



**CHICAGO
NEIGHBORHOOD
LEARNING NETWORK**

**EVALUATION REPORT:
CNLN AT THE HALFWAY POINT**

**Center for Education, Employment, and Community
Education Development Center, Inc.
March 2000**

1. INTRODUCTION

This evaluation report comes at a crucial time for The Chicago Neighborhood Learning Network (CNLN) project. March 2000 marks the halfway point of CNLN, which is funded by a five year (September 30, 1997 to September 29, 2002) Technology Innovation Challenge Grant (TICG). In its proposal to the U.S. Department of Education (US DoEd) the CNLN proposes a vision of innovative, technology-based teaching and learning that promotes active learning not only for students and teachers from kindergarten to grade 12, but also for parents and other neighborhood residents. Through collaborative partnerships of schools and local organizations, it seeks to foster learning communities. Any project that promotes innovation and seeks to demonstrate collaborative approaches involving diverse groups faces many barriers and challenges along the way. The experience of CNLN thus far has not been any different.

In its first year and a half (September 1997 to March 1999), mismanagement, confusion, and breakdowns in communication hindered the project. There was little evidence that the proposed central vision guided the design, planning, and implementation of the project during that period. The big ideas of the project were not translated into plans. The four original partners-Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Office of Catholic Education (OCE), Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and Chicago Urban League (CUL)-appeared to be guided by their own organizational mission and programming needs, rather than working together toward an overarching project vision and the project goals. The lack of focused discussion with community and school "satellite" sites concerning the vision, goals and strategies of the CNLN was very much in evidence.

At the end of Year One, the most tangible accomplishments were that CNLN had purchased 250 multimedia computers, Local Area Network equipment, twelve printers, and software. They were divided among the five partner sites. The CNLN grant had not provided any resources to satellite sites named in the proposal. Professional development, curriculum development, networking across sites, and instructional programming did not commence. To understand the full scope of management problems that plagued the grant, please see the *Year One Status Report*.

In Year Two, from November 1998 to March 1999, CNLN was without a Project Manager. The partners divided the responsibility of the Project Manager among themselves, but made no visible progress toward CNLN goals during this period.

In March 1999, Ila Weinberg became the Project Manager. She addressed the bureaucratic and management problems that had plagued the grant. Please see the *Year Two Status Report*. In particular,

- In Year One and parts of Year Two, OCE served as the fiscal agent for the grant. It withdrew as the Fiscal agent and as partner in June 1999. CPS, as the main contractor for the grant, appointed CUL as the fiscal agent in September 1999. CPS thought that this change would make contracting for vendors and services more streamlined.
- In Year Two, CPS moved the management of the CNLN from the Office of Learning Technologies to the Office of School and Community Relations. This transfer facilitated community involvement in the CNLN.
- Accountability was a problem in Year One. The Management team included representatives from the four partners. This led to confusion and non-responsiveness. CPS established a clear line of responsibility for the project within CPS.

- Ms. Weinberg established the strong working relationships with the sites. Two CNLN funded community organizers began regular meetings with community and school sites at two Chicago neighborhoods -- West Town and Brand Blvd.

At the end of Year Two (September 1999), CNLN appeared to have begun to turn the corner. The project finally began to put management in place to carry out the vision. Grant administration, technology infrastructure, and partnerships were nearly all in place for the project to take off and achieve success.

This report examines whether CNLN has indeed taken tangible steps toward achieving the proposed project goals and vision in the first six months of Year Three (September 1999 to March 2000).

1.1 Evaluation Methodology

This report evaluates the first six months of CNLN project Year Three. It includes the following sections:

- A Goals Report, delineating the amended Year Three project goals
- A Site Report, delineating the goals and outcomes of the sites and assessing how the work of the sites relates to the CNLN project as a whole
- A Status Report, analyzing the strategic planning steps taken toward achieving project goals

In March 2000, CPS contracted with EDC to provide evaluative services for Year Three of the CNLN project. The thrust of the EDC's work will be formative evaluation, providing

feedback to the CNLN Project Director and sites as part of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process. To deliver that service and to prepare this report, EDC:

- surveyed the project sites about status of the project
- met with U.S. DoEd Project Officer Jennell Leonard and CNLN management to amend the goals of Year Three
- facilitated a strategic planning meeting of all CNLN staff and community and school sites to set in motion a process to determine the Scopes of Work (SOW) required to meet Year Three Goals
- continued to monitor project development

2. GOALS REPORT

On February 24, 2000, a meeting took place at CPS to define CNLN Year Three goals.

Attending the meeting were:

- Jennell Leonard, Project Officer, US DoED
- Ila Weinberg, CNLN Project Manager
- Anne Hill, CNLN Community Organizer
- Karen Bozeman-Gross, CNLN Community Organizer
- Dylan Russell, technical vendor and consultant to CNLN
- Dr. John Wong, Senior Project Director at EDC, Evaluation Team Leader

The group examined the Year One, Year Two, and Year Three goals from the original CNLN proposal. They deleted goals that were no longer applicable and updated the ones that were still operative. These amended goals are presented in Table 1.

The group also decided to hold a strategic planning meeting with all CNLN sites to share the amended project goals and to work together to determine each site's Scope of Work (SOW) to reach those goals. That meeting, set for March 20, 2000, would also establish benchmarks and outcomes for the CNLN. The group agreed that Dr. Wong would plan and facilitate that meeting.

Table 1. Amended Year Three Goals

Goals
<p>Goal 1. Build CNLN technology infrastructure¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue site committees in two neighborhoods²• Inventory technology assets in neighborhood (satellite) sites• Design CNLN website• Select vendors and suppliers• Install equipment
<p>Goal 2. Professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select teachers to train on the CNLN• Teachers begin developing instructional materials focused on science, math, and technological literacy• Organize cross-sector teams to select content• Develop database of learning objectives and instructional modules to post on the webserver• Design graphical user interface to access content• Assign site coordinators and resource staff• Provide professional development support to sites• Share successful strategies
<p>Goal 3. Train community in effective use of CNLN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop materials and outreach program to inform neighborhood residents• Identify critical education needs and offer CNLN resources in student learning, career development and community service• Develop programmatic initiatives such as collaborative projects, cross-age peer tutoring and mentoring• Begin training neighborhood students and residents to maintain network³• Expand community training program
<p>Goal 4. Creation of neighborhood website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create neighborhood websites• Expand web resources with links to community organizations, events, and resources⁴• Provide key information to support teacher-community interaction
<p>Goal 5. Conduct evaluation and provide best practices repository</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define goals, benchmarks, and measures of performance• Conduct pre-project data acquisition and surveys• Design data collection instruments• Begin collect data and provide feedback to CNLN participants• Conduct summative evaluation• Validate best practices to be placed on the website

¹ "Prepare operational policies" was deleted as part of goal 1.

² Changed from "Create steering committees at two hubs."

³ Moved from Goal 1 to Goal 3.

⁴ Moved from Goal 1 to Goal 4.

3. SITE REPORT

An important accomplishment during the first six months of Year Three was the disbursement of grants to community and school sites named in the proposal that had not as yet received any funding.⁵ Project management used Year One and Year Two carryover money for these site grants.

The following sites received grants:

- Holy Angels School
- Street Level Media
- Erie Neighborhood House
- Northwest Towers
- Settlement House
- Hall Library
- Carpenter School
- Emerson House
- Greenview Eckhart
- Wells High School

The SOW specified in the site contracts was the same for all sites. (See Exhibit A.) The contracts gave a minimum definition of access requirements. It did not specify any new activities and supported what the sites were already delivering as part of their normal operation. Proposed CNLN goals, such as professional development, curriculum development, and cross-site instructional programming, were not included in the SOW.

⁵ Association House and Humbolt Park Vocational Center, two community sites not named in the original proposal, each received 20 new computers in Year Two.

Another success was that CNLN management and staff were able to organize and foster relationships among the sites in two neighborhoods. In the first 18 months of CNLN, the original partners used a top-down management style that alienated many sites. Current management has operated an inclusive, bottom-up style. Site committees in both neighborhoods have been meeting regularly. Rather than complaining about project management as they had in the past, site representatives have been planning collaborative activities. There existed a clear and open line of communication between project management and the project sites.

Dialogues have been established, but the leveraging of local resources that is a great potential of this grant has yet to begin. For example, one site grant paid for an expansion of network services, doubling that agency's network capacity and increased its Internet connection capacity. However, this agency also has the capacity for learner-centered teacher and parent training and for the development of bilingual (English and Spanish) curriculum, but that resource remains to be harnessed, shared among the sites, and enhanced as part of this demonstration grant.

As one site representative pointed out: "What's innovative about this project, without the technology, is that we have schools and community sites sitting at the same table. Everything so far has been "we can do this at the school or at this site". But I haven't heard a lot about how we can do collaboration, and how can we collaborate on what the learning outcomes should be."

4. STATUS REPORT

On March 20, 2000, project management and staff, site staff, two members of the CNLN evaluation team, and representatives of organizations interested in becoming project sites met at the Einstein School in the East Side of Chicago. One purpose of this meeting was to share the amended project goals developed on February 24, 2000. Another was to determine SOWs, benchmarks, and learner outcomes for each goal. Dr. Wong facilitated the meeting, attended by 28 people. (See Exhibit B for the list of attendees.) The meeting guidelines, distributed to each participant in a workbook, kept the meeting focused and productive.

Figure 1. Meeting Guidelines

This is a "get down to business" meeting. We need to adhere to the following guidelines so that we can stay on task and reach the intended outcomes of this meeting.

- **Think forward.** Please keep historical references to a minimum. Do not dwell on past problems. Let's move ahead.
- **Focus on the CNLN vision.** Focus on the needs of the project, not the needs of your own organization. CNLN is not another funding stream for your agency, however laudable your programs may be. You may argue that your agency's mission is aligned with the project vision, but please think carefully about that before proposing a particular program for funding.
- **Think innovation.** Although this is a technology grant, TICG is not about innovation in technology, but new and creative approaches in teaching and learning. Although this is a technology grant, funding should not be primarily for hardware and software. CNLN has already spent much of its funding on purchase of technology.
- **Think collaboration.** Focus on working together to enhance outcomes.
- **Think outcomes.** The focus should be on increasing and enhancing learner outcomes.
- **Concretize tasks.** Year 3 project goals need to be accomplished. We're almost halfway through the year and halfway through this 5-year project.

4.1 Meeting Outcomes

The meeting produced a rich discussion. It clarified confusion among the participants about the intent of the TICG and provided guidance in defining SOW. The meeting time proved to be too short to produce specific outcomes and benchmarks for each goal, but it energized the group to form committees to continue this strategic planning process and to define SOWs by stated deadlines.

This report presents two groupings of meeting results:

- Discussion points, divided by goals and presented in the order that the goals were discussed
- Strategic plans for each goal, with tasks, deliverables, due dates, and work group assigned

4.1.1 Discussion Points

GOAL 2: Professional Development

1. “Teachers” doesn’t necessarily mean certified teachers but all of those who are teaching, whether at schools or community centers.
2. Professional development does not mean teaching teachers application skills. The best way is to have teachers get together and design projects and curriculum and content, and in the process, learn technology skills. It’s learning by doing.
3. The project is about sharing and collaborating – you may think that you’re doing the greatest thing within your own organization, but by working with someone less advanced, you can not only learn something, but affect more people through your work.
4. This grant is not about technology. Technology is the tool. We’re talking about the process of developing sound thinkers and teams.

5. Dylan, Tony and I (Ila) met with the cofounders of the Gotham Writers Workshop. They have creative writing courses over the Internet. The teachers are screenplay writers. The access is anytime, anywhere, with students all over the country. What they're teaching is thinking, collaborating, and learning through the Internet, not how to use computers. We're going to put this in as a pilot – each site will have 5 students taking 4 courses.
6. Ila's bringing to the table one component of a curriculum we could be adapting; we're going to query the world for best practices, and then adapt it for our own uses. We're moving into curriculum development.
7. There are two strands. You can search the Internet and participate in other activities, and that's fine. On the other hand, as a professional development effort, you should be thinking about creating something new as well for yourselves.
8. For Task 1 (materials search), be sure to ask the young people we work with for suggestions, as they are often as well, if not more, informed about these products.
9. A best practice repository is not a compilation of other's best practices but of your own. You may be dealing with a specific type of problem that also pops up at another site. People should constantly be inputting what's going on where they are.
10. It's important when looking at other products that we look critically at whether or not they are a better way of delivering content than other traditional or innovative methods. It can be something that's just cool and fun; it has to work pragmatically.
11. That's also a part of professional development – you'll be training the community as well as school kids.
12. It seems that the web research is part of the larger goal of developing content.
13. One of the things we need to do is make sure that there's a connect between schools and community groups.
14. If you're going to have teachers involved, write in some stipend for them, give them professional development time. We need to make sure people are paid for their time.
15. This project is supposed to be innovative. It needs to be adaptable for different communities.
16. Another deliverable will be giving teachers the ability to replicate this model within their community.
17. The word that is missing from these goals is ACCESS. We need technology to deliver access to learning information. This is especially true within schools – if they're staying open after 3, that's a major accomplishment.

GOAL 3: Train Community in Effective Use of CNLN

1. Three tasks: Access, Learning Programs, and Outreach
2. If Timedollar wants to be involved, it needs to be integrated into the community that the grant serves.
3. Q: How does this grant support what the community identifies as problems they want to work on (e.g., voter registration)? A: You can make it fit. You can say one of the things we want to get kids to do is to be good citizens, for example, with voter registration, and create a learning program around it.
4. One of the ways we've talked about this network is as a palette in which people can chose number of places to be linked to. There are three components to this palette: access, programs, and content. The website is a part of palette. We need to identify what others things should be part of the palette. A big part of training the community is informing them. We need a PR process.
5. What's innovative about this project, without the technology, is that we have schools and community sites sitting at the same table. Everything so far has been "we can do this at the school or at this site". But I haven't heard a lot about how we can do collaboration, and how can we collaborate on what the learning outcomes should be.

GOAL 1: Build CNLN Technology Infrastructure

1. Q: One of the things that has been deficient has been setting up communication other than physically meeting. Are measures being taken to connect us electronically? A: We will have e-mail capability within 2 weeks.
2. Q: What about setting up a webboard (a web-based electronic discussion board)? A: Yes, we can have a webboard set up by a week from today.
3. One of the major problems I've had with the project so far is that technology came first, and everything else came second.
4. The focus should be on innovation, staff development, and learning. Technology should be the second priority.
5. Those of you who need technology should be involved in Goals 2 and 3. You need to put the goals of the grant (i.e. learner outcomes) first.

6. Everyone has both a network and Internet access except for Mercedes (Emerson House), who won't have Internet access until June, and Sister Helen (Holy Angels), who doesn't have it yet.
7. It's Dylan's work to create a website that can serve as a hub. It should be as much of a tool for learning as possible. The schools are no longer intended to be a hard line hub, although they will still act as a community/activity hub, and thus will still be central to the project.
8. Q: What about "Prepare operations policies"? A: Some people already have operations policies. Perhaps it doesn't make sense to have one consistent operations policy, since centers are different.

GOAL 4: Creation of Neighborhood Websites

1. Dylan will have an individual meeting with every site by the end of 30 days on their websites.
2. There should be criteria for the purpose of these websites. How does it advance the goal of the project? There should also be consistency across the board. What about a chat room, for example? Let's do something innovative and productive and useful. So we might want to have a group meeting or a committee, with electronic feedback from the rest of the group.
3. These web pages must tie directly to the site. What ought to be up by May is a site with useful information about local services.
4. Q: What about having servers that allow kids to work on the website? A: I (Dylan) will house the website and will be working on it myself, so we don't need the equipment for that particular project. The purpose is not to fund your own program. If you can make the argument that it ties into the grant very specifically, that's a strong argument

GOAL 5: Conduct Evaluation and Provide Best Practice Repository

1. Q: What are you being held responsible for? What was outlined in your scope of work? What are the dates and responsibilities of your contract? A: The contract runs from Oct. 1st 1998-Sept. 30th 2002. It shows who the partners are and gives a minimum definition of access, and calls for negotiations for budgets and services.
2. There is \$600,000 carryover from year 2. Each site got site agreements; some site agreements were a little different, but the scope of work is essentially the same.
3. Q: We've talked about shifting intake and tracking of people to the website. Then we can compile a database that can easily be accessed to look at outcomes. A: The database and site

we're designing will be dynamic. We'll be able to collect the data that you want; we just need to tie it directly to the project.

4. Q: Has there been any consistent evaluation process? A: There have been evaluation reports submitted to Ila, but these are from the sites' own record keeping systems. There should be consistent web-based record keeping soon.
5. One of the most important things that the group needs to do is sit down and come up with learner outcomes that are acceptable to everyone. We need to know more than that, say, 30 teachers were trained at something. What purpose did that training serve?
6. Q: If your evaluation task is learning outcomes, are there any outcomes that should guide this search? A: The learning outcomes are for you to decide. It could be improved SAT scores or state tests. It could be a decrease in the truancy rate, or grades going up. There are other qualitative outcomes that are also valuable, such as a survey that measures how engaged the kids are.
7. Q: Are outcomes in math, science, and technology the limiting factor? I thought the intent of the grant was to extend learning beyond classroom. A: Yes. Although the examples given are more applicable for students, adults can be a part of the outcomes as well.
8. Q: How does causal mapping fit in? A: The Department of Education encourages causal mapping, because grants were coming out with intermediate steps, not outcomes. The group needs to think about outcomes and determine whether or not they are actually learner outcomes. I can convene another meeting on outcomes if need be. Application-specific skills for teachers are not an outcome. That's merely an intermediate step.

4.1.2 Strategic Plan for Each Goal

GOAL 2: Professional Development

Task 1: Research and identify innovative activities using technology. Identify innovative educational tools.

Scope of Work for Task 1:

- 1.1 Form a team
- 1.2 Develop a set of standards for critically analyzing findings
- 1.3 Working with students on this research
- 1.4 Evaluating and writing a report
- 1.5 Give to Dylan so he can post on website

Deliverable: a report to Ila indicating how many teachers and students to be involved and the critical sets of standards and evaluations.

Due May 1st. Research done by April 2nd (two weeks from today).

Work Group: Dylan, Shoshanna, Trushar, and Calvin. The group needs to meet regularly – as well as use e-mail and webboard.

Task 2: Think about how to design original innovative activities. Develop content and activities. Create a demo of 1 or 2 modules in an area you choose that involves both the school and the community.

Scope of Work for Task 2:

- 2.1 Look at Task 1's work
- 2.2 Decide on a content
- 2.3 Decide on some sort of innovation
- 2.4 Do the module
- 2.5 Create the demo

Time frame: Carried out in same time frame as Task 1

Deliverables:

1) A concept paper or a plan detailing how many teachers and students will be involved, what they should learn (teamwork skills, technical skills, integrating technology, working with community. This plan should come up with deadlines for the module, and for the final report
Due: 5/1

2) The module(s)
Due: To be decided

3) Final Report, detailing what this module has done in terms of professional development, and how to move forward with implementation.
Due: To be decided

Work group: Erie, Street Level, Humbolt, Emerson, and Grand Blvd. – pretty much everyone will be involved. This group needs to meet very soon and submit budgets.

GOAL 3: Train Community in Effective Use of CNLN

Task 1: Access. Determine what facilities should be open that aren't, and budget for that. Determine times for opening and closing, and then follow through.

Deliverable: Plan due by 5/1.

Task 2: Programs: Determining what is accessible now, developing the program, putting together the information and making it available.

Task 2 Scope of Work:

2.1 Talk about our own programs.

2.2 Decide what new programs to develop.

Deliverable: Plan due by 5/1.

Task 3: Outreach.

Deliverable: Plan due by 5/1.

Workgroup: Both neighborhood committees. Tim Bopp will take the lead.

GOAL 1 AND 4: Build CNLN Technology Infrastructure and Create Neighborhood Websites

Task 1: Establish CNLN website.

1) Register website: Done.

2) Website URL: www.cnlm.org.

Task 2: Develop websites for every site that does not have one

Due May 1.

Task 3: Install equipment: we will have procured and installed all software/hardware needed for project.

Due May 1st

Deliverable: Identify program activities for your audience that web technology can really help you to do.

Deliverable: List of what we *really* can do and how.

Workgroup: Dylan to take the lead.

GOAL 5: Conduct Evaluation and Provide Best Practice Repository

Task 1: Develop list of outcomes and outcome measures.

Due April 3.

Deliverable: A draft of comprehensive list of outcomes and measures for the project

Workgroup: CNLN management and staff, all sites, and EDC Evaluation Team.

5. CONCLUSION

The CNLN has turned the corner toward success. After mismanagement, confusion, and breakdowns in communication, the project has put the management in place and built the relationships in the communities to finally carry out the project vision. Under the leadership of Mr. James Deanes, Director of the Office of School and Community Relations, CPS, and Ila Weinberg, CNLN Director, the project has the administration, technology infrastructure, partnerships, and strategic plans in place for the project to take off, run smoothly, and achieve success.

Exhibit B: Attendance List

Name	Organization
Sister Helen Struden	Holy Angels
Marcy Franklin	Holy Angels
Vincent E. Wilkins	NTRC
E.A. Millendin	HPVEC
Calvin Mims	Wells H.S.
Dylan Russell	Positive Change
Emily McLeod	EDC
Steven Plumer	Time Dollar
Ricardo Estrada	Eric Neighborhood
Tony Streit	Street-Level
Mercedes Soto	Emerson House
Calvin Pearce	Time Dollar
Jawaune Pearce	Time Dollar
Tim Bopp	Holy Trinity
Trushar Desai	Charks Hayes
Ila Weinberg	CPS
Salomon Peres	Association House
Pierre Clark	
Stephen Frazier	CPS/S&CR
Zenubia Johnson-Bloer	CHFIL
Karen Bozeman-Cross	CNLN
Kathleen Harris	CVL
Curtis Pearce	Time Dollar
Richard Grory	King H.S.
Hugh Jeffers	Wright Coll. H.P.
Reketh Webb	Chicago Urban League
Adrienne Pace	King H.S.
John Wong	EDC

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In our role as evaluators, we deeply appreciate the cooperation and assistance we have received from the Chicago Neighborhood Learning Network (CNLN). Respondents to our interviews and participants in our meetings were open and thoughtful about the many complex issues involved in the CNLN project, and provided rich information for our analyses, conclusions, and recommendations. They deserve our thanks.

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Exhibit A: Site Scope of Services

Exhibit B: Attendance List