

*Information
Technology
Task Force*



Strategic Plan

Second Edition - February 1999



*Hamilton
County*

Nebraska

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Complete Strategic Plan

Preface

Throughout the plan many issues are labeled as "Community" which is used in a broad sense and not limited to any one town. Community may also refer to county when applicable.

Introduction

We live in a changing world, and technology is causing that change to occur more rapidly now than it did fifty, twenty-five or even ten years ago. Information technology is the superhighway which links rural America to urban America. It enhances our ability to communicate with individuals and organizations around us in a direct and efficient manner. Information technology enables us to more easily and more rapidly be informed of the continuous advancements which occur around us; therefore, enhancing the quality of our lives both economically and socially.

How do we adapt to change? How do we use technology for the betterment of our citizens? How do we encourage the positive use of technology in order to adapt to this rapidly changing world? We believe that part of the answer to these questions involves planning; looking ahead three, five, ten, or even twenty years to identify the kind of information technology we want in place and then organizing our resources to reach those goals. Planning for the future and acting on a plan is more desirable than reacting to changes that have already had an impact On our community.

In the summer of 1993 a task force was formed to help guide the community information technology strategic planning process. This group was composed of representatives from business, industry, agriculture, municipal and county government, the library, local school districts, health care, telecommunications, information services professionals, the community college and the university. The membership of that group has changed from time to time over the past six years, but the same basic constituencies are represented.

The purpose of the task force is to facilitate the use of and planning for the use of information technology to enhance our overall development and quality of life. The task force has and will continue to:

- (A) Provide a forum for individuals to share their vision of what information technology could or should be.
- (B) Speed up the process of building a consensus of opinion within the community and then move these "visions" into a plan of action.
- (C) Coordinate the efforts of individuals and community organizations so that they are consistent with the common objectives and goals for information technology.
- (D) Enhance the community's ability to provide value and a competitive advantage for individual and corporate citizens by keeping pace with the rapid changes of technology.

The first strategic plan was published in September of 1994. Several goals and action steps were outlined in that plan, most of which have been accomplished or are a work in progress at the present time. The task force determined during 1997 that since much of the work envisioned by the prior plan was accomplished or underway, that it was time to update the plan, set new goals and action steps. This publication and plan is the result of that effort.

Description of Process Used to Develop the Plan

Following is an outline of the planning process used by the Information Technology Task Force and members of the community to develop an information technology plan for the community of Aurora and Hamilton County.

Step 1: Community Assessment

The task force identified and assessed the various strengths and weaknesses of the community as well as the threats and opportunities to the community as it related to information technology deployment and use in our area. The purpose of this step in the process was to become oriented to the community's current state. This step is sometimes referred to as an environmental scan.

Step 2: Developing a Mission Statement

A mission statement is an attempt to define in writing an overall thrust for a particular effort within the community. The task force discussed at length the mission of the task force as well as the mission underlying our community's concern for the deployment and application of information technology. A mission statement gradually evolved from these various discussions along with general feedback from the community via personal contact as well as formal survey information. This information was consolidated to create the mission statement in this plan.

Step 3: Determining What the Community Wants in Terms of Information Technology

The task force went to the public through informational news releases, paid advertisements, and presentations to numerous organizations and small groups. The presentations to various groups consisted of a prepared video outlining what community integrated networks were about. A member of the task force also explained the information technology awareness and planning process.

Prior to the writing of the first plan, an Information Technology Conference was held at the Aurora Middle School Fine Arts Theater in the winter of 1994. This conference not only educated citizens of available information technology, but also requested input by community members on the mission statement and the direction the community should proceed in order to accomplish their goals. Approximately 175 people attended the half-day conference. The task

force also distributed conference evaluations to participants in order to determine their interests and reactions toward the conference. The task force placed specific emphasis on obtaining responses from a broad and diverse group of citizenry. The task force was pleased not only with the volume of written and verbal evaluations received but, in particular, were impressed with the quality and the broad range of interests represented in the input.

Following the conference, two additional questionnaires were distributed. The first was a short form survey designed to gather input from the general public. This form was available at several locations within the community as well as distributed to organizations within the community. In addition, a more detailed questionnaire was given to key institutions, organizations and individuals (e.g. schools, library, community center, fair board, extension office, leadership center, village center, village boards and city councils, county commissioners, hospital and many other similar entities) which were thought to have a particular interest in information technology and its potential within the community.

Another Information Technology Conference was held at the Aurora Middle School Fine Arts Theater in the winter of 1996. Approximately 150 people attended this half-day conference. This conference provided additional awareness and also an opportunity for the task force to obtain feedback from community leaders.

In preparation for the goal setting process for this edition of the plan, a subsequent survey was distributed through various community groups to obtain further input from the public.

Step 4: Putting the Community Goals in Writing

The task force took the community input and identified certain goals to be part of the plan. The first plan published in 1994 had seven primary goals. This second plan had eight primary goals. An update on the accomplishment or progress on the seven goals from the first plan is contained in this publication. The eight new goals along with the action steps are also listed in this plan.

Step 5: Develop the Action Plan

The various action steps necessary to attain these goals were obtained from community and task force input. The task force, in some cases, felt it necessary to more clearly define some of those suggested actions. The task force has not in the past taken on these particular tasks as its responsibility, but rather seeks to distribute the information and encourage individuals and groups with an interest to take responsibility for carrying out the various actions required. Although the task force may choose to facilitate the implementation of certain action steps, the

task force considers it extremely important that most of the goals be achieved by individuals entities or consortiums within the community other than the task force.

Step 6: Ongoing Evaluation

After dissemination and distribution of the plan to the public, the task force intends to periodically review the plan in light of technological advancements, actions taken on certain items in the plan, and generally for the purpose of evaluating the information technology planning process. It is anticipated that we will need to use the planning process in the future for constant growth and development of this plan as local, regional and global events and other changes require it.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to deploy' and apply the latest in information technology to better access, process, create and distribute that information both within and outside of our community; thus fostering improved educational options, health care service availability, employment opportunities, and an overall improved quality of life for our citizens.

Progress Report of the Goals of the 1994 Plan

TWO-WAY VIDEO CONNECTIONS AMONG OUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Goal: To connect two or more of the schools or educational institutions in our general area for the purpose of sharing instruction and other educational resources, enhancing course alternatives and enhancing ongoing training opportunities for adults.

Description: This is specifically to access teaching resources at other locations, primarily through the K-12 school system. It could bring courses that we are not able to offer right now into our schools. It is also currently used for adult education through "distance learning" programs. College Park and Central Community College are currently using this technology.

Progress Report: By spring of 1998 all computers equipped with the necessary equipment to do desk top videoconferencing (software, boards and camera) were installed at the five sites (Aurora Middle School, Aurora High School, Hampton School, Giltner School, and the Edgerton Center). This equipment provides desktop videoconferencing capabilities using ISDN service between the various sites and also makes available such links to other Sites outside the immediate area with similar capabilities. The science teachers are continuing to explore ways in which this technology can be effectively used.

Beginning in late 1996 an effort was made to explore providing two way interactive video connections between several area school districts. There are approximately 23 area school districts involved in the project. Approximately nine of these schools applied for a lottery fund grant which was received in the summer of 1998 for the provision of classroom equipment related to that system. Aurora and Hampton schools within Hamilton County are among those receiving funds and setting up classrooms which will be operational by the fall of 1999. This system uses multiple TV monitors in the classroom and a D53 digital video system. There are ongoing planning efforts by the principals and other administrative and teaching personnel within those school districts to determine the schedule of classes and the curriculum to be offered over this network. There is a planned link to the Community College for use of this system as well.

MULTIPLE PUBLIC ACCESS POINTS TO SATELLITE DOWNLINK

Goal: To provide access to satellite programs which are primarily educational in nature to multiple sites including, but not necessarily limited to, the schools, hospital, library, leadership center, community center, fairgrounds and the Edgerton Educational Center.

Description: Satellite conferences can be for specific business use, but are more likely to be used to access general, worldwide broadcasts of an educational program or conference. Since this is the same technology as used by cable television, it could be broadcasted in many sites. This proposal suggests we have specific, public viewing sites. These sites would be moderate to large in size. This project uses one-way video connection (downlink only) technology and may have two-way audio capabilities using a teleconferencing unit via telephone lines.

Progress Report: Community members can request satellite programming via the library and watch their program on Mid-State Cable TV channel 38. In the fall of 1995 various sites were setup to provide satellite programs Sites are: Leadership Center, Edgerton Center, Aurora School, Alice M. Farr Library, Memorial Hospital, Hamilton County Extension Service, Hamilton County Fairgrounds, and the Bremer Community Center. Members of the public can contact one of these entities for the purpose of setting up satellite downlink educational programs. This effort was lead in large part by the University of Nebraska Extension service and the local cable television provider.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO ON-LINE SERVICES AT REASONABLE COST

Goal: To provide a system which reduces the cost of on-line access to Internet (both educational and commercial), Compuserve, America On-Line, Prodigy and similar on-line services within our local area.

Description: Internet is a worldwide network of computer users and databases. It accessed through telephone lines and paid for by user-fees. Individuals can belong to discussion groups on Internet or simply access information from hundreds of sources including libraries For example, National Institute of Health has a branch on Internet that has current references for medical information for doctors and patients to use. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development has a branch with many useful references as well. Internet is generally accessed in two ways, and the services may vary depending upon which way one accesses Internet. Access is provided for educational purposes through certain institutions; access is also provided for those outside of education through commercial Internet services. In addition, there are a variety of other on-line services for the retrieval of information, the most common being

CompuServe, America On-Line and Prodigy. Although all of these services can be accessed in our local communities now, they can not be currently accessed without paying a long-distance toll charge which can become expensive if one stays on the services for extended periods of time. This goal should encompass the necessary efforts to make on-line access more affordable and also, perhaps, provide certain points within the community where the public might access some of those services, with or without a usage fee.

Progress Report: Hamilton Telephone Company has been offering local Internet services since December of 1995. This allows subscribers to access the entire Internet without paying any long distance charges in all communities within Hamilton County. The Aurora News Register was the first weekly paper in Nebraska to go on line and continues to be actively involved in use of this on-line media.

The Alice M. Farr Library located in Aurora has installed two computers and provides two dial up connections for the purpose of providing the public with an opportunity to access the Internet free of charge. The Library is currently in the process of upgrading the speed and processing capability of their computers and upgrading their access to the Internet to an ISDN connection. This will significantly improve the speed of service to the Internet at this public location and allow the Library to add additional computers to the same connection if desired.

VIDEO CONFERENCE ROOM AVAILABLE FOR BUSINESS AND PUBLIC USE

Goal: To provide a video conferencing room in Hamilton County which is available for public and private use.

Description: Video conferences utilize technology that gives two-way video and interactive audio at all viewing sites. It can be utilized through satellite technology, but is thought of here as private viewing sites, using telephone lines. The room probably would be moderate to small in size. An example of use would be a local business conference with a parent company in another town. All viewing sites would need specialized equipment at this time. There are currently about a dozen such sites in Nebraska. The room would be available on a fee basis.

Progress Report: Memorial Hospital has setup a video conferencing room in their recent fall 1998 expansion. The equipment was installed and the hospital is using it for training and medical consoles so patients no longer need to travel to see a specialist. This equipment and connection utilizes ISDN technology which allows connection to other sites similar served both within and outside of the immediate area. Community members and businesses have access to

this room for videoconference by arranging for scheduling of the same with the hospital and paying any associated telecommunications charges.

COMPUTER MAIL NETWORK AND COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Goal: To have a local electronic mail and community bulletin board system which would allow computer users with a modem to access and distribute information over the system to individuals and to the public at-large.

Description: E-Mail is electronic mail. It is a system of communication via computer over telephone lines. Bulletin Boards are public access programs that contain information and share-ware programs written by individuals. It is like Internet, but this proposal puts it on a local basis. A similar system exists at the Aurora High School. This proposal creates a computer network in the community for messages and a bulletin board. It would probably have some fee for operation.

Progress Report: Electronic mail (e-mail) services are a part of the Internet service provide by Hamilton locally. Although certain information is available about the community and other items on the various local Internet sites and through the schools and other organizations, a community bulletin board standing alone has not been created.

ONGOING AWARENESS PROGRAMS ABOUT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Goal: To organize programs, educational events and materials about information technology which describes and illustrates the technology available, its uses and application possibilities and distribute this information throughout our community.

Description: This goal would consist of a group, task force or organization developing programs which serve the community with information and demonstrations of the various information technologies that are becoming available.

Progress Report: The Task Force has held two technology conferences, one in February of 1994 and the second in January of 1996. In addition to the two conferences, the Task Force has set up a booth at the Hamilton County Fair in 1996 and 1997. Demonstrations included Virtual Reality, CyberMall project, Internet services, computer projects that 4-H kids and school kids had worked on, video demonstrations from Memorial Hospital and farming diagnostic demonstrations. The Task Force continues to provide programs to civic groups on an on call basis.

FOUNDATION TO FUND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS

Goal: To establish a fund or a separate foundation which will serve as a resource of private money raised to support projects relating to information technology which are unable to be done on a for-profit basis by private enterprise.

Description: When analyzing the survey results, the task force discovered that several community members wanted to establish a foundation to support the funding of information technology projects. This goal is a result of those suggestions.

Progress Report: Hamilton County Information Technology Task Force applied and was accepted as a non-profit (501(c) 3) status. A significant gift was received from an anonymous donor earlier in 1997 which assisted in the provision of desktop videoconferencing equipment for the schools and a video projector for public use which is available at the Hamilton County Extension office. The Task Force will continue to take donations to fund future information technology projects and seek supplemental funding for various projects.

New Plan Goals and Action Steps

After reviewing the progress report and obtaining additional new, updated community input the task force identified eight goals to which are set forth in this current version of the plan. On the following pages you will find the eight goals together with a listing of action steps identified by the task force as being part of the process of achieving those goals.

Goal: *Enlist the support and participation of other organizations and entities, both public and private, in the process of developing, setting and accomplishing the various goals of the information technology strategic plan.*

Action Steps:

- (1) Identify by listing possible organizations and entities which could work with the Information Technology Task Force.
- (2) Identify champions (individual members of those particular organizations or entities) who are willing to lead the information technology effort within those groups and/or participate on the Task Force.
- (3) Survey or otherwise solicit the input of the memberships of these various organizations or entities for feedback on the Information Technology Strategic Plan and adapt or enhance the Plan to accommodate their needs.
- (4) Facilitate the provisioning of the needed resources and information to those various entities and organizations, possibly through the establishment of a resource point or entity within the community.

Goal: *Additional Training and Educational Opportunities in Information Technology:*

The community needs to maximize the opportunities for seminars, conferences and courses relating to information technology as much as possible to encourage and make it practical for our citizens to gain the expertise needed in information technology.

Action Steps:

- (1) Do a needs assessment in order to identify education desired by various entities and individuals within the community
- (2) Meet with Community College and University personnel to discuss possible courses which could be made available in the community; locations for those courses (high school, library, leadership center or otherwise) and ways to promote the courses to the citizenry.
- (3) Seek out private enterprise(s) that may be interested in developing or meeting educational or training needs (Computer Spectrum, outside seminar companies, etc.).
- (4) Identify specific employment capabilities needed for the community and identify ways in which information technology can bring career specific training to the community (i.e. distance learning for medical personnel).
- (5) Encourage businesses to partner with educational institutions in the area (middle schools, high schools and community colleges) to provide training opportunities or provide input into educational programs tailored to fit their workforce needs.

Goal: *Recruit information technology based businesses; businesses which use a high level of information technology; and individuals with professional expertise in the area of information technology:*

The community needs to attract additional information technology businesses and/or businesses with a propensity to make good use of information technology to take advantage of the growth in this sector of the economy and to add further balance and diversity to our local agricultural, manufacturing and retail sectors.

Action Steps:

- (1) Explore in corporation with Aurora Development Corporation the building or development of a business incubator with a focus on businesses which are based on information technology; or which have a higher than usual propensity to use information technology; and/or have a higher than average need for an information technology rich working environment.

- (2) Examine community marketing materials and upgrade or modify them to focus on the attraction of the kinds of businesses listed in (a) and/or the individuals which work in or start those kinds of businesses.
- (3) Consult with the University Park Technology Center in Lincoln to determine how we could become an attractive location for businesses which have started there which are looking for a longer term second phase location or be an attractive location for similar types of startup businesses.
- (4) Meet with the Department of Economic Development representatives to review our plan for the recruitment of these types of businesses and solicit their involvement in our process.
- (5) Develop a video which focuses on the fact that this is a great location for a business or individual desiring to be within an information technology rich social and business environment.
- (6) Explore methods or programs by which local businesses will be encouraged to provide internships for high school and post secondary students.

Goal: *Enhance the Level of Public Access to the Internet:*

The quantity and quality "public" Internet access points needs to be improved in order to serve more individuals who do not have adequate access in their businesses or homes.

Action Steps:

- (1) Solicit the Alice M. Farr Library to add additional access points to the Internet, increase the speed of the machines and the capacity of their Internet access.
- (2) Further explore and identify the appropriate role of the library in the use and provisioning of information technology access within the community.
- (3) Identify an entity and/or individual which might appropriately be the focal point for information technology related efforts and provisioning of information for the community.
- (4) Explore the development of a plan for bulk packaging of computers and/or Internet in an effort to provide a reduced cost of entry for individuals which are currently not using a computer or on line services.

- (5) Encourage the exploration of and use of networks which provide higher speeds for the transmission of video and data.

Goal: *Enhance the Opportunities and Services Available to Existing Businesses via Information Technology:*

The Community needs to facilitate and encourage the deployment of information technology tools to be used by our existing businesses.

Action Steps:

- (1) Revitalize and enhance the Cybermall of local businesses, perhaps adding more local businesses on the web.
- (2) Explore methods by which local businesses can make better use of the Internet to sell products or provide service.
- (3) Explore ways in which videoconferencing facilities either now in existence (hospital) or yet to be developed can be used to enhance local business opportunities.
- (4) Develop an Internet listserv to which local businesses can subscribe to share ideas on topics such as local availability of products and services with perhaps a special section on information technology related services.
- (5) Explore the possibility of having the newspaper or other private enterprise develop a career/job site for posting of job opportunities in Aurora, Hamilton County or Central Nebraska, perhaps modeled after the Omaha Career Site.

Goal: *Year 2000 Awareness:*

The community needs to be individual and collectively aware of the issues to be addressed to insure that vital functions of our government, schools and businesses are prepared for January 1, 2000.

Action Steps:

- (1) Host a seminar or conference, perhaps sponsored by the University or the Community College to provide information to local individuals and businesses about the "year 2000" issue.

Goal: *Increase the Awareness of the Impact of Information Technology on the Social-Economic Structure of our Society and Specifically our Local Area:*

There is a need to continue to provide opportunities to generally make the public aware of how information technology will impact our community in order that citizens can prepare themselves accordingly.

Action Steps:

- (1) Host Information Technology Conference No..
- (2) Consider having the schools host a special information technology day/evening/Saturday where tours of the information technology curriculum and outlines of related course work are provided to the public and/or parents.
- (3) Enhance the community web site to further illustrate and demonstrate the information technology rich environment which exists in Hamilton County and facilitate the provision of information technology related resources and information to our citizens and those outside of the area considering working with or within our community.
- (4) Explore ways in which technical support for information technology hardware and software program support can be more readily accessed via telephone, Internet and in person.

Goal: *Continue the Hamilton County Information Technology Fund:*

There will from time to time continue to be special projects, services and facilities for the advancement of information technology in our local area which will require nonprofit funding or stimulation.

Actions Steps:

- (1) Provide the necessary startup or partial startup funding for an entity or individual which can serve as a focal point for information technology resources, if funds are needed.
- (2) Provide working funds for the various organizational and awareness activities of the Information Technology Task Force.

Use of the Plan

The entire planning process which has led to this point has been voluntary in nature. The task force was formed voluntarily with people from diverse and broad areas of interest. The community's input was sought and received on a voluntary basis as well. Implementing the plan, working to achieve the action steps and reaching the goals will also be voluntary in nature. Our desire is for individuals and entities within the community to use the plan as a resource for determining their own actions and plans. Hopefully, some of the ideas derived from the community and published in this plan will spark new activity and positive progress toward one or more of the goals or the overall mission of Hamilton County's Information Technology Strategic Plan.

The task force may monitor to some degree what happens as a result of the plan, review and evaluate the planning process and the results of it, and perhaps even encourage certain individuals, entities or groups to take action on certain parts of the plan. However since the task force has no formal decision making or legal authority, implementation of the plan is highly dependent upon the community embracing the goals and the appropriate parties accepting responsibility for achievement of particular steps or goals within the plan. The plan should be viewed as a resource which defines some of the desires of the community and identifies some of the goals or ideas relating to those desires. The plan should not in any way be viewed as restrictive in nature or cast in concrete. Ideas no doubt have already and will continue to develop which will not be specifically addressed in the plan but certainly are meritorious and should be pursued by the community or by organizations or individuals within the community.

Coordination of Implementation of the Plan

The task force recognizes that there is the possibility that a variety of groups or individuals may elect to take action on one or more of the ideas or goals set forth in the plan. The task force also recognizes that to some degree a coordination of that effort might be valuable. Although the task force has no desire to direct which groups or individuals should work on any particular area or idea, the task force would appreciate knowing which group is working on what goal. To the extent it comes to their attention, the task force will try to inform you of any other individuals or entities which may be interested in working in the same area. Again, however, you or the group you are part of should not feel restricted in any way, nor should you feel any necessity of letting the task force know what part of the plan you are implementing.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The task force welcomes your recommendations. If, after reviewing the plan you have additional suggestions or recommendations as to the plan itself, the planning process or ideas which might enhance the actions taken as a result of the information technology planning process, please contact one of the people listed below or fill out the form on the next page and return to the address on the form:

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Explain:

I would be interested in helping the task force - What area?

mail form to:

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Suggestions or ideas to help the task force reach their goals outlined in the Strategic Plan:

I would be interested in attending task force meetings regularly:

Name:

Street Address:

City/State/Zip:

Phone:

Email