Towards Digital Inclusion: The Role of Libraries and Other Community Technology Centers

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Presentation developed in part by local digital inclusion practitioners who also participate in the Technology Literacy Collaborative (TLC)

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Digital Inclusion

The Digital Divide refers to the gap between those who benefit from technology and those who do not.

Digital Inclusion is necessary as we move towards a technology based society to ensure that all individuals can participate fully in the economic, educational, civic and social activities of our community.
Other Terms

• Community Technology Centers (CTCs) = Public Computer Centers (PCCs) = Public Access Computing (PAC) = Public Access Technology (PAT)
Other Terms

• Technology Literacy = Digital Literacy
  -includes Computer Literacy
  -is a part of Information Literacy
Doesn’t Everyone Have the Internet?

Highlights of Digital Nation (2/16/2010), U.S. census-based data:

- Broadband Internet access at home: 64%
  - Urban 66%
  - Rural 54%
- Notable disparities continue:
  - Those with low incomes
  - Seniors
  - Minorities
  - The less educated
  - Non-family households
  - The non-employed

Source: NTIA Announces New Findings on U.S. Broadband Adoption
Doesn’t Everyone Have the Internet?

• Minnesota Internet Study
  – Produced periodically by Center for Rural Policy & Development, St. Peter, MN
  – Next survey is in process, with publication expected June or July 2010
  – Last publication: June 2008 (12/07-1/08 data)
    www.mnsu.edu/ruralmn/research.php#technology
Minnesota Digital Divide Statistics

One example:
In the Twin Cities metro area, only 26% of households making income under $25,000 reported having a computer in the home and 17.8% had broadband.
The Role of Community Technology Centers/Public Computer Centers

CTCs are sites that provide free computer & internet access to the community and in many cases teach computer and digital literacy skills.

CTCs can be found in:

• Public libraries
• Non Profit Organizations
• Employment / Workforce Centers
• Schools
• Neighborhood centers and parks
• Churches/Mosques
Digital Inclusion (DI) Strategies

Digital Inclusion (DI) strategies must include the “ABC’s of Digital Literacy”:

• **Access**
  – Hardware
  – Software
  – High-speed connectivity

• **Basic Training** in Computer and Other Technology Literacy Skills

• **Content** that is Relevant to the End User
Why it matters

Developing a 21st Century Workforce

In 2005, 77% of Fortune 500 Companies did not give jobseekers the option of responding offline to positions posted on their corporate careers website\(^5\)

- Job postings and application processes have moved online
- Most jobs require some level of computer skills

Access to Government Information & Community Resources

61% of American adults have searched for health information online: of those 60% say the online information affected a decision about treating an illness or condition\(^6\)

- Government services such as unemployment benefits and immigration services have moved online
- Connecting with updated community resources such as housing, mental health, food shelves, childcare and transportation
Why it matters

Addressing the Achievement Gap in Education

71% of teens say the internet was their primary source for information for completing school projects

• K-12 schools are moving towards web-based portals to access assignments and communicate grades & school news
• The Free Application for Federal Student Aid and most college application process are only online

Promoting Civic Engagement & Expanding Social Networks

40% of Americans say they get most of their news from the internet (more than those who cite newspapers)

• New immigrants use the Internet to access news abroad and communicate with family members living in other parts of the world
• Participation in political and election processes use web tools
Outcomes from Community-Based Services Like Technology Training

- Attitude/perception changes (e.g., negative to positive)
- Increased access to information
- Personal efficacy (self esteem, confidence building, a changed outlook on life and future prospects, feelings of accomplishment and hope)
- Increased skill levels (e.g., increased technological literacy, language facility, communication skills, social etc.)
- Learning gains (e.g., increased interest in learning, active participation in learning, etc.)
- Knowledge gains (wide range, individually focused, e.g., knowledge of the community, knowledge needed to pass the GED, etc.)
- Progress toward a goal
- Social networks (e.g., increased social and community connections, increased social capital)
- Status changes (e.g., decide to return to school, get a job, become a citizen, increased participation as a citizen)
- Decreased transaction costs (saving time, money & energy, increased convenience)

--Joan Durrance, *How Libraries and Librarians Help*

http://durrance.people.si.umich.edu/TextDocs/IMLSLibhelpFinalR.pdf
Some Library Statistics  Digital Inclusion

• 71% of public libraries report that they are the only source of free public access to computers and the Internet in their communities;
• 80% of libraries provide hands-on assistance to patrons for understanding and using egovernment resources – up 6% from the previous year;
• 90% of libraries offer formal or informal technology assistance to library users; and
• 80% of libraries do not have enough computers to meet patron demand at all times of the day.

Source: Public Library Funding & Access Study: Executive Brief Handout
Skills Needed by Staff [& Public]

Information literacy

• Searching and using Internet-based resources
• Searching and using library licensed resources
• Training patrons on the use of the public access computers, general Internet resources, and library resources
• Designing curriculum for various patron training courses

[See p. 87-88 for details of 7 required skill areas for staff.]
National Digital Literacy Program Proposed by FCC This Month

• Libraries & other CTCs have been doing the work for some time, and are enthusiastic about federal initiative
• “ALA enthusiastically supports the launch of this Program. Providing individuals with the guidance and training necessary to search, locate, obtain, and use all forms of information resources is central to the mission of libraries. And libraries – whether school, public, academic, or otherwise – are already present in communities across America and are ideally situated to provide digital literacy training or to collaborate with other community organizations to provide such training.”

--American Library Association outlines positions on National Broadband Plan (District Dispatch, 3-17-2010) http://www.wo.ala.org/districtdispatch/?p=4608
Selected Digital Inclusion Resources

- Technology Literacy Collaborative [www.techliteracycollaborative.org](http://www.techliteracycollaborative.org)
- Pew Internet and American Life Project [www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)
- Center for Rural Policy and Development, St. Peter, MN. “2007 Minnesota Internet Study” [www.mnsu.edu/ruralmn/research.php#technology](http://www.mnsu.edu/ruralmn/research.php#technology)
- Digital Inclusion Forum [www.digitalinclusionforum.com](http://www.digitalinclusionforum.com)
- Blandin on Broadband [www.blandinonbroadband.com](http://www.blandinonbroadband.com)
- See supplemental bibliography