



Community Technology Centers Program



Program Purpose

The purpose of the program is to fund Community Technology Center start-up and expansion in distressed urban and rural communities. Community technology centers (CTCs) provide computer access and educational services using information technology. In general, people who visit CTCs do not own computers and many do not have access at work or school.

FY 1999 Competition and FY 2000 Request

The President requested, and Congress appropriated, \$10 million to begin the program in FY 1999. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, will award three-year grants on a competitive basis. It is expected that 40 to 60 awards will be made, with the range of awards being \$75,000 to \$300,000 per year. In his FY 2000 budget President Clinton requested \$65 million, with a goal of building more than 500 new centers.

Eligible Applicants

State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), institutions of higher education, or other public and private nonprofit or for-profit agencies and organizations are eligible to apply.

Application Timeline FY 1999 Competition

Applications Available: April 28, 1999
Applications Due: June 14, 1999
Grants Awarded: September 24, 1999

Current Status

On May 19, 1999, President Clinton unveiled the Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999 with new provisions in Title III for community technology centers.

In July 1999, President Clinton released a major report, *Falling Through the Net*, that documented a growing digital divide and the usefulness of Community Access Centers in meeting the need for services.

As of June 28, 749 applications were received from all 50 states for the FY 1999 Competition. The Department is in the process of reviewing these applications.

COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY CENTERS: BACKGROUND

The Need

On July 28, 1998 the Department of Commerce released *Falling through the Net II: New Data on the Digital Divide*. This report showed that although more Americans now own computers, certain groups are still far less likely to have computers or online access to the internet. Most alarmingly, the report revealed that the digital divide is growing. In its policy implications section, the report stated that it was essential that schools, libraries, and other community technology centers provide computer access. A July 1999 follow-up study, released by the President, documented that the digital divide continued to grow and highlighted the usefulness of Community Access Centers in meeting the need for services.

Community Technology Centers: The Department of Education's Vision

The Department envisions funding Community Technology Centers that are diverse in the populations they serve and programs they offer but similar in that they provide technology access to individuals, communities, and populations that typically would not otherwise have places to use computers.

Among the types of activities that one might find offered at a CTC:

- Workforce Development and Employment Information -- Computer skills training (advanced and basic applications), resume writing workshops, and online access to job databases.
- Pre-School and Family Programs - Times when parents can bring young children to use age-appropriate software. Opportunities to partner with Head Start, family literacy, or daycare programs that may not have access to computers.
- After-school Activities -- Structured activities for students to use software that offers homework help and academic enrichment, exploration of the internet, or multimedia publishing.
- Adult Education -- Individually, or in collaboration with existing programs, GED training, ESL, adult basic education, or post-secondary education classes using the latest learning technologies.

Existing Centers and Related Initiatives

Community Technology Centers have their origins in Harlem, New York where Playing to Win's (PTW) Community Computing Center opened in 1983. In 1992, Playing to Win was awarded a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to help create a network of neighborhood technology access providers. Through technical assistance, PTW helped spur the development of 50 centers.

In November 1995, the Education Development Center (EDC) began a NSF funded effort, *CTCNet*, aimed at the national expansion and institutionalization of the Playing to Win (PTW) Network. Currently, CTCNet is serving 250 CTCs in 35 states through technical assistance and other services, including research and evaluation. NSF funding for this project is ending.

Neighborhood Networks is a non-funded initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that encourages the development of computer learning centers in privately owned HUD-insured and -assisted housing. Through technical assistance and the leveraging of local resources the program has helped create over 400 centers.

The *21st Century Community Learning Centers program* is the Department of Education's after-school program. The Department is funding projects that may include telecommunications and technology education programs for individuals of all ages, making it possible for the technology resources of schools to be available for community use.

The Department of Commerce's *Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program* (TIIAP) is a highly competitive grant program that funds innovative applications of new telecommunications and information technologies that serve the public interest. Many community technology centers have received grants and can serve as national models.

The U.S. Department of Education program builds on this solid foundation of demonstration, evaluation, and network building already underway. The FY 1999 and 2000 funding are intended to dramatically expand the CTC infrastructure through new community technology center start-up and the further development of existing efforts.

Community Technology Centers Program staff are working collaboratively with the initiatives mentioned above to leverage resources and share information.

Plugged In: A Community Technology Center Profile

Located in low-income East Palo Alto, California, just miles from the heart of Silicon Valley, Plugged In provides local organizations and families with access to computer technology, serving as a model for connecting low-income communities to the information economy. Community members of all ages use state-of-the-art computers to do online research, complete homework assignments, or participate in one of 30 classes offered in partnership with local agencies.

Below is a profile of some of the "regulars" at Plugged In:

- *John Mireles* loves art. He began as a graffiti artist covering freeway walls but quickly expanded to more constructive venues — including painting on canvas and revitalizing old refrigerators by covering them with his own surrealistic images. These days, John transfers his images into digital form. At seventeen, John is the main designer for Plugged In's web business, handling website projects for a number of corporate clients. Since he first started coming to Plugged In, John has developed a career plan for himself that will help him earn a good living and still leave time for his art.
- When *Lovell Williams*, 42, was involved in a local recovery program, he learned to use a computer at Plugged In. As chairman of the program's alumni association, he started coming in regularly to make flyers for events. He taught himself how to create and use spreadsheets and to write letters for the association. And when Lovell began looking for jobs, he found much better leads online than he did anywhere else. He used a computer to put together his resume and now has a job operating a computerized saw at a shop that makes custom-designed cabinets.
- *Elisa Romero* likes to think of herself as being able to handle anything. At thirteen, she looks out for three younger siblings and seven cousins, is an assistant in Plugged In's after-school program for kids, and a budding astronomer. One of Elisa's favorite activities is visiting websites that have the latest findings about space. In fact, she's just finished writing an essay -- from information she found online -- about Jupiter's great red spot. A tough girl by nature, Elisa was tempted by local gangs before she started coming to Plugged In.