

NETWORK NEWS



T.E.A.M.: Together Everyone Achieves More

**DELIVERING
TECHNOLOGY
ACCESS TO
AMERICA'S
COMMUNITIES**

Life is full of unknowns, but there are a few things that we know for certain. We know that nothing lasts forever. The sun will rise in the East and set in the West. And, change is inevitable. If you are part of Neighborhood Networks, you can add another item to your list of life's certainties. You know that fulfilling the mission of Neighborhood Networks is not a one-person job. To deliver the programs and services that residents need to achieve greater self-sufficiency and access to technology takes a team effort. And, two key members of any Neighborhood Networks team are partners and peers from other Neighborhood Networks centers.

Get a Little Help from Some Friends

Of the nearly 1,400 Neighborhood Networks centers, there are very few centers that alone have the financial, staff, and material resources to offer the programs and services that will help residents become more economically independent and obtain the computer skills needed to compete in today's digitally driven society. However, by forming strategic partnerships and joining a Neighborhood Networks consortium, centers can better serve residents and achieve greater results than if they attempted to accomplish their goals on their own.

Partnerships allow Neighborhood Networks centers to reach beyond the property lines and tap into much-needed resources.

Centers can establish partnerships with community organizations, businesses, academic institutions, and municipal agencies, such as the police and fire departments, to obtain volunteer, in-kind, and financial support.

In addition, Neighborhood Networks centers can turn to each other for support. By joining a Neighborhood Networks consortium, centers gain unlimited access to professional advice and guidance and greater access to funding resources.

This issue of *Network News* highlights the power of partnerships and the benefits of being part of a consortium. The first article, *Partnerships: Good for Everyone*, showcases how Neighborhood Networks centers are forming partnerships and using the resources provided through partnerships to offer programs and services that residents need to succeed. The article also spotlights the partnership development successes of two Neighborhood Networks centers. *The Making of a Successful Partnership*, a followup to the first article, provides tips for forming a partnership that is mutually beneficial for both parties. The final article, *Neighborhood Networks Consortia: Membership Has Its Benefits*, demonstrates how consortia are helping Neighborhood Networks centers across the country achieve greater results. [IN](#)

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Partnerships: Good for Everyone

Studies show that partnerships are four times more likely to succeed than sole proprietorships. This impressive statistic confirms what many Neighborhood Networks centers already know.

Every day, Neighborhood Networks centers around the country rely on partnerships with businesses, academic institutions, healthcare facilities, faith-based and community groups, nonprofit organizations, and social service providers to help them offer programs that enable residents to achieve greater academic, professional, and personal success. Two centers that are shining examples of mutually beneficial partnerships are The Enrichment Association of Community Healing (TEACH) in Columbus, Ohio, and the Bayview Computer Learning Center in San Francisco, California. Through partnerships, these centers are providing vital services and technology access to residents. In turn, the centers are helping their partners enhance their community outreach efforts.

Past Performance Prompts Partnership

The Enrichment Association of Community Healing's Training and Employment Center's (TEACH TEC's) commitment to helping individuals obtain jobs has been recognized by community members, city and state officials and even Presidents of the United States. So, when the Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation/JOBLeaders (COWIC/JOBLeaders) was looking for a partner to help them fulfill their mission of preparing central

Ohio residents to meet the needs of local employers, it turned to TEACH TEC. Over the past two years, COWIC/JOBLeaders has awarded the Neighborhood Networks center nearly \$500,000 in grants, allowing the center to establish a comprehensive workforce development program to which COWIC/JOBLeaders can refer its clients. Together, TEACH TEC and COWIC/JOBLeaders are moving residents and community members toward greater self-sufficiency and fulfilling their organizations' missions.

The workforce development program offered by TEACH TEC begins with center users taking a variety of assessments aimed at evaluating reading, math, and computer skills, and career aptitude and suitability. TEACH TEC also creates a life plan that assists individuals with overcoming barriers to employment and identifying the tools necessary to progress in life. Recognizing people who may have a negative influence and offering guidance on how to remove these people from



their lives is the final component of the initial week of assessment and self-discovery.

The final weeks of the program focus on acquiring the job skills that will enable center users to secure employment with local companies. "We work with community businesses to identify their employment needs and then create customized classes that will produce employees with the necessary skills to fill these positions," explained John Gregory, chief executive officer of TEACH TEC.

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Network News is published twice yearly by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Multifamily Housing Programs. Additional copies may be downloaded at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. The hearing-impaired may access Neighborhood Networks via TTY by calling the Federal Information Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. For more information about Neighborhood Networks or to request copies of this newsletter in Spanish, contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743.

Partnerships: Good for Everyone *(continued from page 2)*

Accredited by the State of Ohio Board of Career Colleges and Schools, the center offers certificates in small business entrepreneurial, medical filing, customer service management, and financial services. TEACH TEC also operates a strong entrepreneurial development program in partnership with the Minority and Independent Contractors Alliance (MICA), which helps individuals establish their own business and find temporary employment while doing so.

“Individuals who have completed our training have gone on to graduate college, started their own business, or found jobs with local businesses. Over the years, we have placed thousands of individuals in jobs, and we understand that with economic self-sufficiency comes change. Our founding belief is, “Life Works When YOU Work!,” stated Gregory.

Special Audiences Call for Special Partners

Resident Service Coordinator Lee Harrison wanted to better serve the physically and emotionally challenged users of the Bayview Computer Learning Center. To accomplish this goal, Harrison began searching for a partner who understands the unique needs of this special audience. Through Neighborhood Networks, Harrison learned about Alliance for Technology Access (ATA). A national network of community-based resource centers, developers, vendors, and associates, ATA is dedicated to providing information and support services to children and adults with

disabilities and increasing their use of standard, assistive, and information technologies.

One of the first actions taken by ATA was to conduct an onsite training that included demonstrations of assistive technology hardware and software. Harrison invited Brenda Williams and Alicia Ward, resident services coordinators from sister centers LaSalle Apartments Computer Learning Center and All Hallows Computer Learning Center, to attend the training. Members of Bayview’s property management staff were also invited to the training that was facilitated by ATA Director Mary Lester and Executive Assistant Todd Plummer and John Cavano from TransAccess, an ATA center in San Diego. As a followup to the training, ATA will help the centers identify what equipment is needed and how it can be secured when the time comes to purchase hardware and software.

The ATA partnership also enabled the three centers to jointly launch a digital storytelling program for children with cognitive and other disabilities from all three properties. Creating the program began with the three resident services coordinators attending a three-day, train-the-trainer workshop presented by ATA contractor Center for Digital Storytelling. ATA also provided ongoing assistance and funding to purchase the equipment that remains at the center.

During the centers’ 10-week digital storytelling program, the children created stories that captured a significant event in their life—



The Center for Digital Storytelling’s Andrea Spagat helps Mauri create her story.

positive or negative. Stories ranged from a young woman’s tribute to her aunt who suddenly passed away to a self-growth story by a young man from the foster care system who discovered his talent for basketball and gained self-confidence, self-worth, self-esteem, and maturity. ATA performed the post-production of the stories, and was so impressed with the stories that they plan to use one at their annual fundraiser.

While the partnership with ATA enabled the centers to implement a worthwhile program, ATA also received benefits from the collaboration. According to ATA’s Plummer, “Part of ATA’s mission is to reach underserved communities that may have little information on assistive technology resources. We were excited to develop our national partnership with Neighborhood Networks by collaborating on this project. Lee, Brenda, and Alicia did such a great job working with the children and learning the digital storytelling process on the fly. I have such respect for all that they do and was really impressed with their dedication to the community.”

The Making of a Successful Partnership

To form a successful partnership, it is necessary to first understand what makes a successful partnership. Is each partner working toward a common goal? Are the roles and responsibilities of each partner clearly defined? Does each partner receive equal benefits? Is communication between partners open and frequent? Do the partners share a similar work ethic and management style?

The answer to all of the above is 'yes.' Good partnerships do not just happen. They involve more than two entities agreeing to work together. Successful partnerships are carefully orchestrated collaborations that begin with thoughtful and careful planning.

Considerations for Collaborations

The following tips are designed to help staff at Neighborhood Networks centers form and maintain rewarding and lasting partnerships:

- **It's All About You.** Before asking for help, know what kind of help is needed. By clearly defining what specific resources are needed, a center can make an informed decision about what type of partner to pursue. Before establishing a partnership, a center should define the goals of the center and individual programs and prioritize the needs. What is it that the center wants to accomplish and what is needed to make this happen?
- **Know Your Options.** Create an asset map to identify all potential partners and then research each of

these organizations. Learn about their products, services, operations, and ownership. When evaluating a potential partner, consider if the partner has the capacity to provide what the center needs, is familiar with the community, is willing to partner with the center, and is respected in the community.

- **Look for Compatibility and Ability.** Being compatible is more than enjoying working together. It is important that centers and partners share the same values and beliefs and are working toward a common goal. Partners should also be selected because of the technical skills they offer, as well as their ability to effectively solve problems and communicate.
- **Define Each Partner's Roles and Responsibilities.** When establishing a partnership, clearly define the desired outcomes and create a plan outlining how partners will work together to achieve them.

Partners need to know what is expected of them and what role they play in the successful achievement of the goal.

- **Learn to Share.** Partnerships require sharing, not only of ideas, but of time, capital, equipment, expertise, and clients. In a successful partnership, each partner brings something to the table. Agree to invest and share in the partnership.
- **Start Small.** Before tackling large projects, it might be useful to conduct a test run with a partner. Start with a few short-term tasks that have a high chance for success. Be sure that projects are realistic and will be seen as winners in the eyes of your partners.
- **Keep Score.** To determine if a partnership is working, track the outcomes of projects. This allows the partnership to be modified to

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Pitfalls of Partnerships

What contributes to the failure of a partnership? Here are some reasons that partnerships fail to succeed:

- The goals and roles of each partner are not clearly defined.
- The project on which partners are collaborating seeks to achieve unrealistic goals.
- There is an unequal level of effort being exerted by partners.
- The financial and time commitments required by the partners outweigh the benefits to the partners.
- The management style and work habits of partners are incompatible.
- Partners suffer from a failure to communicate effectively.

The Making of a Successful Partnership *(continued from page 4)*

enhance performance and enables both the center and partner to qualify and promote their successes.

- **Work at It.** Keep your partnership productive and healthy by engaging in open, honest, and frequent communication. Recognize that processes may have to be revised and modified to account for any unforeseen challenges. By maintaining communication, it is easier for each partner to provide constructive criticism to smooth out any bumps.

- **Hang In There.** Partnerships can be challenging. It takes time and skill to create successful partnerships. Maintaining motivation and enthusiasm can be difficult, especially if positive results do not happen quickly.

- **Give Thanks.** Recognize that no organization has to enter into a partnership. Partners enter into the relationship because they choose to do so. Express

appreciation to partners and let them know that their efforts are needed and valued.

For more information on forming lasting, mutually beneficial partnerships, see section 6 in the *TARGET: Technical Assistance Resource Guides and Educational Toolkit* available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. 



The graphic features a blue background with a film strip winding across the center. The film strip contains various images: a person at a computer, a group of people, a person holding a laptop, and a person holding a certificate. The background also includes binary code (0s and 1s) and a grid pattern. In the top left corner, there are two logos: the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development logo and the Neighborhood Networks logo. The text 'August 4-9, 2008' and 'Neighborhood Networks Week' is prominently displayed in the upper right. Below that, the slogan 'Providing Resources, Producing Results' is written in a large, stylized font. At the bottom, the text 'Delivering Technology Access to America's Communities' is written in a smaller font. A small portrait of a smiling woman is visible in the bottom right corner of the graphic.

 

August 4-9, 2008
Neighborhood Networks Week

Providing Resources, Producing Results

**Delivering Technology Access
to America's Communities**

Neighborhood Networks Consortia: Membership Has Its Benefits

What do Hoover Dam, one of the greatest engineering marvels in American history, and Neighborhood Networks, one of the first federal initiatives to promote self-sufficiency and technology access, have in common? More than you think.

In 1931, the U.S. government began seeking bids for the construction of what is today known as Hoover Dam. The dam would help tame the mighty waters of the Colorado River and curtail deadly flooding. It would also channel much-needed water to the farming areas of California and Arizona and provide hydroelectric energy to millions of people. To submit a construction proposal, companies not only had to possess the expertise to build a dam of epic proportions (the Hoover Dam stands 726 feet tall and 1,244 feet long and contains enough concrete to build a four-foot wide sidewalk around the equator), they also had to post a \$5 million performance bond (an amount equivalent to more than \$69 million in today's money).

At that time, there was not a single construction company with the range of skills or financial resources to compete for what was the largest single contract to be awarded by the U.S. government. To build Hoover Dam, companies would have to pool their talents and resources. This is exactly what Six Companies, Inc., a consortium of six construction firms that submitted the winning bid of \$48,890,955 (more than \$679 million in today's money), did. In 1936, nearly two years ahead of the government's imposed seven-year deadline, Six Companies, Inc., completed Hoover Dam.

The story of Six Companies, Inc., and Hoover Dam perfectly

illustrates what can be accomplished when a consortium is formed. Like Six Companies, Inc., Neighborhood Networks consortia enable centers to combine their efforts to gain crucial resources and implement and sustain much-needed programs.

A Bounty of Benefits

A Google® search for the term "consortium" identifies more than 32 million Web pages that contain the word. A scan of some of these pages makes it obvious that consortia have been established by thousands of organizations to address a variety of issues. Why do so many consortia exist? Because they work.

Neighborhood Networks consortia offer members numerous benefits, including:

- **Increased information and resource sharing.** Consortium meetings provide centers with the opportunity to exchange program ideas, successful practices, and curricula with other centers, as well as identify solutions to common challenges. Centers also have the opportunity to network with community technology organizations and partners. A consortium can also facilitate joint programming and combine center resources for marketing and media outreach efforts.
- **Access to more funding.** A consortium expands center fundraising opportunities because potential funders and partners are often interested in supporting large-scale community-based projects that involve many groups and serve a larger population.
- **Nonprofit status.** Centers without 501(c)(3) nonprofit status can

acquire it through membership in a registered nonprofit consortium. This status expands funding opportunities for centers because many grant funders require applicants to have 501(c)(3) status.

Rewards of Joining

There are more than 15 regional Neighborhood Networks consortia located across the country. Combined, these consortia are helping hundreds of Neighborhood Networks centers achieve impressive results.

For example, the 18 Neighborhood Networks centers that have banded together to form Community Builders of Arkansas, Inc. (CBA) receive access to a corps of youth service volunteers assembled by its partner City Year. One of the largest AmeriCorps programs in the country, City Year places young people ages 17 to 24 in full-time community service activities, such as tutoring and mentoring school children, working to reclaim public spaces, and organizing enrichment programs.

"Currently, City Year volunteers are supporting afterschool programs at Neighborhood Networks centers in Little Rock. Some of the volunteers provide homework assistance, while others run the entire program," explained Miles Graham, president of CBA and the Neighborhood Networks National Consortium (NNNC). "City Year also sent 150 volunteers to the Future Now Opportunity Center in North Little Rock to revive and restore the center. The volunteers painted the center and repaired playground equipment. Staff from the local HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] office also participated in the rejuvenation project.

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Neighborhood Networks Consortia: Membership Has Its Benefits *(continued from page 6)*

Through our partnership with City Year, centers receive much-needed volunteers, City Year gains access to sites in need of volunteers, and volunteers receive experience and earn college money. It's good for everyone," concluded Graham.

The California Neighborhood Networks Consortium, Inc. (CNNC) is working with long-time partner Imperial Capital Bank to design a financial literacy curriculum specifically designed for youth. While still in the developing phase, the curriculum will be available to the approximately 100 Neighborhood Networks centers that are members of the consortium.

The CNNC also enjoys a partnership with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Through this partnership, consortia members receive NASA's full Imagine Mars curriculum that enables them to offer the arts, sciences, and technology education initiative at their centers. The CNNC also hosts regular brown bag sessions to discuss topics of interest to members.

According to Kimberly Paul, president of the CNNC, one of the most beneficial aspects of a consortium is the networking ability and resources sharing. "Just being able to get together and exchange advice is extremely useful. I find that many of us are facing similar challenges and it helps to brainstorm with others who have overcome the same challenge."

Lisa K. Vasquez, treasurer of the Indiana Neighborhood Network Consortium, Inc. (INNC), echoes Paul's comments. "Each consortium member brings its own strengths to the table. The INNC is a diverse group but we all share a passion

for wanting to help our clients succeed. For some, success may be finding steady employment. For others, it may be to remain in their home to age in place. Each member center can benefit from what other members have experienced, and it is great to have someone to help you through situations that they may have already been through." Vasquez went on to say, "Being in a consortium also allows centers to band together to accomplish their goals. One center on its own is limited on the grants for which it can apply, but being in a consortium opens doors. A consortium can demonstrate that a larger population is served to increase chances for funding. For example, one small center that serves seniors can team with a center that serves working families to show that a greater number of clients are served, as well as a range of ages."

Recently, the INNC launched its own Web site with the help of

Neighborhood Networks national partner, Grassroots.org, which is hosting the site for free. The INNC also partners with GrantStation to provide members with the ability to research funding opportunities on a local and national level.

"We are very proud of how far we have come and are looking forward to the future success of our consortium. One of our main goals for 2008 is to develop and implement a marketing plan that will allow the INNC to become a recognized name in the state of Indiana," concluded Vasquez.

For more information on joining or forming a Neighborhood Networks consortium, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org and click on "Consortia" from the left menu bar or call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743. 

Tips for Starting a Consortium

- **Meet with key players.** A consortium should include community members, Neighborhood Networks center staff, property owners and managers, residents, and potential funding partners.
- **Hold a "vision meeting."** Gather key members to brainstorm about the possibilities for Neighborhood Networks centers and identify how the consortium can help centers secure resources.
- **Establish a steering committee.** The steering committee can develop a strategic plan, create working committees for specific projects, help the consortium secure nonprofit status, and devote funding and current staff time to maintain the consortium.
- **Get to work.** Once established, a consortium should implement its strategic plan, which may include obtaining nonprofit status and recruiting new centers and partners.
- **Seek HUD's support.** HUD offers resources aimed at sustaining and strengthening consortia, such as technical assistance and the publication of funding opportunities.

2008 Calendar of Events

Conference Calls

August 12—Apprenticeships: A New Way to Work

September 9—Volunteers Rock!

Consortia Conference Calls

September 9—Volunteer Recruitment Strategies

Instructions on how to participate in conference calls are available on the calendar of events page found at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

Conferences at Which Neighborhood Networks Will Be Exhibiting

July 10–11—Annual Affordable Housing Conference, Chicago, IL

August 18–20—Southeastern Affordable Housing Management Association (SAHMA) Regional Conference and Trade Show, Destin, FL

Special Events

July 9–11—Regional Technical Assistance Workshop (RTAW), San Francisco, CA

August 4–9—Neighborhood Networks Week

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