

Telecommunity Center Development

A Guide to
Starting a Telecommunity Center
in Your Community



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Overview

Purpose of this guide

Purpose of this guide

This guide was developed in response to requests from communities, government agencies and business professionals for a comprehensive resource to assist in explaining, planning and marketing a telecommunity center. It shares lessons learned from a telecommunity center program developed in several communities in Clackamas County, Oregon, sponsored by a partnership involving Clackamas County, the Mount Hood Economic Alliance, Clackamas Community College, the Oregon Office of Energy and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. The program seeks to increase public access to technology and learning opportunities, enhance rural economic development efforts and reduce lengthy commute trips.

This guide is designed to:

- Create an understanding of the value of a telecommunity center.
- Highlight efforts to create telework (also known as telecommute) programs to create jobs and better manage transportation resources.
- Provide research findings, tools and templates for communities to use as a starting point in planning their own solutions.

This resource is divided into sections and can be used to:

- Review the different types of telecommunity centers, and the research and trends that can help determine if a center might make sense for your community. (Sections 1 and 2)
- Focus and organize community efforts around creating a telecommunity center, based upon the success factors and lessons learned from other telecommunity center development efforts. (Section 3)
- Assess market demand and feasibility of a telecommunity center, using checklists and sample assessment tools. (Section 4)
- Plan a telecommunity center, using a sample business planning template. (Sections 5)
- Generate awareness, interest and publicity using how-to's and marketing ideas. (Section 6)

Many telecommunity centers created in the United States during the 1990s to promote telework have permanently closed their doors. However, telecommunity centers can be successful. Opening the doors to a new telecommunity center requires careful planning to move from the idea stage to successful, sustainable operations.

This guide is intended to be used as a flexible resource and planning tool for creating a successful telecommunity center. Each community is different. It is up to each community to tailor an approach that will best fit its unique opportunities and needs.

Overview

What is a telecommunity center?

What is a telecommunity center?

A telecommunity center is a new place to work and learn using technology. It provides public access to professional work space, high quality computer and office equipment, high speed Internet access, classrooms and meeting facilities. It encourages telework, business development and learning through personal computing, classes, workshops and training to enhance quality of life, improve the local economy and reduce cross-region trips. A center's conference rooms and classrooms provide a convenient meeting place for teleconferences, distance learning and training. They also serve as a resource for local workers, students, entrepreneurs and small, emerging businesses.

As more people seek flexible work situations or find themselves facing career transitions, there is growing demand for access to the new types of jobs and business opportunities that rely upon high speed Internet access and new technology. A telecommunity center is a convenient place for people to work away from their office, whether it is a quick stop to check e-mail or a place to spend the day using high speed Internet access and furnished work stations.

While a telecommunity center might offer computer tools similar to the home or office, the ambience is completely different. It is not home, and it is not the office. For some it is a refuge. For others it is a gathering place. A telecommunity center offers an opportunity to work around other people, and to use a computer with high speed Internet access, new software and high quality business equipment. Successful centers generally offer the comforts of home and the professionalism of the office, but without the distractions of the home or the office.

Centers are found in community centers, libraries, downtown business offices, college campuses and office parks. Most are operated on a non-profit basis, though some are operated as part of a for-profit business. While technology is at the heart of all telecommunity centers, they usually involve collaboration among public and private employers, education and the community, in a shared commitment to help people use technology to improve their personal and professional lives.

“A telecommunity center in our community sends a message that we are competitive, capable, moving forward.”

*Molalla Telecommunity Center Advisory Committee
Molalla, Oregon*

Overview

Why create a telecommunity center?

Why create a telecommunity center?

Communities, employers and economic developers are creating telecommunity centers to strengthen their local economies, enhance quality of life and reduce commute trips to work and school outside their area. People who stay closer to home tend to spend more time and money in the local community. They also develop a deeper sense of community and strengthen their personal and professional connections among businesses, educational institutions and other residents.

Telecommunity centers are traditionally envisioned as serving mainly employed workers, however, these centers also attract and provide services to job-seekers. People come to prepare a professional-looking resume, do online job searching, and be around other people.

If there is sufficient market demand for a telecommunity center, some of the potential services and benefits to a community might include:

- Increasing the number and quality of jobs through telework beyond the local community.
- Attracting to the community new entrepreneurs and new businesses that rely on high speed Internet connections and access to new technology.
- Helping emerging, small businesses become more competitive by accessing technology, information and educational resources through local training and distance learning. They can also learn how to use computers and new software.
- Reducing long distance and/or congested commute travel by providing a place for local residents to work one or more days a week instead of commuting outside the community to work. To residents, this means a new productive place to work while saving time and money otherwise spent commuting.
- Increasing the quality of local workers by helping people improve skills to compete for better jobs.
- Providing residents with the tools and information to create higher quality resumes and perform on line job searches.
- Providing a place for visitors, traveling professionals and field representatives to use work space or meet with local clients.

Communities are creating telecommunity centers as a way to help local residents work closer to home, access information technology, build skills, start new businesses and attract new businesses to the area.

Research

What research reveals about telecommunity centers

What research reveals about telecommunity centers

- Telecommunity centers focused exclusively on telework have not achieved self sufficiency. Most of these centers have folded.
- High turnover is often a challenge. On average, half of teleworkers quit within the first nine months. However, some teleworkers stay for years.
- It is unrealistic to expect telecommunity centers to become self sufficient in less than five years, even among centers that have received start-up grant funding and/or subsidies for capital and operations support. Sustained recruitment efforts (from six months to a year) are necessary to yield results (for example, paying tenants).
- Telecommunity centers typically have an owner or anchor tenant that acts as a steady parent. These might include:
 - Federal agency, state agency or city government
 - Community college or university
 - Public library
 - Private company service providers, such as coffee shops, copy services, office supplies, and executive suites which sell office space with shared administrative support
- Don't expect telework to be the main source of income. It should be one of many, diversified types of services and revenues.
- Financial strength comes from having multiple streams of revenue, which could include:
 - Seed money from public, private or foundation sources
 - Tenant revenue
 - Partnerships with revenue-generating service providers
 - Sales revenue from customer services, such as drop-in computer use, video-conferencing, conference room rental, use of presentation equipment, printers, copiers and other business equipment
 - Fees from training, seminars and workshops
 - Sponsorships and advertising revenue
 - Other funds from the building owner or sponsor organization
- For-profit businesses that offer telework services are primarily focused on other services such as:
 - office space
 - coffee shops and restaurants
 - photocopying and other business services

Research

What research reveals about telecommunity centers

- Location matters. Poor site selection is one of the reasons telecommunity centers fail. Successful centers are typically located close to other service businesses. They are conveniently located and offer easy access and parking.
- Why have telecommunity centers failed? Here are some of the contributing factors:
 - Funding expired
 - Poor site selection, sites were not well-used
 - Poor facility layout and design, not conducive to supporting the services offered
 - Incompatible mix of services
 - Consolidation due to inadequate demand to justify multiple sites
 - Employer resistance to telework
 - Inadequate marketing and recruitment
 - Marketing was viewed as too time consuming and labor intensive
 - Marketing too early – stimulating demand before the center could deliver
 - Incomplete definition of target markets
 - Inadequate staffing
 - Irregular, inconsistent and limited hours of operation
 - The start-up phase was too short; insufficient time and money spent on planning and marketing
 - Inadequate public relations, marketing and outreach within the community
 - Economizing on unreliable, lower quality computer equipment
 - Acquiring cutting edge equipment that was untested and unreliable
 - Lack of ongoing support of community leadership
 - Lack of a central project manager and champion

Research

What research reveals about teleworkers

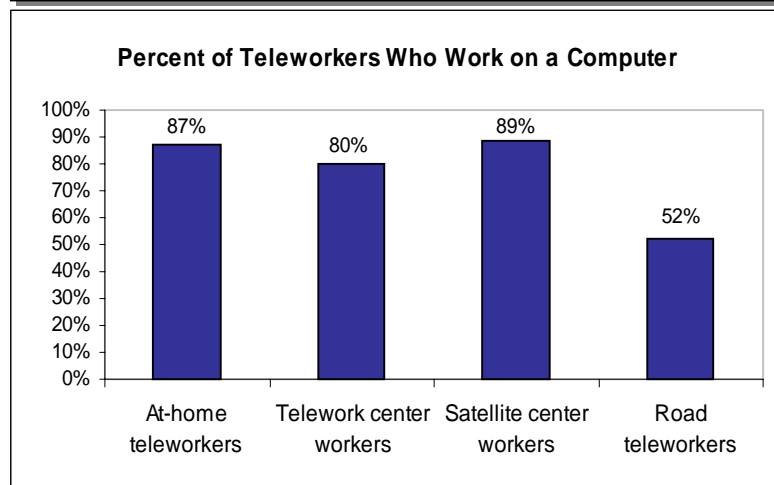
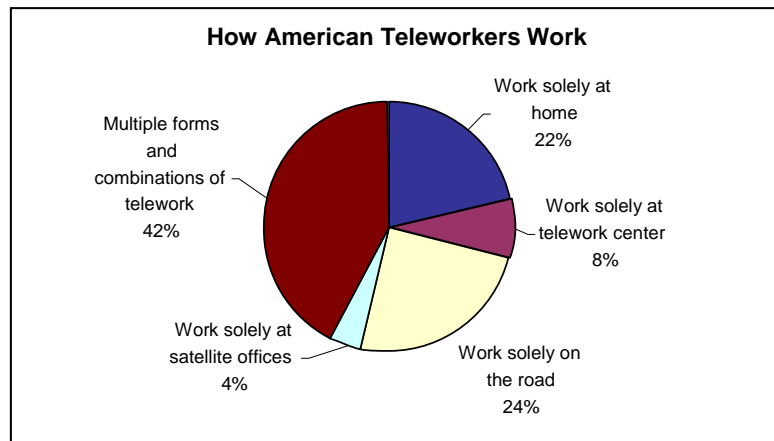
What research reveals about teleworkers

The 2001 Telework America Survey by the International Telework Association and Council (ITAC), conducted by Old Dominion University, revealed the following:

- American teleworkers comprise 21.2 percent of the adult work force. Teleworkers include those working from home, on the road, at a satellite office or a telework center, and any combination of these types of telework.
- Nearly 70 percent of teleworkers say they are quite satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.
- On average, teleworkers are male, married, Caucasian and between the ages of 35 and 44. They are more likely to be located in the northeastern or western United States than other parts of the country. Teleworkers' median annual income is \$40,000, compared to \$25,000 for non-teleworkers.

Their average one-way commute is 12 miles. A teleworker is likely to have a college degree and some graduate education.

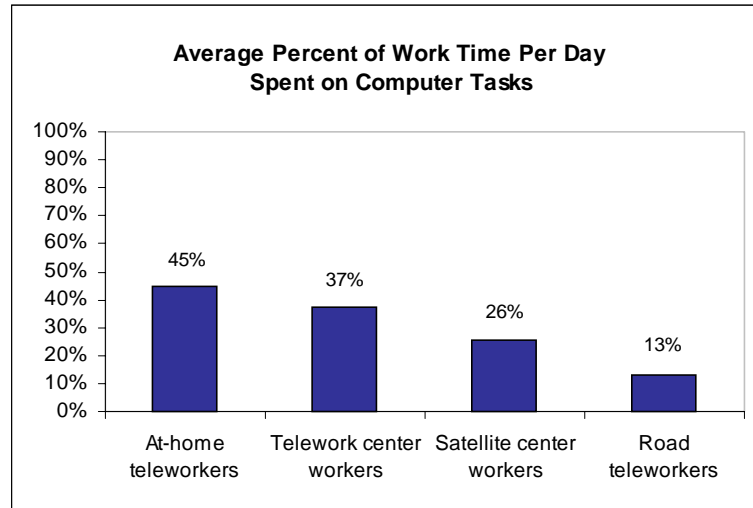
- More than four in ten teleworkers use multiple types of telework in their jobs. Nearly a quarter of all teleworkers work exclusively on the road and about one in five teleworkers works solely at home.
- Satellite office-based teleworkers use a computer in their job more than any other category of teleworker. Only about half of road workers use a computer in their jobs.



Research

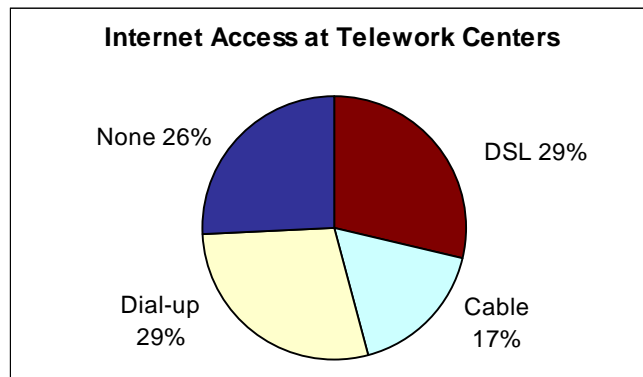
What research reveals about teleworkers

- Home-based teleworkers spend more work time on a computer than any other category of teleworker.



- Traits of those who telework at home:
 - Between three and four days per week are spent working at home.
 - Most (76 percent) have a separate, dedicated work space at home.
 - Most (87 percent) have Internet access and most (60 percent) rely on dial-up modem Internet access and lack high speed connectivity.
 - Most (87 percent) use a computer in their work.
 - An average of 45 percent of total work time is spent on the computer.
 - Computer work, phone calls, reading, planning and analyzing are their main work tasks.
 - Little or no training was received to prepare to work at home.
 - Teleworkers report increased job satisfaction, greater commitment to the organization, higher productivity and increased quality of work since teleworking from home.

- Among those who telework at telework centers:
 - An average of four to five days per week are spent working at the center.
 - Most (53 percent) share a work space with other people or other functions at the center.
 - Most (79 percent) have a dedicated work space at their employer's work site.



- Most (74 percent) have Internet access at their telework center, however less than half (45 percent) have high speed connections via DSL or cable.
- Nearly 80 percent of those who work at a telework center use a computer in their job.
- An average of just 37 percent of work time is spent on a computer, 25 percent on phone calls, and the remainder on other work tasks including reading and planning. Only 8 percent of their time is spent in meetings at telework centers.
- Most (74 percent) received training to prepare them for telework.
- Teleworkers report they increased work quality after working at the telework center.
- Most (79 percent) prefer to continue with the same or even more time at the center.

Research

What research reveals about teleworkers

- Findings about those who work in a satellite office:
 - More than half of satellite office teleworkers work there full time, five days a week, much like a traditional work site.
 - Nearly all satellite office workers have their own dedicated work space at the satellite office, and more than two thirds also have a dedicated work space at their employer's office.
 - Nearly all (89 percent) use a computer in their job.
 - Their time is generally evenly split among computer work, telephone calls, reading/planning/organizing and in meetings with others.
- Findings about those who do some work on the road:
 - Nearly half (48 percent) do other types of telework in addition to working on the road.
 - Nearly half (49 percent) have a dedicated work space at their employer's work site.
 - Their time is spent on meetings, reading, planning, analyzing and phone calls.
 - Only 52 percent use a computer in their job.
 - Nearly a third of their time is spent in face-to-face meetings.
- A wealth of additional information about telework may be found on the International Telework Association and Council's Web site, www.workingfromanywhere.org.

Research

Lessons learned

Lessons learned

- Work through a project champion to spearhead the project, a champion that has credibility, sees the potential and believes in the concept.
 - There is no substitute for a champion to lead the effort. This could be someone from the local community college or government agency or a community leader.
 - An effective champion can work within the community, organize the project, convene a project team and shepherd the feasibility analysis and planning process.
 - A champion can take a big idea and make it real.
- Involve the community in the planning process.
 - A community-driven project team can bring together a diverse mix of people to give input and guide the project.
 - Engage the community at an early stage to obtain as much feedback as possible.
 - Services developed need to match market needs and community plans.
- Plan the project with the customer in mind.
 - Understand your target market. Community surveys, interviews and market analysis are useful tools to make sure that the project appeals to the target customer.
 - Make sure to select a location that will attract your target market.
- Seek both community resources and outside grant funding to generate adequate seed money.
 - Funding from libraries, city, state and federal budgets, foundations and private grants give centers a jumpstart from which they can focus on generating ongoing, self-sustaining operating revenue sources.
- Consider ways to facilitate private investment in telecommunity services or a public sector initiative, or a creative blend of both.
 - In some communities, private ventures are an effective means of enhancing technology resources in the form of business services and office complexes that facilitate telework.
 - In other communities, the public sector is an effective spark and catalyst at moving beyond access and acquisition of technology to integrating the use of technology resources throughout the community.
- Define a clear and compelling purpose.
 - Goals vary depending on whether it is a for-profit or non-profit venture.
 - For-profit centers tend to focus on coffee house services, or even banks, with computers on the side.
 - Non-profit centers have purposes such as training, literacy, small business development, innovations in education, access to lifelong learning, access to health care, transportation demand management and increased sense of community.
 - The purpose needs to directly relate to evidence of market demand.

Research Lessons learned

- Prepare a business plan.
 - A telecommunity program needs scrutiny and planning. The same is required for the successful start-up of any new business.
- Create partnerships to achieve more diverse, cost-effective programs.
 - Working with multiple partners requires significant time and effort. Numerous partners create multiple sources of funding and can form an integrated base of community services, resources and support.
 - Look to the library system, the school district and community colleges or universities for resources and shared efforts to provide training and public access.
 - Libraries and schools are often used for public Internet access and training and distance learning applications.
 - Community colleges often have a strong interest in meeting employer needs that could be served by telecommunity center facilities.
- Put marketing and training at the forefront of the implementation process.
 - Marketing is needed to attract and retain customers. Training and support helps ensure that customers will find the experience beneficial and become your loyal, repeat customers.
- Plan services and pricing strategically. Don't give away too many services for free.
 - If the center begins by offering too many free services (such as Web page development) or low-cost services (such as office rent) as a promotional tool, it is difficult to begin charging higher fees later.

Research

Success factors

Success factors

Successful telecommunity centers, researched as part of this project, share a number of traits and strategies in common:

- **Seed Money** -- Start up capital costs (ranging between \$100,000 to \$1.5 million) for a facility come from foundations, private grants or government sources. Building space is often provided by the main anchor tenant, as a form of ongoing subsidy. Equipment is sometimes donated from suppliers.
- **Service Attitude** -- Sell the service, not just the location. Provide a strong customer-service focus on meeting or exceeding expectations. Make people feel like “this is your office.” Then make it better than their office.
- **Capable People** -- The site administrator and director are highly motivated. The director actively recruits tenants. The administrator provides technical assistance and helpful answers to questions. Service providers offer needed products and services. The employers who participate are supportive of telework. Teleworkers are disciplined self-starters.
- **Aggressive Marketing** -- How will people know you are there? Marketing, public relations and advertising can promote the facility and make its presence and purpose known. Continued outreach to target customers and the community is needed to build and sustain a customer base.
- **Strategic Location** -- Provide a place to work where people are already congregating for other reasons, and where there are plenty of amenities (such as shopping, a library, bookstore, restaurant, bakery and/or coffee shop, post office, banks, dry cleaner, child care) within walking distance. Easy parking is readily available.
- **A Premier Anchor Tenant** -- A premier, high quality anchor tenant cuts the perception of risk to other prospective tenants and gives the center a higher profile. It can be a strong part of the center’s marketing strategy and add financial stability. Over reliance on a single anchor can jeopardize the center if it pulls out.
- **Complimentary Services** -- Provide a mix of services which complement one another, such as office spaces that enable telework with videoconferencing, distance learning, workshops, training, classes, conference room space for meeting with clients, document production services, mailing services, banking services, beverages and snacks.
- **Supportive Community** -- Continued support of the business and education community, local government and the parent organization or anchor tenant, will help the center grow and become an integral part of the community.
- **Continuous Improvement** – Partners in the project all have different benchmarks of success. Identify and evaluate benchmarks to determine whether expectations are being met and make continuous improvements. The center should evolve with the needs of its customers to keep from becoming outdated and to stay relevant.

Trends influencing telework

- Security concerns are prompting some organizations to create remote work locations as an alternative to the central office. Organizations that understand how to empower their employees to work at a distance from the office and in remote locations can keep business moving when interruptions strike, whether it is due to a storm, a disaster or a family emergency.
- Employers are more likely to reward valued employees with more flexible work schedules including telework. Some employers have supported a telework policy for years. Most employers agree telework is a productive option.
- More people expect to be connected to their office anywhere, anytime. In addition to computer connections from home, most hotels and many banks, libraries, grocery stores, airports and coffee shops offer computers and high speed Internet access. When on the go, hand-held personal data assistants, mobile phones and laptop computers are increasingly enabling people to work at a distance from the office anywhere, anytime.
- High-speed Internet access could soon be within easy reach in most urban areas as a result of wireless data networks, known as Wi-Fi. This technology has the potential to eventually let anyone with a computer or computing device connect to the Internet at high speed, without cable. As of Fall 2002, Intel, IBM and AT&T began exploring the creation of a Wi-Fi-based network of networks in U.S. metropolitan areas.
- Falling prices of computer equipment, availability of residential high speed Internet access and a wider variety of technology devices are making telework from home more feasible. New homes are wired for computers and Internet connectivity. Still, telework from home is not an option for everyone. It may not be a conducive work environment, and may lack adequate computer and office equipment.
- Residential and rural areas often lack high speed connectivity, and this is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Residential dial-up Internet access is expected to continue to far outnumber high speed broadband connections. Telework centers with high speed Internet access give the public a chance to sample faster connections in comparison to dial-up service.
- Internet access is attracting new traffic to libraries. Each morning, people reportedly form a line at the door before the Reno, Nevada library opens -- just to use the computers. The American Library Association reported in 2002 that spending on library construction and renovation, and public support for it, was up 15 percent over a decade ago. The renovations sometimes "include construction of amphitheatres and rooms for community meetings, making the library the center of civic activity, especially in rural areas where it is often the only public building open every day. Library branches are also popping up in new, unexpected locations, such as the one on the second floor of a shopping mall in the border town of San Ysidro, California."

Research Trends

- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invested in 40,000 computers in libraries in rural and distressed urban communities across the nation in effort to narrow the digital divide. Although it is doubtful whether the investment has encouraged people to stay put in rural communities rather than leave to pursue job opportunities elsewhere, more than 95 percent of public libraries now offer free Internet access.
- Most new jobs are created in small firms that are home-grown and information-focused. As jobs require higher levels of skills and training, education and the ability to readily access and distill information will play a greater role in the competitiveness of workers and communities.

Trends in telework centers

- The distinction between telecommunity centers and executive suites is beginning to blur. Remote offices, including telework centers and executive office suites, are increasingly wired for high speed Internet access.
- High speed Internet access is a minimum expectation. As wireless high speed Internet access becomes more prevalent and reliable, telework centers are expected to have either wired or wireless high speed access, or both.
- As telecommunity centers add services, they become more of a draw for self-employed individuals and small businesses.
- Distance learning, customized training and classes are one of the more successful alternative, expanded services offered by telework centers. Training programs are the principle draw, for example, for the Ventura Telecommunity Center on a community college campus in Ventura, California.
- Capacity building is a prominent focus among “televillage” advocates. Connectivity and training rather than building facilities and purchasing equipment are promoted to encourage the use of technology throughout a community. Blacksburg, Virginia has established a thriving televillage strategy.

Planning

Find a project champion.

Find a project champion.

To successfully launch a telecommunity center planning effort, a project champion is needed to work with communities, organize the project, convene a project team, attract financial resources, and shepherd the feasibility analysis and planning process. A potential champion might include someone representing one or more of the following:

- State government agency – energy office, environmental quality, transportation or economic development program managers
- County government – economic development or transportation program managers
- Local government – library directors or economic development managers
- Port office – economic development or marketing managers
- Community college – distance learning, small business development centers or customized workforce training program directors
- Others – regional economic development associations, local businesses, chambers of commerce or other civic leaders

*A champion can take a
big idea and make it real.*

Planning

Recruit a project team.

Recruit a project team.

A community-based project team can bring together a diverse mix of people to give input, provide needed expertise and guide the project. The project champion is likely to be the organizer who recruits the team, taps professional expertise, arranges meetings and makes or delegates decisions. The organizer could help convene individual community teams or a community could create a planning team on its own. Involving the community is important to obtain feedback, develop the project concept and create awareness about the project.

In the early stages, conversations and dreams are translated into realistic project ideas that will need to be evaluated. This is an important step because services need to match market needs and community plans, and build on the community's existing assets that may already be in place. Community feedback, awareness and interest, and solid project leads are among the valuable potential products of the team. It is especially helpful at this stage for the community to scrutinize the promises and challenges of a telecommunity center to ensure the community is ready and willing to move ahead – or not. To ensure broad participation, convene a diverse project team.

Involve the community in the planning process to get feedback, develop the project concept, build awareness and interest, and discover project leads.

- Team members might include:
 - teleworkers
 - local and county economic development staff
 - local businesses sharing an interest in economic and community development
 - local information technology and telecommunications businesses
 - chamber of commerce representative
 - community library representative
 - city government representative
 - cable and communications companies
 - community college distance learning, small business development center and worker training program managers
 - state energy office, transportation and telework programs
 - state environmental program manager
 - technology or telecommunications industry association members
 - county cable franchise office, information services / telecommunications
 - other creative, bright, “go-to” people in your community

Planning

Assess community needs.

Assess community needs.

The success of the center's services and programs will depend upon how well the community's needs and priorities are understood, anticipated and reflected in the center. The project team requires as much current information about the area as possible before deciding whether it makes sense to create a telecommunity center.

There are several ways to gauge local needs and interests, even though the community may not be able to specifically articulate their interests:

- Ask local business owners and local residents about their needs and interests.
- Give short presentations at chamber of commerce meetings and service club gatherings.
- Conduct a community survey.
- Ask for comments and expressions of interest in the newspaper or a billing insert in local utility bills, local newsletters or school schedules mailed to households.
- Ask state energy office staff for assistance in reaching employers who employ teleworkers and/or might consider hiring remote workers.

An insert in local cable bills mailed to households is a way to notify residents of a new opportunity. The sample below is courtesy of Molalla Communications Company.

Sample Cable Billing Insert

Coming soon...

Molalla Communications is excited to announce that DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) will be coming soon to many areas in Molalla and Mulino! We expect to begin offering DSL late in '99 or in early 2000. DSL allows you to:

- ◆ Connect to the Internet at significantly higher speeds
- ◆ Avoid the "dial-up" process – Just click your way onto the Net
- ◆ Use your telephone and the Internet at the same time.

Although the timeline for launching this service has not yet been finalized, we wanted to let you know that it is coming. Keep an eye on your bill inserts over the next few months for more details on DSL.



Telecommunity Project: The City of Molalla has received a grant for developing a *Telecommunity Center* at the Molalla Library. MCC is working with the Library to help determine the number of community members who are interested in telecommuting from the Molalla area to their place of business. If you are interested in telecommuting, please e-mail your name, phone number and address to telecommute@molalla.net or fax this information to MCC at 503-829-5603. We will provide this information to the Library for further follow-up. 10/99

Courtesy of Molalla Communications

Planning

Assess community needs.

A telephone survey is the most direct and uniform approach to seek local public opinion. Depending on how extensive the planning effort is, this is an opportunity to learn about a variety of attitudes and needs relevant to overall community development. Broadening the survey can expand its usefulness and could even attract local sponsors to help pay for it. As more communities create Web sites, an online survey is a terrific way to seek input at low cost.

To determine what the survey results are saying, look for statements of support for the kinds of services that are envisioned for a telecommunity center. Some of the factors that suggest a telecommunity center will be accepted are higher than average ownership and use of computers and the Internet in the home, expressed interest in telework, and a priority interest in computer and Internet classes.

Sample Community Survey Questions

1. What do you consider the most important challenges facing the community now and into the future?

2. Please give a rating on a series of questions about our community on a scale of one to ten, where ten means excellent and one means poor: (If any are rated less than 5, ask why.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| Current quality of life in the community | — |
| City library | — |
| City government | — |
| City management of community and social services | — |
| City parks and recreation | — |
| City school district | — |

3. If you could think of one idea or project the community could do to improve quality of life, what would it be?

4. What current or potential community activities are most important to have and support?

5. What education-oriented needs and future challenges exist in the community?

6. How many adult members of your household are either currently pursuing or are interested in looking into any of the following:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Getting a high school diploma or GED | — |
| Taking classes to improve language or reading skills | — |
| Obtaining a certificate to upgrade pay or status in current job | — |
| Getting training to qualify for employment or a new line of work | — |
| Learning computer or Internet skills | — |
| Taking classes toward a college degree | — |
| Distance learning (Internet class) | — |

7. If any adult members are taking classes, where are you taking them? (Allow multiple responses.)

8. Thinking about the local library, please rate each of the following for funding:

- More books _____
- Youth programs _____
- Reference materials _____
- Access to computers _____
- Access to the Internet _____
- Adult programs _____
- Support for local business _____

9. Which local businesses do you value most? (Allow multiple responses.)

10. Do you shop locally or out of town for the majority of the following purchases?
(List grocery, dining, banking, professional services, entertainment, etc.)

11. What could local merchants do to get you to do more of your shopping in town? (Allow multiple responses. If desired, this section can be expanded to include questions about customer service and improvements to the downtown shopping area.)

12. Which of the following do you have in your home?

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone answering machine | <input type="checkbox"/> Scanner | <input type="checkbox"/> Printer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Fax machine | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet access account |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer | <input type="checkbox"/> Copier | (Dial-up, DSL, cable?) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer modem | <input type="checkbox"/> Voicemail | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal data assistant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV cable service | <input type="checkbox"/> Satellite TV | |

If you have Internet access:

13. How many hours per week do you spend online?

14. What is your primary use of the Internet? (List options, email, surf, entertainment, work related, stocks, shopping, sports, news, chat, other)

15. How do you learn what's going on in the community?

16. Telework is a term to describe work done away from the office. Which of the following are true for you?

- Work out of town all/most of time
- Would work from home if my employer would allow it
- Work from home once in a while
- Have a home-based business
- Work in town
- Thinking about starting an in-home business
- Work from home all the time

NOTE: For those who indicate they work from home, ask how far they drive for office supplies, printing and copying services. For those who work out of town, ask how many miles they commute each way.

17. If a visitor asked you to list those things that represent the community's greatest assets or features, what would top the list?

18. How long have you lived in the area?

If less than two years:

19. What attracted you to the area?

20. Finish with demographic questions, such as whether the respondent rents or owns a home, occupation, travel habits (drive alone, share a ride, transit, etc.), highest level of education completed, age, income and gender.

Planning

Conduct a market analysis.

Conduct a market analysis.

An overall market analysis is needed to integrate information about site location options, trends and customer demand to refine the scope of the project. The market analysis process should be used to identify target customers and learn how their problems and opportunities can be served by the project better than the competition.

The chart below is an example of the types of useful information in completing a market analysis. This is only a guide, as not all of this information may be available.

Sample Checklist for a Telecommunity Center Market Analysis

<p>Economic Trends Labor force Unemployment Information-based jobs and local skills Small, emerging and home businesses Income</p> <p>Distance Learning / Training Trends Availability of courses Number of students enrolled Employer workforce needs / potential</p> <p>Transportation & Telework Trends Traffic counts and travel time Number of residents that leave the community to go to work Public perceptions about traffic Existing telework programs Telework turnover trends Employer attitudes toward telework Telework in the home trends</p> <p>Population Trends In telecommunity center area In market area</p> <p>Survey of Potential Customers Interest and awareness Commuting patterns Desired services and amenities Price points for telecenter services Existing use of alternative work sites Facility and feature preferences Likelihood of use Existing use of technology tools Existing use of training, business services Interest in using new tools / software</p>	<p>The Site Attractiveness Access (convenience; handicap accessibility) Proximity to target customers Desirability Personal safety Availability and ownership Telecommunications infrastructure in place; bandwidth Utilities and services Amenities Complementary surrounding uses</p> <p>Competition / Community Resources Other computer hotelling / office space / training Public access computers at public facilities Private sector Internet cafes with telecenter services</p> <p>Market Area Location Size Presence of small, emerging and home businesses Existing local Internet connections Existing use / unmet demand for services and space Existing use / unmet demand for distance learning Existing use / unmet demand for training, teleconferencing and meeting space.</p> <p>Government Climate Does the community want this project to happen? Decision making process and regulations Potential funding assistance Potential physical presence as a tenant State / county / local government support Local community college support Aligns with community development priorities Need for higher bandwidth Supportive of telework and Internet communications</p>
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Planning

Analyze site location options.

Analyze site location options.

If you are going to establish a telecommunity facility, make sure to select a location that will attract the target customer. The project may be launched with a site already in mind or a community may research the market first, then search for the best site available. Matching a project concept to a site is the preferred approach in most business development projects. Sometimes, however, a project is compelled to locate on a particular site if the community already controls and/or owns the property. Problems might crop up later if the site is selected without determining whether the location is appropriate.

If you already have a site location in mind, make sure the site is an appropriate one that will allow the project to be successful.

Potential telecommunity center location ideas might include:

- public libraries
- community centers
- government office buildings
- private office building space
- private businesses (cable/broadcasting, coffee shops, business services)
- other community facilities
- college campuses
- other special places, unique to your community

Planning

Define the target market.

Define the target market.

There is no substitute for a thorough understanding of the target market. No matter how well-equipped the facility may be with the latest technology, or how attractive the surroundings are, unless the project appeals to the target customer it will not be financially feasible. Gaining an understanding and agreement around “who is the customer” is crucial to form a solid foundation for a successful project.

***Who is the customer?
There is no substitute
for a thorough
understanding of the
target market.***

The results of the community survey, interviews, and any other tools used to assess the community will help make sure that the team understands how to define and appeal to the target customer.

Each community is oriented to different market segments. Target customer groups might include:

- Teleworkers
- Small and home based businesses
- Emerging businesses and entrepreneurs
- Job seekers
- Government agencies
- Local employers in need of workforce training
- Employers outside the local area with local resident employees
- Students and/or distance learners
- Local organizations that need meeting room space
- e-business shoppers
- Web surfers
- Residents who want to learn about using computers or simply check e-mail
- Visitors to the area
- Traveling sales representatives, consultants or government representatives
- Workshop and seminar presenters and their attendees

Planning

Define the target market.

Use market segmentation to identify the distinct needs of target customers. A matrix of different market segments can be created to determine different preferences of each segment to ensure that the project is designed to reflect the needs of priority target customers. An example is shown below.

Sample Market Segmentation Matrix

	Teleworkers and their employers	Small/home businesses	Students, job seekers	Employers - training	Traveling professionals & visitors
Estimated % use/sales	20%	40%	20%	15%	5%
Type of use	Office hotel; space rent/lease	Business services	Classes, online research	Classes and workshops	Office hotel
Local residence Regional residence	100% -workers 0%	90% 10%	100% 0%	90% 10%	5% 95%
Product and service preferences	Desk/work space Secure file space Computer Ofc. equip. Conference space	Ofc. Equip. Conf. space Business svcs.	Class space Video-conference	Class space Video-conference	Desk Computer Ofc. equip. Meeting space
Decision influences	Location Time savings Cost Amenities Convenience Data Security Privacy Hours available	Location Access to amenities Cost Convenient services Speed of service	Cost Convenience Attractiveness of class offerings Convenience of the experience	Cost Convenience Availability	Location Convenience Access to amenities Cost Speed of service

Planning

Define a clear and compelling project concept.

Determine a clear and compelling project concept.

Goals vary depending on whether the center is a for-profit or non-profit venture. For-profit centers tend to focus on coffee house services, business copy centers, or even banks, with computers services supplementing the core business. Non-profit centers have purposes such as employer training, literacy, small business development, innovations in education, access to lifelong learning and information, access to health care, transportation demand management and increased sense of community. In all cases the purpose needs to be directly related to evidence of market demand.

A number of questions should be asked to help refine the concept and clarify the project's purpose:

- Is the project going to be a televillage, focused on community capacity building, or will it be an actual physical location?
- What services and products are envisioned? (Please see the checklist on the following page for examples of products and services, amenities and features offered by telecommunity centers.)
- Will it be profit-driven or a non-profit entity? Is it public or private?
- Who will own the center? the equipment? the software? the real estate?
- Who will run it on a day-to-day basis? How will it be governed?
- Who will make the decisions?

Answers to these questions will evolve as the project concept comes into focus, and as customer demand is matched with prospective site locations. Once the project concept is defined, the next step is to identify the services, equipment and amenities the center will offer. A checklist of possibilities is shown below. The project concept is then ready for feasibility analysis, which is simply a tool to help decide whether to go forward with the project.

Checklist for Determining the Telecommunity Center's Equipment, Services and Amenities

Use this list to help determine appropriate equipment and services that will be offered by the center. As the project concept evolves, match services with evidence of customer demand:

Typical equipment provided at a telecommunity center includes:

- dedicated cubicle/workstation space
- private offices, a cubicle or workstation for telework space
- computers (Mac or PC) with high quality monitors and a variety of software
- comfortable, adjustable, ergonomic furniture
- tables to spread out projects or hold small meetings
- conference room, with video-conference equipment
- high quality laser and color printers
- fax machine, scanner, copier
- plenty of electrical outlets
- telephone
- high speed modems, laptop ports and Internet access
- voicemail
- assistance from staff to solve problems and answer questions

What specialized services and amenities will be provided?

- high speed Internet connectivity
- 24-hour access
- magazines, professional journals, reference books or library materials
- reciprocity with other telecommunity centers
- distance learning classes
- computer skills training
- customized workforce training for local employers
- incoming and outgoing mail handling, including FedEx/UPS services
- secretarial services, such as personalized telephone answering
- specialty photocopying and binding services
- coffee and food service; catering
- personal file space
- office supplies such as pads of paper, pens, computer paper
- business services, such as bookkeeping or banking
- computer lab for group classes
- an attractive, safe, secure location and surroundings
- proximity to child care and other business offices and services
- adequate supply of easy parking at no additional cost

What will the facility look like?

- a clean, friendly, uncluttered and welcoming reception area
- heavily influenced by primary services offered, such as office space, photocopying services, training, banking, coffee shop, library, government agency or college campus
- an attractive, business oriented work setting
- abundant natural light and windows; excellent task lighting
- private offices and dedicated or drop-in cubicle/workstation space somewhere in between the ambience of a home office and the business office
- business services and equipment beyond what is practical and affordable to have in home offices and small business offices
- large and small conference rooms with comfortable chairs
- gathering space and opportunity for social interaction with others

Feasibility Analysis

Financial feasibility

Feasibility analysis is a process of testing and refining, thinking and rethinking the project. It offers a set of checkpoints for understanding risk and building commitment to the project. The project should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to deal with unforeseen delays and inevitable changes in circumstances.

While not all feasibility criteria are equal in importance, they measure how beneficial or practical certain aspects of the project are. Not all of the information may be available to answer the questions. However, the following feasibility checklists offer checkpoints for understanding risk and building commitment to the project once the project concept is defined and the market analysis is complete.

The feasibility analysis cannot ensure a successful project. But it can help the community decide whether to move forward.

Financial feasibility

The ultimate purpose of the financial analysis is to model the project's expected financial results to determine whether the community's (or developer's) needs and objectives are met.

- Are there sufficient resources to finance construction? Yes ___ No ___
- Is there sufficient revenue to sustain operations? Yes ___ No ___
- Will the project produce a rate of return and/or profitability at an acceptable level to the developer? Yes ___ No ___

If the answer is "no" to any of the questions listed above, the community should consider revising the composition of the project and changing the timing and/or phasing of the project to achieve financial feasibility. Other options could include changes in the marketing program or a joint venture with another partner.

- Revenues that need to be estimated include:
 - income from fees charged for services, office space rental, products and use of services and equipment;
 - special grant funds from government agencies or foundations for start-up costs; and
 - special one-time-only purposes.
- Costs that need to be estimated include:
 - one-time acquisition and property / facility development costs including purchase of property, building and structural modifications, signage, parking and landscaping, equipment and furniture expenses and regulatory and property development charges such as building permits and systems development charges; and
 - ongoing operations and support costs including staffing, facility charges (perhaps lease/rent expense or debt service), utilities, insurance, taxes, computer usage, supplies, advertising and media, equipment and software upgrades.

In developing the financial analysis, it is helpful to produce a pro forma annual balance sheet, income statement, cash flow statement and profitability analysis to a point at which a positive and continuing cash flow is established. A sample operating statement pro forma is outlined below.

Sample Hypothetical Annual Operating Statement Pro Forma**Operating Assumptions**

Rental rate per workstation per month (1 day a week)	\$50
Rental rate for office space per month (1 day a week)	\$75
Conference room rate per hour	\$10
Workstation rate per hour	\$6
Rental rate for video conference use per hour	\$100
Ave. number of days/week of tenant use:	
Workstations	2
Offices	3
Number of workstations	4
Number of private offices	2
Number of tenants	6
Monthly lease / memberships @ \$500/month	2
Conference room use per week (hours)	10
Video conference use per week (hours)	1
Number of conference rooms	2
Assume other services:	
Training @ \$100/class * 100 classes/yr * 6 participants	\$60,000
Food & Beverage sales per customer	\$1
Merchandise sales per customer	\$1
Number of overall customers per day	25
% of overall customers hourly workstation use	25%

Operating Revenues

Workstation rent	\$4,800
Drop-in workstation fees	9,563
Office space rent	5,400
Membership Leases	12,000
Conference room rent	5,200
Video conference equipment rent	5,200
Telephone services @ \$5 per mo. per tenant	360
Food & Beverage	6,375
Training revenue	60,000
Other services to be determined (or subsidy)	100,000
Merchandise	6,375
Total Revenue	\$215,273

Cost of Goods Sold

Food & Beverage @75%	\$4,781
Merchandise sales @ 65%	4,144
Other to be determined or subsidy @ 40%	40,000
Total Cost of Goods Sold	\$48,925

Operating Expenses

Payroll -- Site Administrator & Part Time Assistant	\$90,000
Office Supplies	10,000
Marketing	3,000
Property rent / lease 2500 sq. ft. @ \$1.50	45,000
Equipment rent	4,000
Utilities, network maint., telecom services	12,000
Staff training	500
Total Operating Expenses	\$164,500

Fixed Charges

Insurance @.4% revenue	\$861
Property taxes	0
Reserve @ 1% x revenue	2,153
Total Fixed Charges	\$3,014

Net Operating Income **\$1,848**

Feasibility Analysis

Analysis of benefits

Analysis of Benefits

Some communities decide to proceed with a telecommunity center development project to achieve compelling public benefits, even if the project is not expected to yield a positive financial result. Subsidies are needed if this is the case. Other potential community benefits to consider are listed below.

- Direct benefits:
 - shorter commute trips
 - greater spending in the local community
 - increased knowledge and skills through training
 - increased Web presence and e-sales by local businesses
 - new and better services available in the community
 - better access to technology for the underserved
 - demonstrated interest and support of technology-oriented businesses

- Indirect benefits:
 - reduced air pollution
 - reduced traffic congestion
 - higher quality of life
 - increased convenience
 - strengthened connections within the community
 - stronger sense of place
 - more and better jobs created
 - new businesses created and more competitive existing businesses
 - increased job satisfaction
 - lower employee turnover

Feasibility Analysis

Operational/technical feasibility

Operational / Technical Feasibility

Analysis of the operational and technical feasibility of the project focuses on whether the project is worth pursuing given the practical aspects of the site and expertise to develop the project.

- Is the site available and workable? Yes ___ No___
- Can you build or remodel a facility and make it work? Yes ___ No___
- Is the solution practical? Yes ___ No___
- Do you have the necessary technical expertise to develop the project? Yes ___ No___

If the answer is “no” to any of the questions listed above, the community will need to revisit the site selection issues and confer with its architectural, building and technology consultants to find an acceptable solution.

- Can you develop the project in a reasonable amount of time, and within the time available? Yes ___ No___

If the answer is “no,” the community should consider changing the phasing and/or timing of the project. Cost impacts need to be figured into the financial analysis.

Feasibility Analysis

Legal and political feasibility

Legal Feasibility

- Are there any legal restrictions or regulations (such as land use laws or zoning) which might impede or prevent moving ahead? Yes ___ No___
- Are there environmental restrictions that need to be addressed? Yes ___ No___
- Does the proposed building design meet current American Disabilities Act requirements? Yes ___ No___
- Is the intended use consistent with the zoning of the property? Yes ___ No___
- If not, does a process exist to successfully address these concerns? Yes ___ No___

If the project is not ready to proceed in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, modifications will need to be made or another site will need to be pursued. Again, the cost of assessing and complying with these legal or regulatory requirements need to be included in the financial analysis.

Political Feasibility

The purpose of the political feasibility analysis is to determine if the community is willing to support the project and whether it wants the project to happen.

- Is the community supportive? Yes ___ No___
- Is it a priority for community development? Yes ___ No___
- Are the mayor and city council supportive? Yes ___ No___

The project concept may be unfamiliar and the technological aspects may be intimidating to some community leaders. It is important to inform them and involve them during the development of the project, particularly if the project depends upon public resources. If support remains weak despite reasonable efforts to inform and engage them, the project should be reevaluated.

Feasibility Analysis

Next steps

Next Steps

If the answer is “no” to any of these questions, the community may not be ready to make the telecommunity center project a success, even if the financial, operational and legal feasibility yields a favorable result.

Affirmative responses to these questions can indicate whether there is sufficient will to effectively integrate telecommunity resources into people's daily activities and make those resources accessible. At this stage of the project's development, it is unlikely that the answers to all of these questions are “yes.” There may be issues that require additional information to reach either a “yes” or “no” answer. Specific information may be needed to put a sharp pencil to the question of financial feasibility. More work would need to be done before proceeding with a business plan. If the refinement of this information still yields a significant number of “no” answers, it is unlikely that project sponsors will have the confidence to proceed without adjusting the project. If the decision is made to proceed with the project without those adjustments, then at least the sponsors and developers will be aware of the risks and weaknesses of the project.

Because the project development process requires ongoing reevaluation and refinement, it is likely that a wide range of new solutions, opportunities and challenges will arise. It is therefore important to periodically revisit this checklist to accommodate change and keep the project on track.

A Business Plan Template

Executive summary

A telecommunity project needs scrutiny and planning. The same is required for the successful start up of any new business. Much of the information needed for a business plan can be drawn from the research and results of the feasibility analysis. The plan should include the following elements, to the extent that the information is available:

Executive Summary

- **Highlights**
Provide a concise, compelling overview of the telecommunity center business plan. Highlight the concept and overall financial highlights, including net financial results.
- **Market analysis**
Summarize the analysis of target customers, the community and the competition.
- **Business Description and Goals**
Describe the mission and goals of the organization, including services offered. This section should include the critical overall success factors for attracting target customers and ensuring ongoing operations.

Sample Key Success Factors

- F **Convenience.** Provide a convenient, welcoming office and/or training experience.
- F **High speed Internet connection.** Provide the fastest available connectivity.
- F **Right pricing.** Price services attractively for the value received.
- F **Software availability.** Upgrade software and hardware to keep current. Prospective teleworkers are looking for a variety of specific, technical quality software used in their jobs. They are interested in software that ensures a secure connection to their office networks.
- F **Employer willingness.** Cultivate employer support. Teleworkers need to persuade their employers that a telecommunity center work site is a viable alternative to teleworking from home and commuting to the office. Whether the employer or employee pays to rent a workstation depends on the situation.
- F **A businesslike, collegial environment.** Provide an atmosphere that is attractive, friendly and conducive to work. Teleworkers want to avoid the distractions or loneliness sometimes found in a home office setting.
- F **An integral part of library services.** Create a cohesive community learning center by making the technology center a part of the library. The library provides financial strength, attracts customers and reduces risk.
- F **Partnerships between the business community and the library.** Tap and integrate expertise from within the local business community.

A Business Plan Template

Market analysis / Business description and goals

Market analysis

- **Target Market**
Who are the proposed customers? This section should identify the target customers, their demographics, their needs, distinguishing characteristics, key trends affecting the market size and anticipated changes within the target market.
- **Community Profile**
What is the nature of the community in which the center will operate? Economic and demographic information about the community should be included here. Sources of information might include survey data on transportation habits, employment and income data. The local chamber of commerce is a good source of information about the area's employers.
- **Competition**
Who are the competitors? This section should evaluate the alternatives to the center's proposed services such as telework, training and business services within the community. Identify competitors, market trends and barriers to entry.

Business description and goals

- **Strategic overview**
What opportunity is the center capitalizing on? Describe how the center is organized and how it is unique and qualified to succeed.
- **Description of services**
What are the center's services and how will tasks be accomplished? Components of the telecommunity center, such as work space for teleworkers and conference room space for broader use, should be outlined in this section. Services should be described in some detail.
- **Goals for the first several years**
While target results involving information technology are difficult to forecast beyond the first couple years, this section is a guide for setting goals to be achieved and for developing operating assumptions for testing financial plans. Utilization / occupancy rates, marketing and outreach goals should be described, including what functions are needed over time to make the venture successful.

A Business Plan Template

Marketing plan

Marketing plan

- **Marketing Strategy**

What is the strategy for penetrating the marketplace? The overall marketing effort should be outlined in this section, including plans for any additional market research needed. It should include a pricing strategy and promotional and outreach strategies to introduce the center into the market.

- **Pricing Strategy**

At what price points will the offerings be sold? This section should define what the center will charge for its services. This includes workstation rent by the hour, the day, the month, and any special packages and promotions. Licensing and fee revenue from service providers should be outlined in this section as well.

- **Promotion and Outreach Strategy**

How does the center plan to generate publicity and positive recognition? How will it promote its services? Strategies should be identified for each of the target customer groups. A compelling message is needed to attract media attention to help build the brand. Promotion tactics might include local news articles, interviews, Web sites and links, community organization partnerships, flyers, coupons, special events and direct mail. State agencies might also be identified as potential advocates of the center. Other tactics might include open houses, workshops, seminars and other special events tied in with local community activity calendars. The center can further promote its brand with displays, signage, presentations and printed materials such as brochures, bookmarks and give-aways, including paper tablets, pens and mouse pads.

- **Community Partnership Strategy**

Consider sponsorship and partnership arrangements with local businesses which can increase community visibility and generate new customers. Examples are a free hour of computer usage with purchase at a local coffee shop or a free business consulting session with purchase of a class.

A Business Plan Template

Evaluation plan

Evaluation plan

How will the center's performance be measured? Every organization's approach is different. Include measures that fit with the established practices of the sponsoring organization and make sure there is a way to capture and act upon ongoing feedback and suggestions from customers. The list below includes various measures covering the project from the idea stage through implementation.

Sample 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 technology 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> <i>Increased employee productivity</i>	Commuter trips avoided 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

A Business Plan Template

Start-up plan / Financial plan

Start-up plan

What is the plan to take the idea from the concept stage to reality?

- **Development Timeline**
Provide information on the status of the development, the target “finish” date of development, key tasks to be accomplished and obstacles to overcome in this process.
- **Equipment Specifications**
The types of equipment to be offered should be outlined in this section.
- **Facility Location**
- **Interior Layout / Space Requirements**
- **Management Team**
The operations staff and management involved in running the telecommunity center should be described, including how the decision structure operates and the role of community advisory teams and professional advisors, if appropriate.
- **Start Up Capital Budget**
Identify how much capital is needed and when.

Financial Plan

How much money is needed and for what?

- **Operating assumptions**
Include pro-forma income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow statements, if applicable.
- **Exit strategy, if applicable.**

Attachments

Additional pertinent information, such as specifications for equipment and services, spreadsheets and calculations could be included in this section.

Marketing Tools & Templates

Brand identity

Brand identity

- **What is a brand identity**

A brand identity is not simply a set of marketing materials, a logo or a catch phrase. A brand is the set of expectations of performance that customers, prospects, constituents and the entire community have in mind when they think of your telecommunity center. Your brand identity is your reputation and a direct reflection of everything the center does and how it interacts with everyone. Everything matters, from the way the center looks and feels and how clean the parking lot is, to the way staff members are treated and how courteously customers are greeted. A brand identity is drawn from all of the senses – sight, scent, sound and touch.

A brand identity resides in the prospect's mind. Always changing, it evolves over time. It includes the best and the worst aspects of the center, the sum of all of those experiences and impressions. The strongest, most successful brands rise above the service or product and identify with people on a positive emotional and personal level.

- **Why create a brand**

Whether the telecommunity center is an extension of an existing organization or an independent entity, a distinctive brand identity will help establish it in the minds of prospects, customers and the general community. By defining the center's brand identity, prospects learn what the center is, what it offers and how it distinguishes itself from similar services provided by others. You can either play an active role in guiding the development of the center's reputation, or it will grow on its own.

- **How to create a brand**

The best place to start is with a candid assessment of what the center is, what it has to offer and how it distinguishes itself. What does the center want to become and what attributes does it want to be known for? What sets it apart? What are its strengths that make it valuable and compelling? What is superior about the value offered by the center? To launch a new brand, define the center from the customer's point of view. Identify the motivating factors that will encourage prospects to try the center and will persuade them to make it a habit.

The brand identity becomes the mindset for the entire organization and its overall business strategy, not just a marketing function. Once this is defined, a strategy is needed to convey it to the customer. It takes more than money to define and build a brand – it takes commitment and consistency throughout the organization.

When a center is based on a broad community partnership, telecommunity centers run the risk of having too many brand "stewards." Turnover, too many hands and a lack of central leadership can lead to a brand that is defined by its many parts rather than a cohesive whole. A successful brand has a steady, responsible leader with a deep, abiding connection to it.

Marketing Tools & Templates

Sample brand structure

- **How to create a brand structure**

Start by identifying the brand attributes the center wants to be known for doing differently and better than anyone else. Then describe the ways in which customers will describe the center that exemplify the selected attributes. Identify the tangible features of the center that tie directly to the target brand attributes. A sample brand structure, useful in focusing marketing strategies and themes, is shown below.

Sample brand structure

<u>Brand Attribute</u>	<u>Brand Component</u>	<u>Feature</u>
Productive	Fastest available Internet access Latest technology "I save time by working close to home." Professional atmosphere "I get so much done here – as well or better than at home or the office."	Work stations with high speed connectivity, latest software releases, high quality printers, fax, scanners, professional office environment; tutorials, templates and people that make them easy to use
Cost effective	Affordable prices, saves money Costs less to rent than purchase	Work stations, full range of software and hardware
Convenient	Easy access - proximity All you need is right here No lengthy commute	Office space, equipment, services and products, refreshments, parking, all at a location close to home
Relaxing	Serene place to work Natural light Leave behind stress of home and the office Collegial "family" atmosphere A sense of belonging	Work stations, common areas for social gathering places, adjustable work surfaces and chairs, attractive and well-lit
Enriching	Ability to learn new skills Learn from other teleworkers	Training classes, how-to materials, conference room, library resources
Correct, Compelling	It's the right thing to do Save gas, save the air "I support my local community." "I like working closer to my kids."	Work stations that enable telework

Marketing Tools & Templates

Sample logo

A distinctive look and design helps establish a recognized identity for the center. The sample logo shown below was created for the Canby Telecommunity Center in Clackamas County, Oregon. The image evokes nearby Mount Hood and a free-spirited computer mouse. The goal was to create a new, distinctive image that would look approachable, inviting and connected to the place as well as the technology purpose of the center. Creating a new brand name and a new logo helps reinforce that this is an entirely new category of service.

Sample logo and brand identity



Brand Identity: Local, affordable, convenient public access to technology and learning opportunities in a friendly, comfortable and productive setting.

The same design image was created for telecommunity centers in Clackamas County's other communities to establish a consistent, recognizable look county-wide.



Visibility and awareness of each of the centers is reinforced when the logo is incorporated into written communications and Web sites (www.no-commute.net). Other organizations are permitted and encouraged to use the logos in their own promotions for services provided at any of the centers. They are also encouraged to add hotlinks to the center's Web site.

Marketing Tools & Templates

Promotions

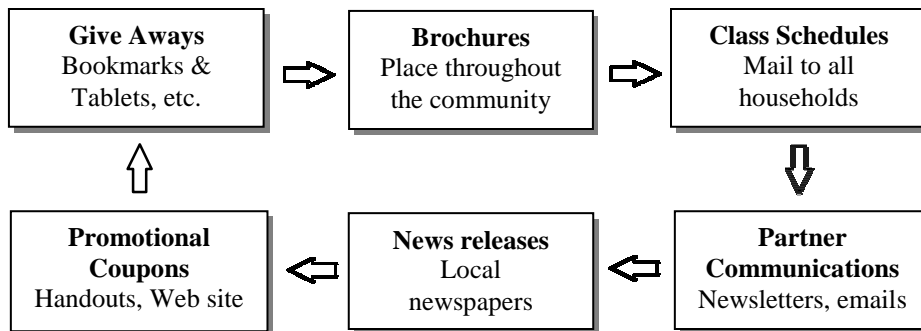
Promotions



There is no single approach that can guarantee success. Multiple promotions that emphasize connections within the community and partner organizations will help build public awareness.

Examples of brochures, promotional coupons and a bookmark used by the Molalla Telecommunity Center are shown at left.

The most effective marketing campaigns employ a variety of coordinated efforts. An example is shown below.



Marketing Tools & Templates

Media relations

Media relations

Media relations is the means of conveying messages to the public through the media. It is a crucial first step to building a brand, especially when it involves planting a new idea in the mind. The essence of building a new brand is to provide the media with the materials that enable them to build the brand. Telling your story indirectly through third parties, primarily the media and local community organizations, will help build credibility. People are generally cautious and skeptical about advertising, and are more likely to believe what they read in newspapers and magazines or what they hear on radio or see on television. People also tend to turn to friends, co-workers and neighbors for recommendations and advice, so building positive relationships within the community is time well spent.

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Establishing a continuing relationship with various types of media will help the center get stories placed that will reach target customers. It will also enable the center to convey information to the public without paying for advertising, promote the value of the center and publicize its services. A disadvantage of publicity is that the content, the timing and the appearance of the message is in the hands of the media, beyond your control.

It takes an ongoing effort to build visibility and awareness. Most media releases are not read. At most, the logo and headline will be noticed. The main thing a media release accomplishes is to say, "We are still here and we are open for business." If the center works to establish a relationship with someone in the various media organizations, it is more likely releases will be posted and/or published. Designating a spokesperson helps connect a face and a voice to the center and attracts interview opportunities.

The center should strive to have some fresh, compelling news on a monthly basis. Determine what the story is and give it the "Who cares?" test. The story should be of interest to the audience you want to reach.

- The kinds of stories that could be announced include:
 - Creation of the center
 - Hiring of staff
 - Grand opening
 - Classes offered
 - Annual anniversary report
 - New resources and services added
 - New equipment added or updated
 - Special demonstrations or guest speakers
 - Milestones reached and key accomplishments
 - Open house
 - Creation of a public service announcement
 - Foundation funding and grants awarded
 - Special recognition or awards from other organizations
 - Special feature on a customer, volunteer, or staff person

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- The primary ways of communicating to the media include:
 - A face-to-face visit
 - Telephone call
 - Personalized e-mail message
 - Personal letter
 - Newsletter via e-mail or regular mail
 - Media release
 - Press conference
 - Press kit
 - Calendar of events

- Media releases may be distributed by e-mail, fax and mail to a variety of media contacts:
 - Post it on the center's own Web site
 - Newspapers and their special interest columnists
 - Local community or county Web sites (establish hotlinks to the center on their sites)
 - Radio stations
 - Television stations
 - Newsletters, notices and publications of other businesses and organizations in the community such as the chamber of commerce, school district, cable and utility companies, city, county, library, community college, real estate offices, and state agencies, such as the Oregon Office of Energy.