

Clackamas County, Oregon Telecommunity Center Project Evaluation



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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to evaluate progress to date and identify lessons learned from Clackamas County, Oregon's telecommunity development project. The county has created telecommunity centers in three of its rural communities: Canby, Molalla and Estacada. This report gives an account of centers in Canby and Molalla, which first opened in 2000. The third center, in Estacada, is just now being developed, so evaluation measures are not yet available.

This report reviews three categories of measures of success:

- *Process Evaluation*
Includes measures important to planning the centers, such as community involvement and support, and degree of support from project partners.
- *Product Evaluation*
Includes measures of actual results, including whether the centers are attracting their intended target customers, and the extent to which the centers are becoming sustainable and self-sufficient.
- *Outcome Evaluation*
Includes measures of community and economic benefits, including new skills created, shorter or avoided trips, new jobs created and increased business competitiveness.

To gather information on the development and status of the centers for this report, the centers were asked to provide data and information they collect and use to measure their performance. Most of their information is anecdotal. The scope of this project did not include original research such as customer feedback surveys. Reports produced during the course of the project were reviewed and interviews with staff, project partners and customers provided additional information and perspectives.

A report evaluating the county's telecommunity centers would not be complete without mentioning the ongoing concern that has surrounded the name, "telecommunity." The county's team struggled over selecting a name that would adequately capture the spirit of this new gathering spot – it's different from the office or a campus, and it's neither a home office nor a coffee shop. It offers the professionalism of an office, and, to some extent, the comforts of home without the distractions. In the end, the county's team decided to stick with the term "telecommunity" with an understanding that it refers to both a *partnership* among public and private organizations, and a *place* that offers public access to technology, learning opportunities, telework, business services, classes and meetings.

Evaluation Measures

The performance measures used as a guide for this report were originally selected by the Molalla Telecommunity Center planning team as part of their business plan. These measures were considered useful for ongoing evaluation and fine tuning required for successful operations of the center.

Evaluation Measures	
<u>Goal / objective</u>	<u>Performance Measures</u>
Process Evaluation	
<i>Achieve community commitment and buy in</i>	Participation in community planning team / technology center advisory team and ongoing support of the center in the city's budget
Product Evaluation	
<i>Agreement to implement a telecommunity center</i>	Consensus reached on adopting a plan for a technology center
<i>Provisions to ensure implementation</i>	Completion of feasibility analysis
<i>Track lessons learned</i>	Something new is learned and/or accomplished as a replicable model
Outcome Evaluation	
<i>Efficient access to jobs with reduced traffic congestion</i>	Commute trips avoided
<i>Increased employee productivity</i>	Services used; customer satisfaction with equipment, services, software and training programs
<i>Increased business competitiveness</i>	Services used; hours of use; utilization rate
<i>New community resource</i>	Demographic profile of users; new technology available
<i>Economic benefits</i>	New jobs created, start-up companies supported Higher level of skills available in the community

Background

Clackamas County, Oregon began a telecommunity development program in 1998 to make telework, technology and learning opportunities available to residents and businesses in its small, rural communities. This program was part of a broad economic development strategy in which telecommunications capacity and infrastructure became a priority to create more economically competitive, livable and sustainable rural communities.

Recognizing the possibilities and challenges of an increasingly technology-driven economy, the county convened a diverse project team of local leaders willing to participate. Local businesses and community leaders, community college program managers and state agency representatives joined in the effort. The research and feasibility analysis phases of the project revealed that market trends and local community attitudes were favorable toward telework and telecommunity center development. Drawing upon the experience of other telecommunity projects, careful planning, financially strong partners, smart marketing and a three-to five year timeline were identified as key factors for a center to become sustainable.

The mission of Clackamas County's telecommunity centers is to create access to computer technology, high speed Internet service, work space and learning for the purpose of enabling telework and encouraging residents to build technology skills for their personal and professional lives. Centers are also seen as a catalyst to let residents try new software and computer equipment so they can set up systems in their own homes and businesses. Overall, the centers are intended to provide residents and businesses with new options for new ways to work and learn within their local communities so they can be more flexible, more competitive and more economically secure.

Overview of Outcomes to Date

Canby Telecommunity Center

The Canby community opened its telecommunity center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house in April 2000. The center was founded as a partnership among the City of Canby,

Canby Telecommunity Center Overview	
Started:	April 2000
Location:	184 N. Grant Street Canby, Oregon 97013
Contact:	Kitty Thiel, Administrator and Community Education Coordinator
Population:	11,702 in 2001
Key Partners:	Clackamas Community College Canby School District Canby Telephone Association (provides building space and high speed Internet access at no charge) City of Canby (2000-2001)
Major Accomplishments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Focus on learning through community education and college credit classes.· Partnership between the college and school district.· "Open lab" day to help those without technology access.
<i>"The importance of technology in rural and small communities is economic equity and fairness. You don't have to move to a big city like Portland or New York. You can stay right here in your community and have all the tools of technology available to you."</i>	
Richard Ares, President, Canby Telephone Association	

the business community, Clackamas Community College, Canby School District and Clackamas County. The center's office space was donated by Canby Telephone Association. Economic development matching funds from the Mount Hood Economic Alliance were given to the city for building improvements and other capital costs. Although the center was initially supported by the City of Canby, support was withdrawn in 2001 as part of budget cutbacks.

Clackamas Community College increased its support of the center after a federal grant dedicated to local technology centers was secured in June 2000 and a local \$47 million bond measure was passed in November

2000. To staff the center, the local school district relocated two of its administrative staff members to work out of the telecommunity center. Support was later reduced in overall budget cutbacks. Influenced by changing financial conditions, the telecommunity center shifted its focus to classes and a free computer lab open to the public.

The college's three-year federal technology center grant enabled the center to target services to local residents who might not otherwise have access to computer technology. The center's services and content have been expanded through a number of partnerships:

- Clackamas Community College supplied the center with a dozen wireless laptops and an onsite computer technician for "open lab" days offered free to the public one day a week, especially targeting the non-English speaking community. The computer technician helps the general public with web surfing, e-mail and software troubleshooting.

- Clackamas Community College's Small Business Development Center offers business counseling by appointment at the telecommunity center at no charge to local businesses. The development center's business counselor made personal visits in a door-to-door campaign among Canby's local businesses. However, the development center reports that few business owners have taken advantage of the offer so far.
- The Canby School District assigned two administrative staff members to support to the center while also performing their jobs for the school district. Clackamas Community College funded part of the cost of the staff.
- Clackamas County's Employer Training and Business Services group furnished software tutorials, resume templates and samples. They also offer onsite, one-on-one consultation and help with creating resumes on an appointment basis.
- The Canby Area Chamber of Commerce promotes the center's services to its small business members, including development of its ShopCanby.com community website supporting local businesses.
- The local Starbucks store donates coffee to Canby's community education program for the telecommunity center's use in meetings and classes.

The Canby Telecommunity Center is currently located on a prominent downtown street corner with convenient parking, a stationery store, pharmacy, café and banking nearby. With modest furnishings in a compact space, the center's reception area leads to a small classroom, a small private office with a desk, and an open area with three computer work stations and a docking station with high speed Internet access. A variety of office equipment is available, including a printer, copier, fax machine, scanner and an LCD projector for meetings and presentations. The center has a meeting room that accommodates up to 15 people. Furnished with the college's wireless laptop computers, the room serves as the center's conference room, classroom and computer lab. The room also has a small refrigerator and a coffee maker.

There were frequent problems with equipment and Internet connections early in the project. These were resolved, and the center has worked to increase the reliability of its equipment and Internet access connections.

The facility initially began operating 41.5 hours a week. However, through a series of budget cutbacks, the hours have periodically changed and are now reduced to 27 hours per week. The center is available by appointment during non-business hours. It is difficult to obtain current information on the center's hours of business because the center's phone message line, printed information materials and website all list different hours of operation.

Clackamas Community College determined in early 2002 that the Canby center had not demonstrated viability at its current location. The college plans to relocate the center to a professional technical building adjacent to the high school. The move to the new site is planned in 2003. The new building is expected to include several telework stations.

Revenue figures from services and classes offered at the center were not available. The center does not have a central accounting system and does not track the center's overall expenses and revenues. Revenue from classes held at the center goes directly to the college or the school district and is not identified with the center.

Canby Customer Profile

Canby Telecommunity Center customers are drawn mostly from the local community. Neither the overall number of customers nor use of the center is formally tracked. The center's administrator notes that most customers come for the free, "open lab" days. Open lab customers come to surf the Internet, learn to use e-mail, do online shopping and try out new software. Telework and project work at the work stations are less popular. However, the center successfully secured a teleworker on a contract that lasted nearly a year.

**Canby Telecommunity Center
Types of Customer Use**

*Open lab (free days)
Meeting room
Community education classes
College credit classes
Computer work stations -- projects,
online research and telework*

Customers who use the computer work stations for projects and online research praised the center's friendly staff, comfortable surroundings and reasonable prices. A repeat customer, who initially read about the center in a newspaper article, said she was willing to drive a distance of more than twenty miles to do research project work because of Canby's pleasant work environment and affordable prices. She

added that the productive yet relaxed setting in a professional office set the center apart from other public computer access services in libraries and Internet cafés.

The center did not provide data on the number of customers and participants in its community education classes. However, the center reports that local community education courses are an increasingly popular draw and consistently well-attended. Topics range from introduction to computers to safety classes for babysitters.

From mid-April 2001 through mid-April 2002, Clackamas Community College served 1,664 students at the center and other locations in Canby. The college reports that the public appreciates the self-paced learning offered during open labs.

College credit classes scheduled at the center frequently have been cancelled when the number of registrations failed to meet expectations. On the other hand, the college's classes offering English as a second language are in such high demand that the center's classroom is not big enough to accommodate them. When college credit classes are cancelled, the school district's community education program books the space for its classes.

Small business counseling has been offered. Few businesses have taken advantage of it. The meeting room is popular with local businesses. Canby Telephone Association has been a steady customer, and holds many of its training sessions there.

Molalla Telecommunity Center

The Molalla Telecommunity Center (also known as the “telecenter”) began in early 2000 as a prototype in the Molalla Public Library. In 2001, the library and the center relocated to a new, expanded facility at the former site of Molalla High School. After the library moved to its new location, library usage soared 40 percent and continues to grow.

The Molalla community put its support behind creating a telecommunity center early in the planning phases when local survey results showed strong interest in access to computers, home-based businesses, computer training and telework. The library embraced the concept as an integral part of its mission to support the educational, recreational and economic well-being of the community.

The center’s target outcomes are to:

- Be a reliable place to access information using technology.
- Support learning to use computers and the Internet.
- Provide personalized customer service for a positive, productive experience.
- Enable the public to try out and use new software and hardware and do projects using high speed Internet access.
- Offer college classes such as English as a second language and computer basics in Spanish.

Similar to Canby, Molalla’s center is a direct result of the time and resources contributed by many partners. Federal funds through the Oregon Office of Energy funded a business plan, created with the participation of a local volunteer citizens advisory group. The Mount Hood Economic Alliance paid for equipment and software for start-up. Molalla Communications provided high speed Internet access. Federal funding helped pay for building the library. Foundation funding and a Leadership Grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services are helping the telecenter stay on the forefront with high quality computer systems and software upgrades. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated \$11,500 toward the purchase of four additional personal computer systems. Foundation support is envisioned as a continuing part of the library’s ongoing operations and expansion.

Telecommunity center services are viewed as part of doing business of the library. While the center was created without expectations of being a revenue generator, it has produced approximately \$5,000 annual revenue.

The telecenter is a private room within the library. There are two private cubicles and work stations with personal computers. There is also a laptop computer docking station and a Macintosh work station. Two conference tables seat up to ten people or can be used to

Molalla Telecommunity Center Overview	
<i>Started:</i>	March 2000 (prototype)
<i>Location:</i>	Molalla Public Library 201 E. Fifth Street Molalla, Oregon 97038
<i>Contact:</i>	Randy Collver, Library Director
<i>Population:</i>	5,665 in 2001 (19,900 in the library service area)
<i>Key Partners:</i>	Molalla Public Library and the City of Molalla (leases the building from the Molalla River School District). Molalla Communications (provided funds for the community meeting room and provides high speed Internet access).
<i>Major Accomplishments:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dedicated information technology telework and learning center, integral to the city's new library. · Growing customer base of local businesses and several teleworkers. · A community meeting place. · Reliable service, high end equipment.
<p><i>"We are becoming part of a wider community base of the world, and technology is what is going to take us there."</i></p> <p>Sheri Sawyer, Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce, and City Council member</p>	

spread out and work on a special project. Audio visual presentation equipment, a television and VCR and wireless laptops are available, as well as a laser color printer, an inkjet printer, fax, scanner and copier. The newest editions of Microsoft, Adobe, QuickBooks and other software and tutorials are also available. A large conference room seats up to 60 people.

Hours of operation match the hours of the library, currently 52 hours per week. The center is available after business hours by appointment. Services and equipment have been added gradually, with a focus on building a track record of reliability.

Molalla Customer Profile

The library tracks the number of customers who use the center, asks for feedback on how the center is used and seeks suggestions for improvements. The meeting rooms have proven to be a huge draw. The telecenter is used mainly in the evenings as a conference room rather than for its computer work stations. Individual telework has priority over meetings. If the center is occupied by a teleworker, meetings are conducted elsewhere so that teleworkers are undisturbed.

The library's large conference room is used by an average of 325 people each week. The smaller meeting space in the telecenter drew an average of 171 people each week during fiscal year 2002. The center attracted 5,399 customers in its first year of operations, jumping to 9,205 the following year. About 82 percent of the computer usage is on personal computers and 18 percent on the Macintosh. The docking station has not been used.

**Molalla Telecommunity Center
Types of Customer Use, July 2000 -- June 2002**

Customer Use*	July 2000 -- June 2001		July 2001 -- July 2002	
	Number of Customers	Percentage of Use	Number of Customers	Percentage of Use
Conference	5,270	98	8,920	97
Project work	82	2	92	1
Job searching	29	-	106	1
Software testing	<u>18</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	5,399	100	9,205	100

*Figures exclude large conference room use.

Project work is the most common use of the telecenter work stations, followed by job searching on the Internet and software testing and tutorials. Some customers come to the center simply to use the high quality printer. The center would like to attract more teleworkers and entrepreneurs. At least one state agency has expressed interest in an ongoing contract to encourage telework for its traveling staff members who currently work out of their vehicles.

In the past year, Clackamas Community College served 212 students in Molalla as part of the program. Classes include English as a second language programs incorporating technology. The college reports that some of the students had never used a computer before starting classes in Molalla.

Process Evaluation

Process Evaluation

Achieve community commitment and buy in

Participation in community planning team / technology center advisory team and ongoing support of the center in the city's budget

Achieve Community Commitment and Buy-In

Community commitment and buy-in were achieved in a number of ways throughout the project's planning process. As a first step, the county convened a broad-based, community-driven team comprising both public and private sector participants. Community, education, government and business leaders were invited to participate starting from the earliest planning stages. The county convened the meetings, sent out agendas, prepared minutes and circulated project information via e-mail. Reports from the project were posted on the web and broadly circulated among telework professionals to share progress and lessons learned.

The team had a direct impact on shaping the focus, decisions and direction of the project and acted as a steady guide and catalyst for community action. Local business leaders serving on the project team contributed to a focus on the bottom line. Matching funds for developing the telecommunity centers, managed by the county, provided incentive for the communities to commit to the project. This approach enabled community representatives to share the information beyond those on the project team and build awareness within their communities.

The county-wide project team met on a regular basis, adapting its agenda as the project progressed. Meetings were held only if key information and reports were presented for discussion or the team had decisions to make. Molalla's telecommunity center director reports that the county-wide team meetings have been a highly valuable source of ideas and support – a “not-to-be-missed” gathering that he considers among the most productive meetings he attends. The team continues to meet as of the date of this report.

The county's approach to the process led to learning and innovation. For example, Estacada began participating in the county-wide project team meetings after the centers in Canby and Molalla were well underway. Estacada's team learned directly from the other communities' experience and developed its own unique approach to telecommunity center development.

In addition to the county-wide project team, local community teams were a vital part of Clackamas County's process. In Molalla, a volunteer local planning committee helped design a telephone survey of 400 residents to learn about attitudes and interests in community issues including technology and telework. The survey was conducted during the research phase of the project in the spring of 1999.

Molalla also formed a local community-based advisory team to help create a business plan for Molalla's telecommunity center. This team included a telecommuter, a business owner, a cable company representative, the chamber of commerce director, and the library director. The team was instrumental in shaping a business plan to fit the community's needs. The business plan was completed in the spring of 2000.

A community planning team in Canby was formed early in the planning stages. It disbanded after several months when it appeared the community lacked matching funds. However, when the Canby Telephone Association offered the use of one of its buildings, the City of Canby soon forged a partnership with the Canby School District and Clackamas Community College to start a telecommunity center.

A start-up marketing program created for the Canby Telecommunity Center drew input from community leaders as well as the county-wide team. Through a series of creative work sessions, a distinctive logo was selected (shown at right), key messages were tailored to target customers, and collateral marketing materials and websites were developed. Articles were placed in local newsletters and several press releases were written announcing telecommunity center news. Canby's logo and marketing materials were used as a model for the other centers in Molalla and Estacada, enabling a consistent look and a cohesive, economical approach to cooperatively market each center. The start-up program was intended to be a catalyst for the community, however, marketing communications initiatives were not continued.



To further support the communities and build awareness about the project, Clackamas County produced a video about the services and benefits of the telecommunity centers. Funds and staff were donated by the Clackamas County Cable Communications Department. The video was broadcast 145 times from April 2002 through January 2003 on a local cable television channel. The media attention created a way for the centers to tell their stories through credible spokespeople. Hosted by a county commissioner, Molalla's telecommunity center director, local community leaders and the State of Oregon's director of telework programs and conservation services were featured throughout the video.

Additional support to the communities was provided by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. It contributed state printing services that funded 100 percent of the printing cost of telecommunity center marketing materials for Canby, Molalla and Estacada. Printed materials included brochures, bookmarks, coupons and tablets.

Product Evaluation

Product Evaluation	
<i>Agreement to implement a telecommunity center</i>	Consensus reached on adopting a plan for a telecommunity center
<i>Provisions to ensure implementation</i>	Completion of feasibility analysis
<i>Track lessons learned</i>	Something new is learned and/or accomplished as a replicable model

Agreement to Implement a Telecommunity Center

The county began the project in anticipation of creating a single telecommunity center. Both Canby and Molalla agreed to implement a center once the feasibility was researched and the county coordinated financial incentives. In both cases, the agreement to implement a telecommunity center was made by the city, with broad support from project partners including the Clackamas County, Clackamas Community College, Mt. Hood Economic Alliance, the Oregon Office of Energy, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and private businesses, including Molalla Communications and Canby Telephone Association.

Provisions to Ensure Implementation

The Clackamas County Telecommunity Project convened essential partners and provided a process (discussed in the previous section), information, tools and funding that all worked toward helping communities implement their projects. These provisions included:

- Background research and lessons learned on the successes, failures and trends involving telecommunity centers.
- Feasibility analysis of a telecommunity center in Clackamas County.
- A business plan for the Molalla Telecommunity Center.
- A telecommunity center logo and brand identity designed for each center.
- Marketing tools tailored for use by each center.
- A website for each center linked to community partners and telework information.
- A start-up marketing program, including public relations, outreach and initial marketing assistance to the Canby Telecommunity Center.
- Product research into teleconferencing equipment.

- Economic development funding for infrastructure, furniture and equipment needed for start-up.
- Convening of key partners throughout the project, including the cities, local cable companies, the community college and local school districts.

Track Lessons Learned

Lessons learned have been identified and shared throughout the project in a number of ways:

- Information is routinely exchanged at the meetings of the county's project team. These have been held on nearly a monthly basis since 1998.
- County-wide team meetings are periodically held at the telecommunity centers which encourages center staff and project partners to learn from one another.
- Meeting summaries are prepared and shared via e-mail.
- Project reports completed throughout the project, such as research, feasibility analysis and product reviews, have been shared via e-mail and posted on the web to provide a replicable model for others.
- State agencies supporting the project, including the Oregon Office of Energy and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, share project reports and results with their counterparts in other states.
- Project partners and consultants have shared lessons learned from this project at conferences including Livable Oregon and the International Telework Association and Council. The Oregon Office of Energy routinely shares project concepts and results with other Oregon communities and with telework professionals in other states.

A later section of this report summarizes some of the key lessons learned based on interviews with project partners, county and community team meetings and reports to date.

Outcome Evaluation

Outcome Evaluation	
<i>Efficient access to jobs with reduced traffic congestion</i>	Commute trips avoided
<i>Increased employee productivity</i>	Services used; customer satisfaction with equipment, services, software and training programs
<i>Increased business competitiveness</i>	Services used; hours of use; utilization rate
<i>New community resource</i>	Demographic profile of users; new technology available
<i>Economic benefits</i>	New jobs created, start-up companies supported Higher level of skills in the community available

Efficient Access to Jobs with Reduced Traffic Congestion

Clackamas County's telecommunity centers have created a new option for residents who want to work or take a class without having to leave the community. Customers have not been asked how their patronage has affected their travel habits. However, there are numerous anecdotal examples of auto commute trips avoided:

- Molalla has attracted customers ranging from an artist to a database engineer that would have otherwise commuted to jobs in Portland and Beaverton.
- Canby contracted with a weekly teleworker who would have otherwise driven to his job in Salem.
- Community college students are able to take classes locally instead of commuting to the main campus.

News of the Canby Telecommunity Center has attracted customers from as far as Aloha and Beaverton. The friendly atmosphere and reasonable prices drew a frequent, repeat customer from outside the community, generating new trips. This is an interesting result given that one of the motivations in creating the centers was to reduce trips.

Increased Employee Productivity

A teleworker at the Canby Telecommunity Center reported that working at the center forced him to better organize his workday. He added that there are fewer distractions so he was able

to devote concentrated blocks of time to a project. He said, "My time is focused and uninterrupted when I telecommute from the Canby Telecommunity Center. I have time and energy to spare at the end of the day." Customers are often asked informally for their suggestions and feedback. There is no system in place at either center to document customer experiences such as productivity.

Increased Business Competitiveness

The centers do not directly measure increased business competitiveness, however the Molalla center tracks services used and hours of use. Both the Molalla and Canby chambers of commerce describe the centers as a resource for helping local businesses. Training and meeting space are the most popular services to businesses. Small business counseling has been less popular. For businesses wanting to learn more about QuickBooks, or unable to afford the expense of specialized software and updates, the centers offer a way to access to software, training and high speed Internet connections.

New Community Resource

By providing access to information technology and the training to utilize it, the Molalla and Canby telecommunity centers are helping fill gaps in their communities related to learning and economic opportunity. Both centers have created new services and resources that did not exist in the community prior to the project:

- *New Resources*
The centers support local businesses and residents by providing work stations, training opportunities, college credit classes, community education courses, meeting room space, software and computers. The new local community college classes involving technology and English as a second language help fill gaps related to learning and opportunity.
- *New Funding and Partnerships*
The Molalla Library and its telecommunity center are creating new channels for attracting grant and foundation funding and new partnerships. This is in addition to support from the City of Molalla, Molalla Communications and Clackamas Community College. The Canby Telecommunity Center is a partnership among Clackamas Community College, Canby School District and Canby Telephone Association.
- *Enhanced Community Image*
Aside from the computers and equipment located at the centers, community leaders and local business owners believe the centers demonstrate the community is technology-minded, competitive and forward-thinking. Molalla's Chamber of Commerce executive director has said the center helps send a message beyond the community that "Molalla is competitive, capable, moving forward."

Economic Benefits

Both centers are increasing information technology skills and learning opportunities in their communities which could lead to new and better jobs. Clackamas Community College is offering several classes in the local communities in Spanish to reach even more residents. While neither center measures jobs created, both centers help customers create resumes and conduct Internet searches for jobs. Generally, this includes local jobs as well as those outside the region and the state. Job-seeking and training have taken on greater value and importance in each community as the overall economy has slumped.

The Molalla Telecommunity Center indirectly supports job creation by serving many small business owners who rely on the center's high quality work stations, equipment and software. The telecenter also has placed a new computer work station in an "annex" location at the local chamber of commerce to reach more businesses and introduce them to new ways of using information technology.

Lessons Learned

What Works

- *Project champions*
There is no substitute for a champion to lead a telework or telecommunity project development. Project champions at the state and/or regional level provide access to resources and help secure funding. Clackamas County fulfilled the role by working through the communities. It organized the project, convened a project team and provided communities with information essential to planning and operations. Project champions within the community are needed, too. They generate local interest in the project and help attract advocates, partners and funding.

What Works
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Project champions</i>• <i>Seed money</i>• <i>Community goodwill</i>• <i>Customer focus</i>• <i>Service attitude</i>• <i>Capable people</i>• <i>Aggressive marketing</i>• <i>Strategic location</i>• <i>A premier anchor tenant</i>• <i>Compatible services</i>• <i>Supportive community</i>• <i>Continuous improvement</i>

- *Seed money*
Grant funds for capital facilities and equipment were a catalyst for community support and private sector contributions. Software and equipment are either donated or attractively priced because of the public purpose and the marketing opportunity.
- *Community goodwill*
Rather than charging customers based on an established fee schedule, the Molalla Library found that it attracts higher revenues and builds community goodwill by asking its drop-in telecenter customers to contribute what they think the service is worth to them. The same holds true for the library's book sales. Local citizens contribute more money overall than what the library would have charged. This technique may not be applicable in other situations, but it does illustrate that there is a supportive link between earning community goodwill and attracting higher revenue.
- *Customer focus*
Surveys, interviews and market analysis are useful in determining if there is demand for services, and if so, designing and adapting a center so it appeals to the target customer. For example, Molalla used telework research and community survey results in deciding on its telework center room design (a simple, respectful work environment with a meeting room) and in choosing high quality, proven (not "cutting edge") software. Moving forward with a prototype concept, even while some aspects were still undefined, enabled Molalla to design its center in a way that works for the customer. Teleworkers and businesses expect quality, reliability and security. Job seekers were

not initially among the target customers of the centers. However, high speed Internet access and computer work stations have proven to be popular with people who want to create a professional resume and find new job opportunities.

- *Service attitude*

Friendly, helpful staff who have an ability to connect with people set the centers apart from computer access services at copy shops and in home-based offices. A customer service attitude has helped attract teleworkers, jobseekers, the general public and local businesses to use telecommunity center services. There is also a sense of pride in providing a service that promotes doing more business locally.

- *Capable people*

Technical, administrative and people skills are needed to make the centers work. Centers are a valued source in “emergency” situations when people have difficulties with their own equipment or software. Building a reputation for reliability and availability may prompt some who turn to the centers on an emergency basis to consider regular use of the facility and its services.

- *Aggressive marketing*

In addition to continuing support of partner organizations, outreach to the community and target customers is needed to make the center’s presence and purpose known. A ribbon-cutting ceremony and an open house draw attention at the start, and it is impressive how much you can learn by talking and listening to visitors. However, continued marketing and public relations are needed to build and sustain a customer base. Positive relationships with the media and other influential contacts lead to opportunities to tell your story, as Clackamas County found with its video aired on a local cable channel 145 times over 10 months. It helps to have a spokesperson to give the center a voice, a face and a personality. Other ongoing marketing efforts typically include printed materials, establishing and maintaining a website and community involvement.

- *Strategic location*

Downtown locations with convenient parking and other services nearby help draw customers. It increases visibility and the chance of attracting first time use. Convenience to other services promotes frequent, subsequent use.

- *A premier anchor tenant*

Locating a telecenter within a public library creates a high profile. This has attracted community attention and business support.

- *Compatible services*

Both centers offer a variety of services, and are not concentrated solely on telework. Meeting rooms, high speed Internet access for research, online shopping, file downloads and specific work applications are popular services at Molalla’s center. The center is a good fit with Molalla Library’s wealth of resources, inspiration and information. Canby’s customers are focused more on community education classes and free lab sessions. Training and classes create a draw and increase the visibility

and use of computer work stations. Center administrators agree it would be tough to market and sustain a stand-alone telework service center. High speed Internet access and high quality software and hardware are minimum expectations. The Molalla Library views the telecenter as an integral part of the library's overall service to the local community.

- *Supportive community*

Leadership for a telecommunity center begins in the planning stages and comes from within the community. Partnerships with local businesses (such as high speed Internet service providers) are a source of expertise and shared commitment. Chambers of commerce and realtors are positive advocates in both communities. In Canby, the public library refers people to the center. People like finding a community resource that promotes learning about computers and does not impose time limits on computer usage.

- *Continuous improvement*

Partners in the project all have different benchmarks for success. Benchmarks should be identified and evaluated as a part of doing business to determine whether expectations are being met and to make continuous improvements. The center should evolve with the needs of its customers to keep from becoming outdated and to stay relevant.

What Does Not Work

- *Economizing on equipment*

If teleworkers find computer equipment to be slower and less reliable than what they have at home, they do not come back. Unsophisticated computer equipment and outdated software do not attract businesses or teleworkers.

- *Cutting edge equipment*

Equipment that is too new and untested is not reliable enough for teleworkers and businesses. Stick with what works.

- *Marketing too early*

Do not stimulate demand until you know you can deliver. Disappointed customers may not return and they will probably tell their friends about their less-than-satisfactory experience.

What Does Not Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Economizing on equipment</i>• <i>Cutting edge equipment</i>• <i>Marketing too early</i>• <i>Insufficient marketing</i>• <i>Inconsistent leadership</i>• <i>Inadequate staffing or irregular hours of operation</i>• <i>Inaccurate or outdated information</i>• <i>Poor site design</i>• <i>Incompatible services</i>• <i>Lack of revenue</i>

- *Insufficient marketing*
It takes time to build a customer base. Creating awareness is just the start. A steady, constant marketing program is needed to successfully establish a center within a community. A start-up marketing push may spark initial interest but is not enough to secure a successful niche as a recognized leader in a new category of services. It can easily take at least three to five years to become established.
- *Inconsistent leadership*
Without ongoing support of community leaders and a central project director and champion, it is difficult for a center to establish, much less sustain itself. Effective leadership, partnerships and relationships are a minimum requirement to be able to deal with economic swings, shifts in funding and evolving expectations of project partners.
- *Inadequate staffing or irregular hours of operation*
Dependability is key. If there is doubt in a customer's mind whether the center's staff is capable or uncertainty when the center is open, the customer will not rely upon the center. Frequent changes in hours and days of operation and part-time operations confuse the customer and undermine the image of the center.
- *Inaccurate or outdated information*
Information about services and hours of business needs to be kept current in the center's signage, printed materials, website, and on the phone. Customers and partners expect accurate information and to be kept informed of major changes affecting services. A center that fails to manage its own communications loses credibility and customers.
- *Poor site design*
Computer work stations need sufficient space. Work stations lacking in privacy and elbow room have limited appeal. Interruptions and noise are an issue when work stations are located too near a public entrance and/or classroom.
- *Incompatible services*
Additional services may not necessarily work well together. For example, the Canby telecommunity center staff handles onsite (not online) registration for children's swimming classes and other programs. This periodically creates noisy interference and distraction for project work at computer work stations located in the open entrance area of the building.
- *Lack of revenue*
When a center does not charge for its services or retains an inadequate share of revenue from services, classes or events, it does not have a way to create an ongoing funding base. Unless there are other guaranteed funding sources, giving away too much for free, whether to partners or customers, could undermine financial stability of the center.

Conclusion

Willingness to Continue

Perhaps the ultimate measure of success and commitment to operating a telecommunity center is continued community support and investment in upgrading, marketing and operating a center. Each center is shaped by the unique and evolving needs of the community.

“Continuation” might not necessarily mean the same shape or form of the center that was first launched. Many government, education and local business partners invested time, money, buildings and equipment in the start-up of each center. Clearly they want to see the centers succeed. However, it is up to each local community to determine whether to carry on the effort.

Canby may support the concept of community access to technology, but not in its present form. The current facility was guaranteed to be available for the telecommunity center at no charge, compliments of Canby Telephone Association, but only for two years. The community has known since start-up that the center would need to find another home and funding to support itself to continue operations. With the downturn in the economy, financial constraints have increased. Continuation of Canby’s center is uncertain. The educational and technology access services offered by the center are evolving and may be continued as part of the local high school when a new building, financed by the college, is completed in 2003.

Canby

Continuation of Canby’s telecommunity center is uncertain. Some services may be continued when a new building, financed by Clackamas Community College, is completed as part of the high school.

In contrast, Molalla’s center has established itself as a vital part of the public library’s ongoing operations. Molalla’s experience shows that similar to the start-up phase, a capable, supportive project champion builds community support, commitment and willingness to continue the project. The director of the Molalla Public Library and Telecommunity Center has continued to inspire community pride in the project while expanding and upgrading equipment and software. The overall motive has been to secure the center as an integral part of the public library and contribute to the recreational, educational and economic well being of the community. The business community is equally supportive. The center has set up additional work stations at the local chamber of commerce office. The local chamber sees the center as a community asset and as exploring another way to build and strengthen the local economy.

Molalla

Molalla’s telecommunity center has established itself as an integral part of the public library, contributing to the recreational, educational and economic well being of the community.

Both Molalla and Canby demonstrate that under the guidance of a capable, steady public organization such as a public library or community college, telecommunity center services could become sustainable and integral to the community. This contributes to their success but it also makes it difficult to assess performance and benefits apart from the parent organization. Until the centers collect and share information on measures of success, it will be difficult to assess their economic return and benefits.

Centers should track relevant data to account for results, determine whether expectations are being met and to make continuous improvements. The centers in Canby and Molalla have each faced different struggles in the first two years of operations, but without this data, it is difficult to say whether they will be successful.

The Molalla Library plans to begin collecting data on specific telecenter statistics beginning in January 2003. This data will be very helpful in evaluating performance, determining the longer term success of the project and planning for the future.