



Bridging the Digital Divide

Crossing Over to a Technology Future Together

Digital Divide Committee Report

May 17, 2005



Background

- During Feasibility Study Report Hearings, Council members and Administration encouraged LUS to provide a more formal plan to address the Digital Divide
- LUS made a broad appeal for community volunteers to help with this effort



Committee

- Chairman – Walter Guillory

- Members

Joe Bourg

Doug Menefee

Ed Bowie

Joy Miguez

Steve Creeden

Abigail Ransonet

Kevin Domingue

Taylor Rock

Jennifer Hamilton

John St. Julien

Marcel Lalonde

Layne St. Julien

Glenn Lambert

Melanie Lewis



Process

- Digital Divide Committee has met numerous times, in whole or in part
- Sub-committees were established to make a more in-depth study of the various issues
- A report has been prepared for council and public review
- At least 500 volunteer hours have been spent on this effort



Report Overview

Walter Guillory

- “The Committee is motivated in its efforts by the vision of our community as one which created a culture in which everyone is both enabled and motivated to seize the full power of modern information systems networks.”
- “A fiber-optic network has the potential to transform the lives of citizens in ways similar to the deployment of electricity, radio and television.”
- “Lowering all the barriers to and engaging in vigorous and innovative educational efforts will help us realize our community’s full potential.”



Digital Divide Committee Studied

- **Structural barriers** – Factors which prevent people who are eager to advance technologically from doing so
- **Motivational and historical barriers** – Factors which cause people to ask “Why do we need the Internet?”
- **Barriers to full participation** – Factors which limit eager participants from moving deeper into the world of the Internet
- **Assessing successes and shortfalls** – Tracking changes in public participation



Structural Barriers

Glenn Lambert

Definition

Factors that prevent people currently eager to advance from technologically being able to do so

Factors Include

- Availability of Internet service
- Affordability of Internet service
- Accessibility of computers
- The most basic knowledge of computers and the Internet



Structural Barriers

Recommendations

- Internet service must be made available to ALL segments of the community
 - Initial fiber build-out needs to include areas that are traditionally under-served
- Prices for broadband must be affordable
- Design LUS Communications System to include enhanced features that are easy to use



Structural Barriers

Recommendations, continued

- Make donated or low-cost computers available to those who qualify
 - Donation and refurbishments of computers by multiple entities
 - Develop programs with local PC retailers to offer discounted purchase plans for new, entry-level PC's
- Develop funding resources to support such initiatives



Motivational Barriers

Kevin Domingue

Definition

Factors which cause people to ask “Why do we need the Internet?”

Recommendations

- Help under-served citizens become more aware of the benefits of broadband access
 - Tailor awareness campaign to reach under-served citizens
 - Align efforts with existing community networks
 - Continue to inquire into the community needs and determine how this advanced technology can meet those needs



Motivational Barriers

Recommendations, continued

- Develop a strong, community oriented Internet Service Provider (ISP)
 - Making it easy and pertinent to all users of the system
 - Allowing users to easily customize it to their needs
 - ISP could be provided through a public/private partnership
- Examples of envisioned ISP content
 - Local employment opportunities
 - Childcare services
 - Housing availability
 - Education opportunities
 - Cultural and arts events
 - Local organization calendars



Motivational Barriers

Recommendations, continued

- Develop community training facilities
 - Establishing in convenient locations throughout the community
 - Used donated and refurbished PC's used for training
 - Graduates EARN the PC – to take home!
 - Introduce activities of immediate and obvious use for early lessons to motivate participants



Barriers to Full Participation

John St. Julien

Definition

Factors which limit eager participants from moving deeper into the world of the Internet

Recommendations

- Incorporate technological advances that enhance and equalize bandwidth between in-city subscribers to encourage local commercial growth and sustain our local cultural uniqueness
 - Enhanced in-city bandwidth would make local products, such as videos of cultural activities, available for viewing on local channels, as on-demand video, or as streaming video
 - Support programs at school and in the community to develop skills to produce rich, high level local products that would reflect our local cultures



Barriers to Full Participation

Recommendations, continued

- Donated or low cost computers with an easy-to-use interface already installed, making the computer “friendlier” to wary new participants
- Make computer education free and easily accessible to all residents using both one-on-one and group training
 - Louisiana Technical College
 - Goodwill Training Centers
 - Housing Authority and Community Centers
 - Local Access Television Channels



Barriers to Full Participation

Recommendations, continued

- Provide web-based programs
 - Low (or no) cost, up-to-date and easy to use software for common applications (word processors, spreadsheets, Web page design for small businesses, etc.)
- Develop easy-to-use templates for résumés
- Include programs for different interests, such as genealogy
- Develop series of templates to help micro-businesses to develop
 - Allowing local people to market services and products



Barriers to Full Participation

Recommendations, continued

- Provide CD-based free software for off-line use and to bridge users to commercial software
 - Open source office suites, such as Linux Open Office



Assessing Successes and Shortfalls

Jennifer Hamilton

Definition

- Tracking changes in public participation

Recommendations

- Develop and periodically run citizen survey
- Assemble “Assess and Advise” panels
 - To provide on-going feedback and to help track progress
- Gather publicly available objective data on a timely basis
 - On available telecommunications prices and services
- Perform periodic community assessments
 - Use widely adopted instruments such as the Telecommunications Readiness Inventory or LSPP Readiness Guide



Closing Comments

Walter Guillory