

Quarterly Consortia Conference Call Summary

Neighborhood Networks Quarterly Conference Call “Understanding the Neighborhood Networks Consortium” December 6, 2005

On December 6, 2005, Neighborhood Networks held the first of four quarterly consortia conference calls. The topic of the call was “Understanding the Neighborhood Networks Consortium.” Two guest speakers from existing Neighborhood Networks Consortia were featured: Cynthia Brown represented South Carolina Advancing Community Technology (South Carolina ACT), a group that started in 2005; and Jessica Venegas participated on the call on behalf of the National Capital Area Neighborhood Networks Consortium, based in Washington, D.C., and the Neighborhood Networks National Consortium (NNNC). Both Brown and Venegas were chosen as speakers because of their experience in the consortium development and maintenance. The call also featured Neighborhood Networks Consortium Development Team members Kenya Crumel and Tara McCall.

The call focused on the technical assistance support that will be provided to new and existing Neighborhood Networks consortia in 2006. The available technical assistance is aimed at improving the current organizational capacity of existing consortia and assisting in the planning and development process for the Neighborhood Networks centers contemplating forming a consortium. It was explained that staff would assist consortia in the following areas: strategic planning, identifying funding opportunities, board development, grantwriting techniques, and applying for 501(c)(3) status. Crumel noted that the ultimate goal is to provide resources that will ensure the future growth and success of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. The guest speakers spoke about their experience with the consortium development process, national partnerships, and the NNNC.

Highlights from the Call:

- Crumel explained the benefits of consortium development. She stated that the benefits of consortium membership include access to a larger, more resourceful network of Neighborhood Network centers, increased partnership opportunities, more funding opportunities, and the possibility of gaining 501(c)(3) status. Consortium membership gives individual Neighborhood Networks centers the opportunity to share resources and ideas, which allows them to address challenges and achieve goals together. Additional benefits include increased networking opportunities, resource sharing, community empowerment, political participation, increased access to funding, nonprofit or 501(c)(3) status, increased exposure, the ability to leverage resources, resources for sustainability, technical assistance, organizational development, and staff development. Joining or starting a Neighborhood Networks consortium offers considerable benefits to both centers and the surrounding community.

Brown of South Carolina ACT responded to questions regarding the consortium development process and noted that participating in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis allowed her to better understand the common challenges Neighborhood Networks centers faced in her area, and enabled the members to develop goals that would benefit the group as a whole. Venegas described how the NNNC is working to meet the needs of centers and consortia nationwide. She explained that since each of the NNNC board members went through the consortia development process, they are in a great position to

determine what the needs are locally at each of their consortia, and to highlight those needs on a national level. After talking about some general needs, the NNNC board came up with four core objectives: resource development, partnership development, technical assistance and training, and public awareness. Conference call participants were encouraged to become members of the NNNC via their Web site (www.nationalnnc.org).

- Staff members discussed the impact of national partnership for Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers. McCall explained that an important component of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative involves building partnerships with national organizations, many of which pave the way for collaborations between local Neighborhood Networks centers and organizations of varying size and scope. Partnerships can vary in length and scope and can range from organizing a single event to multiyear agreements striving to train and place residents in jobs. By partnering with the national public or private organization, Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers can access products and services negotiated between Neighborhood Networks and the national partner. There are a number of national partnerships that are making a difference in the lives of thousands of people who participate in Neighborhood Networks, and each year, more partnerships are developed to better serve the needs and populations of Neighborhood Networks centers.

The call concluded with a general question-and-answer period for participants on the call. The speakers responded to questions regarding the time commitment necessary to build a Neighborhood Networks consortium and the benefits of consortium membership. Additional conference calls will be held on March 7, 2006, on the topic of financial literacy; June 6, 2006 – “Innovative Technology;” and September 12, 2006 – “Basics in Consortia Board Development.”