Community Council Progress Report
2002-2003

Priorities

1. Develop leadership capacity in Nebraska communities to address IT development.

2. Promote the development of an infrastructure (including sufficient bandwidth) that is secure, affordable, reliable, and responsive to the specific needs of various sectors. Efforts should be made to ensure that systems across the state are compatible.

3. Support the development of the intellectual infrastructure necessary for Information Age development.   Intellectual infrastructure includes the development of a workforce knowledgeable of and fluent in the use and applications of information technology and the availability of IT support services.

4. Encourage the use of information technology to enhance community and economic development.

5. Foster awareness and collaborative and innovative uses of information technology by local governments to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and provide better customer service.

Action Items

Technologies Across Nebraska

Description: Work with the University of Nebraska and other Technologies Across Nebraska partners to support the implementation of the Technologies Across Nebraska Action Plan, including the following action steps:

*   Inventorying what activities TAN partners are planning regarding information technology development in the next year.
*   Identifying gaps in the information and resources that are available to assist communities.
*   Setting up regional support teams and regional meetings of IT committees.
*   Developing and maintaining an e-mail discussion to facilitate the exchange of information among resource providers and members of community IT committees.
*   Piloting toolkit materials by working with at least 10 communities to develop community or regional IT plans.

Expected Outcomes

*   Communities in Nebraska will make progress toward becoming Information Age communities;
*   Communities will have easy access to information and resources to assist them in developing their capacity to use information technology for community and economic development;
*   State agencies, education institutions, and other entities with responsibilities in the area of community and economic development will coordinate and collaborate to leverage available resources and maximize benefits.

Accomplishments

Communities in Nebraska are making progress toward becoming Information Age communities. Eight Nebraska communities and regional groups have been awarded grants of $2,500 to develop local information technology plans from the Nebraska Information Technology Commission (NITC) and Technologies Across Nebraska (TAN), a coalition led by University of Nebraska (NU) Cooperative Extension. These community and regional technology committees will

pilot the *Community Information Technology Planning and Assessment Workbook*.

Recipients of the planning grants include the communities of Alliance; Brown, Keya Paha and Rock Counties; Custer County; Crawford-Harrison; Edgar; Fillmore County; West Point; and York County. The communities participating range in population from 8,959 (Alliance) to 279 (Harrison) and are geographically dispersed across the state.

Participating in the program has energized local technology committees and focused their efforts. Initial reactions to the workbook have been positive. At the suggestion of one of the participating regional groups, a sample plan was developed   Most community and regional groups are in the process of completing their initial assessments.   Updates on the activities of the participating community and regional groups are available at http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/pilot/index.htm .

The Crawford-Harrison regional group provides an example of the progress being made by the participating groups.   The communities of Crawford and Harrison focused initial efforts on the preparation of a grant application for the RUS Community Connect broadband program.   A community survey was also done to determine technology usage, the demand for broadband services, and interest in training opportunities.   Results from the survey indicate that technology use is high among area residents.   Only four out of 159 respondents reported not owning a computer. Fewer than 16 of the respondents reported having no Internet connection. Approximately 120 of the respondents have a dial-up modem connection. There is strong interest in training--especially for e-commerce training. Approximately 60 respondents indicated that they would be interested in e-commerce training. About 35 respondents indicated that they would be interested in basic Internet training.   The survey and the results are available from the project Web site.   The Crawford-Harrison group is currently working on developing a technology plan for the area.

In northeast Nebraska, West Point and ten surrounding communities are working to develop individual technology plans and a regional plan. Participation in the IT planning process has helped community members organize and effectively communicate their needs with potential providers. The West Point area group is currently working with two providers to deploy fixed broadband wireless in West Point, Oakland, and the Bancroft/Pender area.

Community and Regional groups should have their IT plans completed by May 31, 2003.

Through a number of TAN efforts, communities have easy access to information and resources to assist them in developing their capacity to use information technology for community and economic development.   Technologies Across Nebraska, in partnership with other sponsors, organized the Building Information Age Communities Conference and a workshop on preparing applications for the RUS Community Connect broadband grant program.   Both the Community Information Technology Toolkit and the Technologies Across Nebraska Web sites provide information for communities on using technology to enhance development opportunities. In addition, an inventory of partnership resources and a preliminary gap analysis will help target the development of additional resources to better meet the needs of communities.   More information on each of these activities is included below:

> **Building Information Age Communities Conference.** The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and the Nebraska Information Technology Commission in partnership with TAN organized the Building Information Age Communities conference held April 12, 2002 in Aurora, Nebraska.

- Approximately 135 individuals from 43 Nebraska communities participated in the conference.

- Ninety-six percent of the participants indicated that attending the conference helped them understand the importance of IT-related community and economic development.

- Ninety-one percent of the participants indicated that attending the conference helped them understand how to begin incorporating information technology into local community and economic development processes.

- Eighty-eight percent of the participants indicated that attending the conference helped them learn about available resources.

- Ninety-two percent of the participants indicated that attending the conference enabled them to meet and learn from community leaders from other communities.

- Ninety percent of the participants agreed that attending this conference was worthwhile.

- On a scale of one to five with five being excellent, the overall conference received a rating of 4.4. The ratings of individual sessions ranged from 3.8 to 4.5.

    Preparing Applications for the RUS Community Connect Broadband Grant Program workshop. A workshop on preparing applications for the RUS Community Connect Broadband Grant Program was broadcast via satellite and Web streaming on September 24, 2002. The workshop was co-sponsored by the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Nebraska Information Technology Commission, USDA Rural Utilities Service, Congressman Tom Osborne, and NET.   At least one Nebraska community which participated in the workshop submitted an application.

    Community IT Toolkit.   The Community IT Toolkit (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit) contains one of the most comprehensive collections of materials on technology related development.   The newly developed Community IT Planning and Assessment workbook organizes much of this information in an easy to follow format.

    Technologies Across Nebraska Web site.   The newly redesigned Technologies Across Nebraska includes resources, a calendar of events, a list of partners, and information on workshops and educational programming.

    Inventory and Gap Analysis.   An inventory of existing programs and resources was completed. A preliminary gap analysis revealed:

    - There is a lack of motivated local leadership in many communities.
    - There are few effective regulatory remedies for poor Internet service.
    - There is a need for technical assistance in evaluating broadband technologies.
    - Additional information on providing incentives for alternative service providers is needed.
    - Information on new models of private-public partnerships needs to be developed including sample cooperative agreements.

State agencies, education institutions, and other entities with responsibilities in the area of community and economic development have coordinated and collaborated to leverage available resources and maximize benefits.   Examples of cooperative efforts through TAN include the Building Information Age Communities conference, the Community IT Toolkit, the Community IT Planning and Mini Grant program, and the workshop on preparing applications for the RUS Community Connect Broadband Grant Program.   In addition, quarterly TAN meetings have been held to foster networking among state agencies, education institutions, and other entities.

Telehealth Vision and Strategy

Description: Work with the NITC and other stakeholders to develop a vision and strategy for expanded use of telehealth.

Accomplishments

Members of the Telehealth Subcommittee of the NITC Community Council were actively involved in preparing testimony to the Public Service Commission regarding the use of the Nebraska Universal Service Fund to support telehealth. In December, the Nebraska Public Service Commission approved the use of the Nebraska Universal Service Fund to support telehealth. The Public Service Commission has asked the Nebraska Hospital Association to present a plan for the development of a telehealth network by June 1. NITC staff and the Telehealth Subcommittee are working with the Nebraska Hospital Association in the development of a statewide telehealth plan.

A document outlining the role of the telehealth subcommittee in the development of a telehealth plan and vision has been developed.

Local Government Toolkit Resources

Description: Identify and develop toolkit resources for local governments, including sample IT plans, sample inter-local agreements, best practices, and case studies.

Accomplishments

Due to the time and resources spent on the first two action plans, no progress has been made on this action plan to date.