



Connections for All

Best Practices

CTC Best Practices for Increasing Accessibility



About C4All

The Connections for All (C4All) program enhanced the capacity of community technology centers (CTCs) to serve people with a broad range of abilities by offering opportunities for training, for funding, and to access other tools and resources. Funded by a grant from the AT&T Foundation, the program was a collaboration between CTCNet and the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA). In April 2007, CTCNet awarded \$20,000 Accessibility Grants, which included thirty hours of technical assistance, to fourteen CTCs across the country. The grants were used to expand the capacity of CTCs to serve people with physical and learning disabilities, enabling them to have greater access to educational, vocational and social opportunities. In addition, they provided targeted professional development to CTC staff and provided assistive technology resources and guidance for CTCs in order to create more inclusive environments for all people.

Information collected from C4All Accessibility Grantee reports, the program evaluation, and case studies point to several best practices for increasing the accessibility of CTCs. This document distills these learnings into eleven best practices across the categories of assistive technology, community outreach, facilities improvements, staff and volunteer recruitment and development, and program access and enhancement. By documenting and disseminating these best practices, CTCNet hopes to present practical information to help increase the overall capacity and quality of all CTCs.

Overall Best Practice: Conduct a Self-Assessment of Your CTC

CTCNet collaborated with ATA to develop the C4All Self-Assessment Tool, designed to help CTCs take stock of their organizational strengths and weaknesses in serving people with disabilities and chart a practical pathway towards addressing the barriers that keep CTCs from including people with disabilities in their programs. CTCs reported that the Tool was an excellent way to assess their current level of accessibility and to plan for the future. The process of self-assessment highlighted areas where improvement was needed that may have been overlooked otherwise. CTCs reported that the Tool also served as a valuable guide, helping to gauge progress, monitor activities and set goals. Periodically revisiting the Self-Assessment Tool further assisted CTCs in moving along the continuum of accessibility. With a new self-awareness raised by the Self-Assessment Tool, increasing accessibility was incorporated into organizational and program planning and budgeting.



The Self Assessment Tool was extremely helpful in that it gave us a solid foundation to understanding what accessible features we already had and helped identify what was needed.

– Program Manager, Computer Clubhouse at the Museum of Science

Assistive Technology

Best Practice #1: Activate, Invest in and Advertise Your Assistive Technology

CTCs made sure to activate built-in accessibility tools available in their Windows or Mac operating systems. They also assessed the needs of their clients and invested in new assistive and adaptive technologies, such as screen magnifiers, text to speech software, trackball mice, large print keyboards, speech recognition software and touch screens, to increase computer usability by people with a range of abilities. For example, Self-Help for the Elderly serves San Francisco's Chinatown, so it purchased Windows Light, a Cantonese screen reader to assist its clients.

I love this equipment – it helps out a lot. The keys are easier to see and to push down.

– Client at Emmaus Services for the Aging

CTCs clearly advertised the types of accessible technology they had available and did so without singling people out for their disabilities. Neighborhood Technology Resource Center in Chicago added to the desktop of every computer a slide presentation to provide an overview of the computer lab, including the assistive technology available. An approach like this allows clients to make their own decisions regarding which technology to use. Other CTCs placed signs around the labs advertising the available software and hardware to center users. Additionally, CTCs reached out to their communities through technology fairs, demonstrations, open houses, presentations to partners, press releases and newsletters. This outreach generated interest and enthusiasm and identified the CTCs as “go to” places for accessible technology and programming for people with a wide range of abilities.



Our facility is now able to assist in relieving some of the barriers to technology by offering accessible computers...Our facility is also now better able to include people with disabilities in our programs that help youth in the community climb out of poverty. The organizations in our community are now able to refer their clients to our facility to use accessible computers to access the Internet and expand their social, vocational and educational horizons.

– Executive Director, Young Entrepreneurs Society

Community Outreach

Best Practice #2: Make Sure Clients Know What You Offer

CTCs included accessibility statements in all outreach and training materials. Accessibility statements reflect an organization's status of and commitment to being inclusive.



The Neighborhood Technology Resource Center (NTRC) is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and to providing quality services and resources to all of our customers. NTRC does not advocate, support, or practice unlawful discrimination based on race, religion, age, national origin, language, sex, sexual preference, or disability in regards to services rendered and employment practices.

– Neighborhood Technology Resource Center
Accessibility Statement

CTCs included information about class schedules and hours of operation in monthly calendars, press releases, flyers and email broadcasts, which they then posted and distributed throughout their facilities and communities. CTCs revised their registration processes to make them more accessible, accepting registration by various means, including phone, online and in-person. The Computer Clubhouse at the Museum of Science in Boston utilized its community partners to spread the word to their constituents about the Clubhouse's new accessible programs. An article about the programs was included in the Museum newsletter and the Computer Clubhouse's Village intranet news.

Best Practice #3: Engage the Community

CTCs formed new partnerships and strengthened existing ones to leverage resources, share ideas and sustain the impact of their projects. Partners included local organizations that serve people with disabilities, housing authorities, local schools, libraries and other CTCs. As part of these partnerships, CTCs gave presentations on their programming and demonstrated accessible technologies and how they were relevant to the partners' clients.


CTCs also formed advisory groups composed of staff, volunteers and other members of the community. These groups offered insights into the needs of the community and helped determine what assistive technology would best serve them, as well as contributed to programming and outreach efforts. At Young Entrepreneurs Society (YES) in Orange, Massachusetts, the TechACCESS committee decided to hold on-going monthly meetings to assist YES and other organizations with programming for people with disabilities.

[T]heir participation will help spread what we started here to other organizations, municipalities and businesses, which is vital to creating a more universally accessible region for people with disabilities.

– Executive Director, Young Entrepreneurs Society

Best Practice #4: Make Your Website Accessible

CTCs revised their website to meet basic accessibility guidelines and to include their accessibility statements. Website accessibility provides choices for the user that will enable successful interaction regardless of vision, hearing, learning or other disabilities. All staff at Little Tokyo Service Center's DISKovery center in Los Angeles participated in the development, review, and feedback on how its website could more accessible. Staff at



Centro Latino for Literacy in Los Angeles received training on web accessibility standards and converted the organization's website into accessible HTML, meeting Section 508 standards (federal agency standards for accessibility). Self-Help for the Elderly in San Francisco utilized free online tools to test the accessibility of its website and then made appropriate updates.

Facilities Improvements

Best Practice #5: Increase Your Visibility

Through the installation of new signage that is appropriately sized, high contrast or graphically representative, CTCs facilitated use of their labs and programs for people with poor vision, possessing limited English skills and who were unaware of their services. For example, Self-Help for the Elderly in San Francisco installed a series of large signs listing the agency's name and services. Centro Latino for Literacy in Los Angeles installed new signs and symbols to facilitate use of its services. It hung individual symbols - a pencil, a computer and a book - perpendicular to the building so that they could be easily seen from the sidewalk. When a student who cannot read or write inquires about Centro Latino classes, staff can send them to the appropriate classroom by referring to the hanging symbols.

Best Practice #6: Increase Your Physical Accessibility

By installing adjustable height tables and re-arranging lab configurations, CTCs made their centers more accessible to people in wheelchairs or with limited mobility. They took simple steps such as removing barriers like bookcases and shelving from hallways and doorways and installed automatic door openers and motion-sensor lighting. Pillsbury United Communities in Minneapolis physically redesigned its lab to allow easier mobility around and easier paths to adjustable tables and larger monitors for increased visibility. CTCs also included accessibility considerations into ongoing or scheduled renovations. Cyber Café included widening of internal doorways, accessible plumbing fixtures, architectural changes for access and an automatic door opener as part of its lab renovations. Little Tokyo Service Center's DISKovery Center lowered its reception desk seven inches to make it more wheelchair accessible. As a result, members in wheelchairs are now able to see the receptionist, sign in and out and access informational brochures.



On the whole, the changes brought on by the project has overall increased awareness of our inclusionary practices, and has benefited other users in terms of computer desk space, new registration policies, and a more readable website.

– Program Coordinator, Little Tokyo Service Center

Staff and Volunteer Recruitment and Development

Best Practice #7: Invest in Staff and Volunteer Training

Many CTCs invested in accessibility training for staff and volunteers, also inviting the staff of their host and partner organizations to attend. CTCs provided training on the landscape of accessibility, assistive technology, and other tools and resources available to make life easier for people with disabilities. As a result of these trainings, CTC staff and



volunteers were better able to assist clients by providing options for alternative learning techniques and tools, increasing client satisfaction. As a result of the training they received, staff and volunteers at Emmaus Services for the Aging in Washington, DC, created focused lesson plans for seniors that took into consideration adaptations for disabilities such as low-mobility and impaired vision.

Best Practice #8: Document Practices and Disseminate Materials

CTCs developed staff training aids and reference materials such as videos and manuals for current and future staff and volunteers. Technology for All developed a C4All Assistive Technology Clearinghouse to introduce essential information, tools, and resources needed to assess, plan for, and support the inclusion of people with disabilities in community technology centers in Houston. East Tennessee Technology Access Center developed a manual that will be used in underserved communities in East Tennessee to increase their access to accessible technology.

Program Access and Enhancement

Best Practice #9: Adapt Training Materials for Accessibility

CTCs reviewed training materials and curricula to ensure they met demonstrated community needs. Materials were converted to accessible formats, including large print, alternate languages and audio. Young Entrepreneurs Society in Orange, Massachusetts, scanned program textbook chapters from its training materials for audio playback for students and converted materials so that they could be projected on a large screen to facilitate viewing. Academy for Career Development in Rochester, New York, converted all PowerPoint slides from its Basic Computer Skills Curriculum into Rich Text Format, so they could be accessed by text-to-speech software. These documents have also been converted into MP3 format so that they can be accessed through audio devices.

Although the hardware and software purchased through this grant will broaden the use of our center by many people from the local community, the conversion of our curriculum into accessible alternative formats will have the greatest impact on the use of our center by people with a broader range of abilities.

– Executive Director, Academy for Career Development

Best Practice #10: Improve Evaluation Techniques

CTCs improved their evaluation techniques so that they could better determine impact of services on clients and how services could be enhanced. Evaluation techniques included mid-term and end-of-class progress reports; surveys to assess the impact of new hardware and software; and feedback from staff on the impact of the assistive technology training on their ability to better serve their clients. Skillpoint Alliance in Austin conducted a community needs assessment to collect baseline data about its clients' experiences with and needs for assistive technology. This data helped inform planning and purchases of assistive technology. Technology for All in Houston plans to provide a pre- and post-assessment of users with disabilities in the assistive technology centers and to provide training as required by volunteers, staff and clients on the use of assistive technology tools at the CTCs.

Conclusion

Accessibility exists along a continuum and can happen at all levels and in all areas of your operations and programs. If your CTC is interested in increasing your accessibility, it is never too late to start. Just remember that accessibility is not an end-state – there is always room for improvement!

This ‘project’ was only started by the [C4All] grant and is intended to be an integrated component of our operation. Thus, much of our work towards goals is still in process and will be accomplished over time and continued as part of daily operation.

– Partner, Cyber Café at Malden Square

C4All Grantees developed and implemented a variety of practices – ranging from simple to more complex – to increase the accessibility of their organizations and programs. These practices in one form or another can be adapted by all CTCs to increase access to and training on technology for people of all abilities. For a more comprehensive overview of what your CTC can do to better serve people of all abilities, see the CTC Self-Assessment Tool in CTCNet’s CTC Resource Center.



About Community Technology Centers’ Network

The Community Technology Centers’ Network (CTCNet) is a national membership network of community technology centers (CTCs) and other nonprofit organizations, united in the commitment to provide technology access and education to underserved communities. CTCNet works through the CTC Network to provide resources and advocacy to improve the quality and sustainability of CTCs. www.ctcnet.org



About Alliance for Technology Access

The Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) is the national network of community-based Assistive Technology Resource Centers, technology developers, community-based organizations and individuals dedicated to providing information and support services to children and adults with disabilities, and increasing their use of standard, assistive, communication and information technologies.

2007 C4All Accessibility Grantees

Academy for Career Development
Centro Latino for Literacy
Computer Clubhouse at the Museum of Science
Council for World Class Communities
Cyber Café @ Malden Square
Emmaus Services for the Aging
East Tennessee Technology Access Center

Little Tokyo Service Center
Neighborhood Technology Resource Center
Pillsbury United Communities
Self-Help for the Elderly
Skillpoint Alliance
Technology for All
Young Entrepreneurs Society