of technical assistance is tracking and evaluation of performance. The TA coordinator will assess your center's existing tracking, evaluation and reporting techniques. And, if needed, the TA coordinator will work to create an evaluation tool that will effectively track, evaluate, and report on your centers' programs and outcomes.

For example, the TA coordinator might identify and suggest alternate methods of tracking your residents' program participation using START, or options for assessing the outcomes of your center programs and activities. This will assist in improved program development for your center and its funding efforts because the center's potential funders want to know about your center's activities and the audience it is serving.

Another category of technical assistance is START, the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, which includes business plan development. The TA coordinator will assist the center in creating or updating the HUD-approved business plan in START. Centers will receive training during onsite technical assistance by reviewing the START user guide, receiving instructions on collecting data, and receiving a START tutorial.

START is an Internet-based business planning tool that you can access through the Neighborhood Networks Web site. It includes information on a center's mission, operations planning, demographics, budgets, and marketing planning. It also includes information for stakeholders, such as potential and actual partners for the center.

START includes features that allow for tracking, program assessment, and Web page development, which we'll discuss shortly.

Another required area or category of technical assistance is Web page development. This is actually a new required technical category and we're very excited about it. Web page development will include center-specific information such as class schedules and operating

hours. It will also include information about service providers, and supportive service programs within the center's local area. Jonathan Rogers, my colleague and fellow TA coordinator, will talk about this category in a few minutes.

You'll also receive more information about outreach and marketing, program development, organizational development and annual assessment.

There are two types of technical assistance available, onsite and remote technical assistance. Remote technical assistance provides support to the Neighborhood Networks centers via e-mail, telephone, and fax. All Neighborhood Networks centers may receive remote technical assistance by utilizing the toll-free technical assistance line at (888) 312-2743. Please don't hesitate to call if you need help with any of the technical assistance categories that I just mentioned. You may already use the technical assistance line for help with your START business plan. But we can also provide help in such matters as event planning at your center. We are always available and happy to assist you.

Centers will also find technical assistance by navigating through the Neighborhood Networks Web site, www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org, and its many available resources including direct links funding opportunities, national partners, consortia, online publications, like the technical assistance resource guide and educational toolkit, or TARGET, and the START workbook.

Now that we have a better idea of what technical assistance is, let's discuss in more detail what occurs during the nomination process of onsite technical assistance for those centers eligible to receive it.

Each year Neighborhood Networks provides 50 multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers with the opportunity to receive onsite technical assistance. This is a competitive process. There are about 1,400 centers, but we can only select up to 50 each year. Centers that have received

onsite technical assistance in the past may reapply and be selected provided two years have passed since last receiving onsite technical assistance. The nomination process, conducted between October and December, involves the selection of qualified Neighborhood Networks centers to receive onsite technical assistance. When you receive the nomination information, please take time to read the letter and review the technical assistance guidelines before submitting the onsite technical assistance request forms.

Centers may nominate themselves by completing the request form or be recommended by their HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator who submits the form on the center's behalf. TA coordinators begin by contacting HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, center staff, property owners, and management staff by phone, fax, or e-mail to explain the benefits and expectations of engaging in the technical assistance process. The nomination letter describes in detail the categories of technical assistance offered and attaches an onsite technical assistance request form. Each center that submits a request form is contacted to determine eligibility. The deadline date is around mid-November. Submission information is indicated in the nomination letter and the request form.

If you do not receive a nomination letter and request form within the next two weeks or by November 12th, or if you need help completing your request form, please call the toll-free technical assistance line, (888) 312-2743. We will assist you immediately.

All Neighborhood Networks centers requesting technical assistance must agree to the following minimal expected outcomes or MEOs:

- Develop at least one local partnership.
- Establish or expand a workforce development program.
- Develop or enhance tracking, evaluation, and reporting capabilities.
- Update the center's business plan using START.

- Develop a customized, one-stop shop Web page, and if requested, follow through on 501 (c)(3) applications.

As promised, we'll give you a little bit more information on one of the new categories of technical assistance, the customized one-stop shop Web page.

Michele Higgs: And to do that we're going to ask Jonathan Rogers to give us the overview.

Jonathan Rogers: Thanks, Michele. As you just heard, technical assistance now includes the development of customized one-stop shop Web pages using START. Just as participants gain technology access, centers receiving technical assistance will benefit from customized Web pages to promote their programs and resources. With guidance developing and maintaining free Web pages, centers will be able to advertise schedules and events to residents, highlight community partnerships, communicate with stakeholders and much more. A free one-stop shop Web page will help secure participation, partners, and publicity for your center.

Michele Higgs: That's good. You know what I'd like to do? You've given us a lot of information, I'd like to stop now and see if we have any questions.

Michele Higgs: Tomeka.

Operator: Yes, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: Can we check and see if we've got any questions for Cheryl or Jonathan at this point?

Operator: Sure, no problem. The question-and-answer session will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, please do so by pressing star one on your touch-tone telephone. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, that is star one.

We will take our first question from Mary Francis Byrd with the U.S. Department of HUD.

Mary Francis Byrd: Yes, I was just wondering about the nominations that a Coordinator might have sent in for technical assistance. Will you all send those request forms to the centers? Because I nominated some centers via e-mail without the forms.

Cheryl Dixon: Yes. All of the forms that are submitted by HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators receive particular attention. And yes, the centers will be contacted directly to obtain additional information to assess their eligibility to receive the onsite technical assistance.

Mary Francis Byrd: OK. Thank you.

Cheryl Dixon: You're welcome.

Operator: There are no further questions at this time.

Cheryl Dixon: OK. I'll continue then. In addition to the required technical assistance categories which form the MEOs, there are also other optional technical assistance categories such as outreach and marketing that a center may elect. Each of these technical assistance categories will be more fully explained in the nomination letter.

Centers selected to receive onsite technical assistance must be approved by their property management staff. Each selected center receives two onsite visits from the TA coordinator assigned exclusively to the center. The first onsite visit occurs between January and March. The second visit takes place two to six months later. As an aside, the site visits are great experiences that allow for more personal contact between TA coordinators and center stakeholders including residents, property owners, managers, and potential partners.

We share a lot of information. TA coordinators provide training on the technical assistance categories, and centers share additional information about their center's history, programs and services, challenges, and successes.

During the technical assistance process, weekly contact with your TA coordinator is also required. This is a very important part of technical assistance. The TA coordinators want to ensure that centers receive the best possible services, and ensure that the established goals are met. Weekly commitment to communicate goals status ensures the quality of technical assistance services.

Once you receive your nomination letter and onsite technical assistance request form, here are some suggestions to facilitate your completion of the request form. It is suggested that you gather center contact information, including the name, address, e-mail address, phone and fax numbers, and contact information for the property management company and property owner. Also locate your HUD-approved business plan and find out the approval date. Identify the name of your HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, which may be found on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

Next, read carefully through the technical assistance categories that are offered and make your selections, including any desired optional categories of technical assistance.

Finally, you'll have an opportunity to provide detailed information about your center's needs. Please think about this section carefully and identify specific areas that are in need at your center, and ways that technical assistance could assist you. Whether you call to receive assistance in completing a request form, or you complete it on your own, please e-mail it back to us. There will be a designated e-mail address identified in the nomination letter.

We hope that we have just demystified the process of applying for technical assistance and encourage you to consider applying or reapplying. The benefits of receiving free technical assistance include a thorough identification of and navigation through the wealth of resources that are available to you. We provide a customized service and personal attention to your specific center needs. And as Michele hinted earlier, stay tuned, we have new and exciting learning experiences planned for this year, virtual learning classes.

Successful technical assistance for centers hinges on determining the center's needs, developing a technical assistance plan, completing onsite technical assistance visits, and conducting remote technical assistance. It's like getting an additional staff person to assist you with improving the efficiency and effectiveness of all center operations. We provide ongoing advice, and guidance throughout the technical assistance year and monitor the progress each center makes in achieving goals set forth within action plans. Strategic planning, staffing, and budgeting are just some of the additional areas that technical assistance might encompass. Additionally, we work with you to guide you to improve your Center Classification and the center assessments that are needed for this.

As part of the technical assistance process, therefore, those 50 centers that are selected will be contacted again to undergo a more thorough analysis and assessment of their strengths and weaknesses so that a well thought out and specific action plan strengthening the center's operations can be developed. My fellow TA coordinators and I look forward to another wonderful year working with you and your Neighborhood Networks centers to ensure long-term center success and sustainability.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Cheryl. I do want to say that Cheryl has done a yeoman's job in going through all of this information to be certain that you get as many details as you can. One thing that she covered in talking about the technical assistance categories is that the advanced Center

Classification as one of the areas that is covered. That means covering those areas that you may be weak in so that your center can move up to the next level in Center Classification.

What I'd like to do at this moment is move on to Brian with a discussion of consortia.

Brian Franke: Thank you, Michele, and good afternoon to everyone that's on the line today. My name is Brian Franke and I am part of the consortia team. Today I'll be talking about the technical assistance services that are available to a consortium to further develop its abilities and capacities to become an organization representing Neighborhood Networks centers. Our technical assistance services have recently been expanded to include additional areas of technical assistance that did not exist before, and I'm going to explain those new areas shortly.

Before getting into the services, for anyone on the call today that is not part of a consortium I would like to explain what a consortium is and how it can benefit your center. A consortium is a group of Neighborhood Networks centers within a geographical area that get together to collectively address sustainability challenges. For example, we often hear that funding or building partnerships are challenges that Neighborhood Networks centers face daily, which impact their sustainability. A consortium enables Neighborhood Networks centers to form an organization that can deal with these challenges.

I'd like to point out several of the benefits that Neighborhood Networks centers obtain in forming or becoming part of a consortium. One is that Neighborhood Networks centers meet and network with each other to share ideas and best practices, on such issues as programs, staffing, or funding.

A second benefit in forming a consortium is that Neighborhood Networks centers can have their concerns addressed. Many centers may be going through or have gone through similar situations concerning the development of programs or how to get residents to participate in their

programs or even how to obtain funding for their center. These concerns can be addressed by other Neighborhood Networks centers that are consortium members.

Third, a consortium allows for the sharing of resources and making connections with external stakeholders such as funders, or larger nonprofits, such as the United Way, for example. These connections and resources can support the consortium's efforts as well as individual Neighborhood Networks center efforts.

A consortium also creates an organization. What I mean by that is that the consortium that we have developed and work with forms boards. They form committees. They develop leadership skills among their members. They aim to fulfill a mission and they develop goals and objectives based on the member's input.

Finally, another benefit of consortium membership is that the consortium can apply for 501 (c)(3) nonprofit status. Plus, the consortium can act as an umbrella organization for its members to attract funding, apply for grants, or even accept donations.

There are currently 23 active consortia across the country. Some of you on the call today may belong to one of them. I'd like to point out that consortia serve different geographical areas. For example, we have consortia that include centers from an entire state, such as California. But we also have consortia that serve metropolitan areas such as those in Philadelphia and New York City.

For those of you that are not part of a consortium or want to find out if a consortium exists in your area, you can find an updated list on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. On the home page's left hand menu, you will see a link called "consortia." When you click on that link, you can find a list of consortia to see if there is one in your area.

I also encourage you to call our toll-free line (888) 312-2743 to find out how to contact a consortium in your area. I'd now to describe the technical assistance services that consortia can receive. As I said before, we have some new areas of technical assistance this year, and in the future as well.

One of the first pieces of technical assistance that we provide to new consortia as well as revived consortia is a strategic plan. As a point of information, revived consortia are existing consortia that are currently inactive. A strategic plan builds a consortium from the bottom up. One of the critical areas of technical assistance we provide, a strategic plan is a comprehensive plan that establishes the consortium's mission, its goals and objectives, strategies, as well as a role for its members. It is a plan that envisions what the consortium will become over a period of one or more years. So we make strategic plans a priority when working with consortia.

The second area of technical assistance is board development. The forming of a consortium board is necessary because it provides leadership and directs the decision making for the group. When we work with new or revived consortia, we create boards and find leaders to fill the positions of president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. We also help to develop strategies and policies that will govern the consortium for years to come.

A third area of technical assistance is action planning. An action plan puts the strategic plan into motion through the establishment of timelines, implementation, roles and responsibilities for the consortium. Technical assistance aids the consortium in developing an action plan that is both manageable and realistic.

Two areas that are especially popular among consortia are funding development and grant writing.

If your consortium is looking to acquire funding such as grants, or donations, we provide assistance that will develop a fundraising plan. We'll lead you through strategies for raising local as well as national funds.

In terms of grant writing, let's say your consortium would like to submit grant proposals our understand how to read a grant and its requirements from a funder. We will show you how to write a grant proposal, understand all its components, and learn how to effectively maintain relationships with funders should you receive grants for your consortium.

Another major benefit of technical assistance is 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Joining a consortium designates allows you access to tax-exempt benefits. With this status, you can apply for grants and receive donations. The technical assistance in this category is two-fold. With consortia that do not have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, we will help you complete the paper work for attaining it. For consortia that all ready have 501(c)(3) status, we will provide follow-up services for maintaining your 501(c)(3) status, including how to file your 990 form to the IRS, keeping accurate records of your finances, and the best use of 501(c)(3) status.

Of the newer areas of technical assistance that we will provide to consortia, the first is outreach and marketing. For your consortium to attract the attention of stakeholders or obtain new members, we will devise strategies for developing an outreach and marketing planning, and we'll teach how to develop outreach and marketing materials, such as brochures and business cards.

Another new area of technical assistance is organizational development, which focuses on a consortium's internal structure, management, staff and overall capacities. We offer assistance in developing management practices, including constructing a budget, professional development of your consortium staff.

A third area is tracking and evaluation. Similar to Cheryl's description of technical assistance for centers, this new area will focus on collecting, managing, and evaluating data and information for your consortium for more effective and efficient decision making. This will help consortia obtain grants, as funders are requiring more tracking and evaluation of your programs.

The last category I'll talk about is partnership development. Partnerships provide crucial resources that enhance your programs, staffing and much, much more. We will help consortia develop a partnership during onsite technical assistance. Consortia will be required to develop at least one partnership during technical assistance.

In terms of the nomination process, the nomination forms packet will soon be mailed. The packet will be sent to centers, HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, and consortia leaders. The forms will provide details on the requirements and the criteria for receiving technical assistance if you are a consortium or if you would like to start or revive a consortium.

Finally, I would like to describe what happens after you have been selected to receive onsite technical assistance. We will be working with a total of three new or revived consortia and each of them will receive four visits during the year. For an already existing consortium, we can provide up to two visits annually depending on your needs, and we will work with you throughout the year. The onsite visits are between one and four days in length.

Consortia that are either not selected or do not apply can take advantage of our remote technical assistance by calling the Neighborhood Networks toll-free line. We're happy to address any challenges or concerns you may have. At this time, I'd be happy to take any questions from the audience.

Michele Higgs: Tomeka, do we have anyone on the line either for Brian or for Cheryl?

Operator: Thank you. And once again, that is star one if you would like to ask a question today. We'll take a question from Veronica Sanders with Neighborhood Networks.

Veronica Sanders: Yes, this is Veronica Sanders calling from Neighborhood Networks. Good afternoon everyone. How will the new Web page market center services and programs to their stakeholders and people in the immediate area? Thank you.

Cheryl Dixon: Actually, Veronica, I'd like to turn that question over to Jonathan. I think he's our Web page expert.

Jonathan Rogers: Thank you, Cheryl. The Web page can be really useful for centers in attracting stakeholders and potential partners in the community. You can reward partners for their participation by advertising and highlighting that partnership on your Web site's community partner section. The Web site also allows your center to be discovered by potential partners as it increases the center's presence in the community. By building the center's reputation and presence in the community, the Web site attracts new partners and stakeholders.

Operator: And once again, that is star one to ask a question. And we do have a question from Mary Francis Byrd with HUD.

Mary Francis Byrd: I was just wondering what your thoughts are about individual center outreach for funding versus consortium?

Michele Higgs: That's one of the things that we address when we are working with individual centers. We teach them about grantwriting and looking out for their own interest. With the consortium, it's the kind of thing where a group makes a lot more noise than just one person. And it's much stronger for a number of people to solicit funding than just one. Does that help?

Cheryl Dixon: I'd like also like to add something. The experience has been the particular type of grant, sometimes the size of an organization, or the location of an organization could make a difference. An individual center should decide when it would benefit it to join with others for a particular type of grant. For example, if a grant requirement is that you would need a particular location or geographic region. You take advantage of whichever route offers you the greatest ability to get that grant.

Sometimes what's great about these consortia is that you have numbers. You have shared resources an individual may not have. For example, it may be required that you have a certain size center staff to apply for a grant. While you might not be able to do that individually, collectively you'll have those numbers. So I think you have to look at the particular opportunity and decide whether it would be to your advantage to go alone or with a group.

Brian Franke: I'll add a couple of points to this question. Number one, for fundraising, it helps for the consortium to have 501(c)(3) status especially to apply for grants because that's usually a requirement from funders. The centers who are consortium members benefit as the consortium can serve as a fiscal sponsor to them.

The second point is that funders are giving out money to organizations that are doing more collaborative work. So if a funder looked a consortium versus an individual center they may be more likely to give it to a consortium because of its network. The group of centers that work on a regional basis have a better idea of some of the issues for which the grant is awarding money.

Michele Higgs: Does that answer your question, Mary Francis?

Mary Francis Byrd: Yes. It's just, realistically, every center is different. And I've had some say they would rather get their own one 501(c)(3).

Michele Higgs: Thanks for calling in.

Operator: There appears to be no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: OK. Did any of our speakers have any further comments? One of the things that I wanted to say is that the current movement is to look at more collaborative efforts when organizations are working within the community or working with like organizations. Funders cast a brighter light on them than towards the individual lone wolf of the world.

When a group is working towards a common purpose, and is more likely to get results than by any one of them acting alone, that's where I see the whole consortium movement benefiting our centers. If they get together and they're sharing best practices, sharing ideas, finding out that they're not out there by themselves, it's so much better.

And that's enough for me.

Brian Franke: Yes, I would add to that. A consortium is sort of like the old saying two heads are better than one. Consortia have been very successful in getting center staff together, sharing ideas, and seeing how other centers have advanced and learned to assess challenges and get past them.

Because funding is always one of the number one things we hear about, a lot of consortium that are out there have experience in obtaining funds, in writing grants. Those skills that individuals bring to the table can be transferred. It's just a matter of getting people together and having those discussions.

Michele Higgs: Tomeka, I'm going to ask if there's anyone on the line with a question.

Operator: And as a final reminder, that is star one if you do have a question. We'll take a followup from Veronica Sanders with Neighborhood Networks.

Michele Higgs: Veronica.

Veronica Sanders: Yes. I had a situation in which I was providing technical assistance to centers in Southwest Texas and they were in need of a consortium in that area. The two centers shared the same property owner and they were duplicating their efforts. One of the centers is a nonprofit, growing organization. What would be some qualifications that they would need to form a consortium because each center was doing basically the same thing? They're tripping over each other's toes, instead of just doing the same thing and sharing resources.

Brian Franke: Right. Well, that's certainly a duplication of efforts, which is an inefficient way of going about things. You probably have more information on what their issues were but they could certainly form a consortium. I don't know if this is in a specific city or if they were spread out. Because they were under the same property management company, if that management company has a model for them to follow, it would be helpful for them to at least collaborate.

In terms of requirements for them to form a consortium, we do need the commitment of three to five of these centers to receive technical assistance. Since this would be a new group, they would have to commit to getting four visits throughout the year to form a strategic plan and develop a partnership. They all have to be recognized Neighborhood Networks centers; they have to have a START business plan. These are some of the criteria for forming a new group.

Michele Higgs: I think that's helpful because I'm certain that the question floating on many people's minds is "How do we form a consortium?"

Brian Franke: I should also add it's important for the HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator in that area to be involved because the Coordinators are instrumental in providing information, getting people together, and promoting the consortium to centers. The other piece is based on what the group wants to do in terms of its membership; any Neighborhood Networks center in this region of Texas can become a member. It doesn't necessarily have to be under that property management company. It could be formed by another property management company. But it depends on what the group wants to do in terms of its membership.

Veronica Sanders: Just to add to what Mary Francis was saying, they do have a consortium in North Texas. And since this is in Southwest Texas, would they be able to contact someone for some of the centers in Southwest Texas? I'm talking about in Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Harlingen and New Burnsville.

Brian Franke: Sure. There are actually two consortia in Texas. There's one in Dallas and one in Houston. The geographical scope of those two consortia will better answer that question. We could certainly put them in touch with the leaders of those two consortia to see if they're looking to expand their membership.

Michele Higgs: May I jump in with another question? Because I've worked with a few centers in Texas, I know we're talking about vast distances. In terms of creating consortia in geographical areas, is what ideas do the centers have that want to develop the consortium? Do they have to be a certain number of miles away? If you're thinking north Texas, south Texas is a long distance and they may not ever be able to get together. Would they only be able to work electronically?

Brian Franke: Right. I think these days that's possible. Because of distance issues or logistic issues, members don't physically have to be there. In the past some consortia used a Yahoo! group where people can communicate on a message board and send each other e-mails. Putting a contact list together is another good starting point. Some consortia have gone as far as setting

up a conference call line. That way, any time they have meetings and people have to stay at their center, they can just call in and participate on the conference call. So certainly the technology is there. There's no distance when it comes to technology.

Michele Higgs: Sounds good. Veronica was that the end of your questions?

Veronica Sanders: Yes, it was.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you. Tomeka, have we anyone else on the line?

Operator: We do have a question from Mary Francis Byrd with HUD.

Michele Higgs: Mary Francis.

Mary Francis Byrd: Hi. Well you know the board of directors of a consortium is made up of volunteers. It's a real challenge because they're very busy with their own professions and lives. It's also a very big challenge, I think, to have a consortium. Of course, everything is a challenge, isn't it?

Michele Higgs: Oh goodness, I think you're right. But just as Brian was saying, with technology being the way it is, you can have a meeting with your Blackberry while you're sitting in the airport with somebody else riding down the road with their cell phones. So it may not be as tough as you think to catch up with those busy people because if they're busy they also have lots of ways to work. And they won't have to be present at all times. They can use all kinds of technology to get things going.

Brian Franke: Yes, I would say that that certainly is something we recognize because the board is made up of people that work at Neighborhood Networks centers and they are extremely busy. They don't always have time to devote to a consortium. But as consortia evolve, they are open to

having other members outside of Neighborhood Networks centers. They could bring partners to the table.

Mary Francis Byrd: Yes, well we have the Houston Community College.

Brian Franke: It depends what they want to do as a group. Time is certainly significant; consortia members need to be realistic when they develop a strategic plan. Additionally, when people are assigned roles and responsibilities on a volunteer basis, they must be realistic in terms of what they can and cannot do.

Mary Francis Byrd: Well, I think it's very important that consortia get technical assistance.

Michele Higgs: Good, just so that they can learn these kinds of things.

Mary Francis Byrd: Yes.

Brian Franke: Right. A goal of technical assistance is to attract funding so consortia budgets include paid staff, rather than volunteers. Paid staff can fulfill these tasks and functions and that's all part of the growing process. But it starts with the volunteer board members. They know Neighborhood Networks the best, and they know the issues and challenges at their center, and other centers.

Mary Francis Byrd: Well, I think, you've aptly put it when you identified it as a growing process.

Brian Franke: Right. As an organization, it goes through its lifecycle and technical assistance is there to help it grow.

Mary Francis Byrd: That's right. One hundred people, 100 different ways.

Michele Higgs: There you go. Thanks, Mary Francis.

Operator: And there appears to be a follow-up question from Veronica Sanders with Neighborhood Networks.

Veronica Sanders: Yes, just a suggestion in terms of technology. The individuals for the consortium could always use Web cams and computers and hold the meeting in real time while located in different locations.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Tomeka, anyone else on the line?

Operator: There appears to be no further questions at this time. I'll return the conference back over to our speakers for any additional or closing comments.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well, that's the word. Closing it is. We've come to the end of the October conference call. Thank you all so much. Just let me remind you of the resources that are available to 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 that question on the Neighborhood Networks online message board where either staff or your peers will see to it that your question gets attention.

You can always call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line with questions at (888) 312-2743. Also you'll find abundant resources and current information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. And don't forget, we're going to talk to you about your ideas for topics for the upcoming RTAW. So you can call the toll-free information

line at (888) 312-2743 or sit in for one of the focus group calls. You'll be getting information about those next month. We're eager to get your suggestions.

Remember, creativity reigns. Again, call the toll-free information line at (888) 312-2743 to talk about your topic or the session that you'd like to present.

Thanks to all of you for joining us today. I want to thank Cheryl Dixon, Jonathan Rogers, and Brian Franke for sharing the mystery and mastery of technical assistance and consortia development with us today. We look forward to working with you all this year.

As Cheryl noted, technical assistance is an opportunity to get to know the residents and the stakeholders as well as us. Developing a consortium in your area will give you a chance to get to know what other centers are doing and share the best practices that help centers grow.

Thank you again for joining us. Look for the announcement for our November call. We thank you again. Take good care and we'll talk to you next time.

Operator: That concludes today's conference call. We thank you all for your participation and you may now disconnect.

END