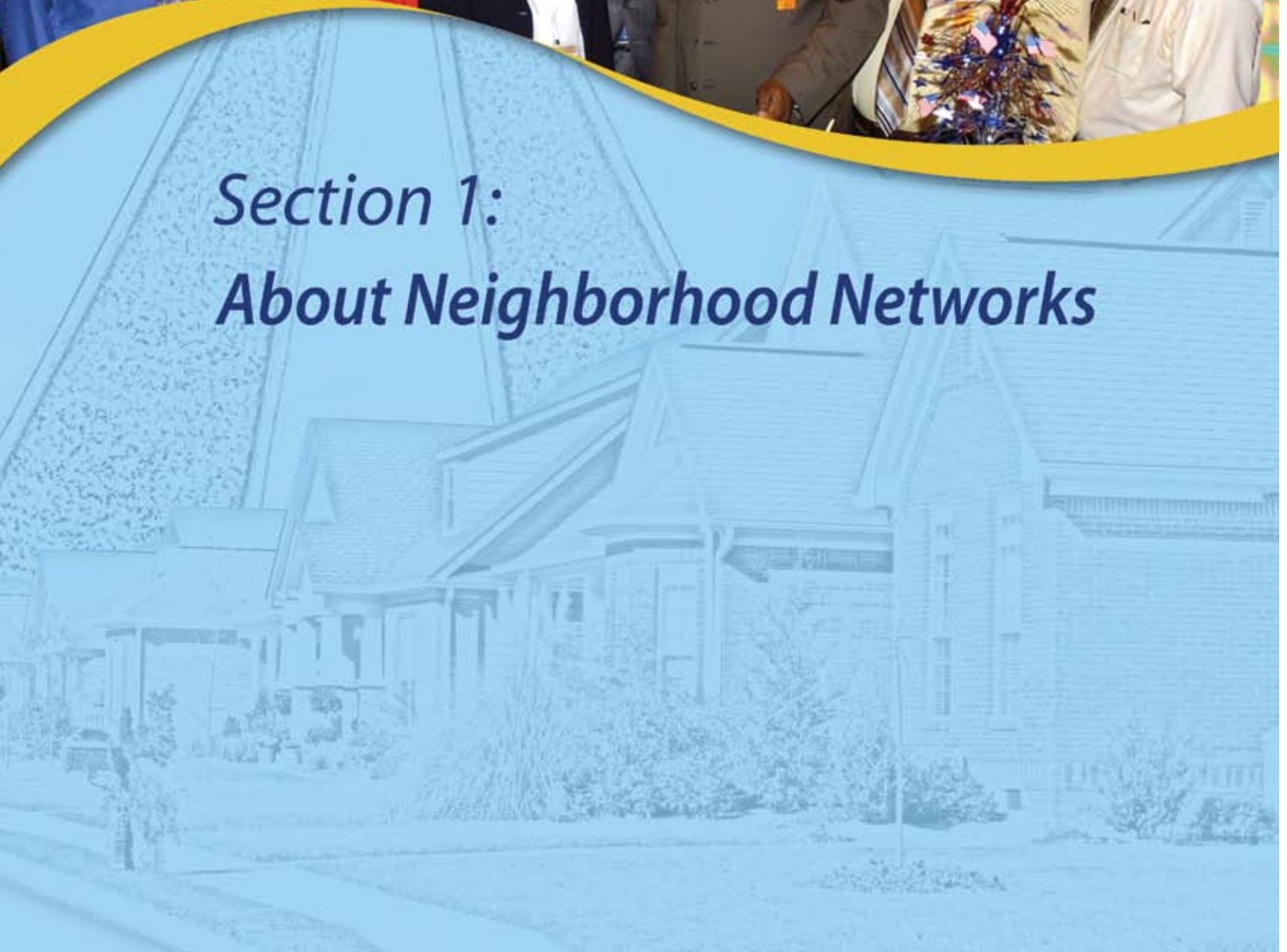




Section 1: *About Neighborhood Networks*



Highlights of Section 1: About Neighborhood Networks

<input type="checkbox"/> <i>About the Neighborhood Networks Initiative</i>	3
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>HUD's Role in Neighborhood Networks</i>	3
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Customized for the Community</i>	4
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Benefiting More Than Residents</i>	5
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Living Up to Expectations</i>	7

About Neighborhood Networks

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had a vision—to create an initiative that promotes self-sufficiency and delivers computer access to residents living in privately-owned HUD Federal Housing Administration (FHA)-insured and -assisted multifamily housing.

Neighborhood Networks is the result of this vision.

About the Neighborhood Networks Initiative

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative that encourages the development of multiservice community learning centers that provide residents with access to:



- Computer technology that allows them to achieve academic success and obtain better jobs.
- Educational and job-training programs that enhance their skills so they can take advantage of employment opportunities.
- Healthcare information and other social services that improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.

By encouraging the creation of Neighborhood Networks centers in multifamily properties, HUD is working to ensure that residents are given access to information technology and economic opportunities. Neighborhood Networks centers are proving to be important players in helping Americans—regardless of age, income, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, and geography—gain access to 21st-century tools and skills.

HUD's Role in Neighborhood Networks

Neighborhood Networks is not a grant program. HUD works behind the scenes to encourage the creation and expansion of Neighborhood Networks centers by guiding property owners, managers, and center staff members through the center development process and by providing limited financial assistance. HUD also provides the following:

- Onsite and remote technical assistance covering topics critical to center development and long-term sustainability. These topics include partnership development, employment/job-training programs, tracking and evaluation, outreach to stakeholders and residents, business plan development, fundraising, grantwriting, and application for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Digital Inclusion

According to an April 2006 Pew Internet & American Life Project survey, 73 percent, or about 147 million, Americans use the Internet. However, only 53 percent of adults living in lower income households (less than \$30,000 a year) are online, compared to 80 percent of those whose annual income is between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Also, only 40 percent of adults with less than a high school education use the Internet, compared to 64 percent of adults with a high school degree who go online. In addition, low-income youth are eight times less likely to use a computer at home as compared to children in families earning \$75,000 or more a year.

- Useful and up-to-date resources maintained on the Neighborhood Networks Web site (*www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*). The Web site includes news, success stories, online publications, and contact information for centers, HUD staff, and Neighborhood Networks consortia.
- Funding updates posted to the Neighborhood Networks Web site. These funding opportunities—both national and regional in scope—can help property owners, managers, and center staff members identify additional sources of revenue.
- Access to the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) through the “Neighborhood Networks at Work Portal.” With the use of START, center staff can develop online business plans to better manage their centers. Through the “Neighborhood Networks at Work Portal,” center staff can also design their own Web site with the Center Web Site Creation Tool, apply for advanced classification with the Center Classification Tools, highlight upcoming center activities through the Calendar of Events, and utilize other online resources.
- Assistance in creating partnerships. Partnerships are forged with businesses, nonprofits, government and social services agencies, educational and health institutions, faith-based organizations, civic organizations, and foundations that can provide cash and in-kind support. Strong partnerships can ensure the sustainability of all Neighborhood Networks centers.
- A monthly conference call for centers. Monthly conference calls address a wide range of subjects, such as grantwriting, fundraising, resident involvement, marketing, partnership development, and staffing.
- A Neighborhood Networks Information Center and toll-free hotline at (888) 312-2743. Center staff can speak with a specialist to gain additional technical assistance and program guidance.
- A variety of print and electronic Neighborhood Networks publications including newsletters, a national brochure, and technical assistance resource materials.
- Assistance to centers in generating local media coverage and publicity. HUD provides assistance with creating media materials, such as news releases and advisories, as well as providing lists of local and regional media outlets.
- Neighborhood Networks Week, a weeklong observance held each summer. During this week, all centers are encouraged to highlight and showcase their achievements by participating in a variety of national and local events.
- An opportunity to learn new skills through the Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs) and the Neighborhood Networks National Training Conference. Participants can attend sessions on topics such as grantwriting and strategic planning, network with fellow center staff members and property managers, and exchange ideas and best practices to strengthen center sustainability.
- Desktop educational opportunities through the Neighborhood Networks Interactive Virtual Learning Courses (IVLCs). Offered free of charge to center staff and residents and taught by subject-matter experts, the IVLCs consist of audio and video presentations, quizzes and evaluations, interactive tools, and content designed specifically to meet Neighborhood Networks stakeholder needs.

Customized for the Community

From urban centers to rural towns, property owners and managers—with the support of private and public partners—are bringing digital opportunity and lifelong learning to residents at hundreds of centers throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. And yet, no two centers are the same.

Residents, property owners, and managers establish local centers that offer programs and activities to meet the specific needs of their communities. Centers are locally driven, and HUD does not dictate the programs that centers offer. While Neighborhood Networks was designed to be easily replicated in any community, HUD leaves the specifics of program planning to center planners and does not impose

programmatic parameters. This approach enables centers to develop programs based on identified resident needs, which increases resident participation and is more conducive to generating successful outcomes.

Typically, a Neighborhood Networks center is a room or series of rooms equipped with computers and located onsite or near a HUD FHA-insured or -assisted housing development. A Neighborhood Networks center must provide at least one computer with Internet access. Centers usually also offer staff assistance and a range of training resources for residents. Center programs may include:

- Computer training.
- Adult education classes.
- General Educational Development (GED) classes.
- Literacy programs.
- Youth education and recreation programs.
- Anti-drug and crime-prevention programs.
- Afterschool homework help.
- Childcare services.
- Job-readiness training and support.
- Microenterprise development.
- Transportation assistance.

- Health and wellness activities.
- Social services.

Benefiting More Than Residents

While the mission of Neighborhood Networks is to help residents move toward self-sufficiency, residents are not the only beneficiaries of the Initiative. Residents, property owners and managers, community partners, and the community at large all benefit from the programs and services offered at a Neighborhood Networks center. Specifically:

- **Residents.** Residents gain convenient access to onsite programs and services that can help them improve job skills, expand their education, and become economically self-sufficient. For example:
 - Adults can receive job training, education, and supportive services.
 - Children and youth can have safe afterschool havens that promote learning, acquisition of skills, and healthy recreational choices.
 - Senior citizens can gain access to health programs and services, computer training, and social activities, which help them remain productive and vital and contribute to their quality of life and independence.

The Benefits of Partners

Benefits that centers and their partners derive from Neighborhood Networks include:

- A social service agency provides support services at a Neighborhood Networks center and reaches a new group of constituents.
- An employer works with a center to develop and offer a job-training program and gains access to a newly trained workforce.
- Area colleges and community colleges provide student interns to teach at an afterschool program, giving both the interns and children a great learning opportunity.
- Hospitals and community health clinics reach their surrounding communities by developing programs and services to help Neighborhood Networks centers address residents' health concerns.

- Residents with disabilities can access programs and services that enable them to remain healthy and increase activity and social participation.
- **Property owners and managers.** Property owners benefit from the return on investment that having a Neighborhood Networks center on their property can provide. Services provided by a Neighborhood Networks center can increase a property's marketability. Centers provide many benefits to property owners and managers, such as:
 - Making properties more competitive, attracting new residents, lowering vacancy rates, and stabilizing tenancy.
 - Decreasing security and upkeep costs by giving residents a greater sense of pride and a greater stake in the overall well-being of the community. In fact, some properties have saved thousands of dollars in security costs with the addition of a Neighborhood Networks center.
 - Helping to build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with residents and the local partners that work with the center.
 - Increasing residents' levels of self-sufficiency, which in turn supports prompt payment of rent, as well as a greater sense of pride in their community. And, with higher incomes,

Other Available Resources

Several resources can help you start a Neighborhood Networks center and learn about successful programs and activities at centers nationwide. Among these are the *HUD Management Agent Handbook* (HUD Handbook 4381.5) and the *Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) Workbook and User Guide*.

residents can move into market-rate housing, releasing affordable housing units for others with greater need.

- **Partners.** Forming a partnership—on a local and/or national level—with a center can demonstrate an organization's commitment to strengthening its community. Businesses, local clinics and hospitals, colleges, nonprofit organizations, social service providers, and others can:
 - Gain greater access to targeted populations.
 - Improve the economic health and vitality of the community.
 - Help train a potential labor force with skills that meet evolving needs of area employers.
 - Strengthen community relations and meet their philanthropic commitments.
 - Increase awareness of the organization within the community.
- **Communities.** When residents prosper, so do their communities. Neighborhood Networks centers enhance the quality of life for individuals and the entire community in numerous ways:
 - By equipping people with the skills to participate in the information age, Neighborhood Networks is preparing them to take a more active role in society.
 - Many centers allow residents of surrounding communities to use their facilities, giving them access to programs and services for adults, children, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities.
 - Centers can decrease incidents of vandalism by promoting community ownership and access to employment and opportunity. This reduces operating costs, resulting in savings for both property owners and HUD. Safer environments benefit the entire community.

Living Up to Expectations

When HUD created the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, we knew we were setting the bar high. But, we also knew that with the right people and the right approach, the team could fulfill the mission of one of the first federal initiatives aimed at promoting self-sufficiency by providing computer access to low-income housing communities.

Today, more than a decade later, Neighborhood Networks is fulfilling its mission as residents in HUD multifamily communities nationwide are becoming more economically self-reliant. Every day, residents are able to access computer technology, educational programs, job training, healthcare information, and other social services at a Neighborhood Networks center located on the premises of their housing development.

