



Connections for All

Best Practices

Technical Assistance Design & Delivery

About C4All

From July 2006 through November 2007, the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) partnered with the Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) on the Connections for All (C4All) program. Funded by a grant to CTCNet from the AT&T Foundation, C4All was designed to enhance the capacity of community technology centers (CTCs) to serve people with a broad range of abilities by offering training, funding, and other resource opportunities. ATA provided technical assistance (TA) to the subgrantees of the C4All program with the goal of enabling awardees to make maximum use of their grant awards to increase the accessibility of their centers to participants with disabilities.

The first round of TA was to the AccessNow awardees selected at random at each of the C4All Accessibility Institutes. This consisted of an average of three hours for each of the twenty-four awardees receiving this \$1000 award. The second round was to the Accessibility Grant awardees and consisted of an average of thirty hours to each of the fourteen centers receiving these \$20,000 awards.

This document presents the ten best practices in TA design and delivery gleaned from C4All Accessibility Institutes, AccessNow Awards and Accessibility Grants.

Accessibility Institutes

The twenty-four AccessNow awardees were picked at random at the C4All Accessibility Institutes held at ten cities throughout the United States. Participation in one of these institutes was a prerequisite for applying for one of the \$20,000 Accessibility Grants. The ATA and CTCNet jointly prepared the curriculum for these institutes, integrating accessibility and assistive technology throughout. Segments on understanding disability related issues and exploring examples of assistive technology were presented by ATA at each institute. Perhaps most significantly, ATA worked with CTCNet to integrate accessibility throughout the C4All Self Assessment Tool benchmarks. Completion of the Self-Assessment Tool was an integral part of the Accessibility Grant application process. As the project is evaluated, both the decision to mandate institute participation and the integration of accessibility throughout the benchmarks are emerging as best practices.

Best Practice #1: Inform and inspire through training

We are hearing from organizations who did not receive an Accessibility Grant that participation in the institute created awareness of disability issues and helped them to make a difference in the accessibility of their centers.



Best Practice #2: Provide tools to assess and address

Institute participants are also reporting that, while somewhat cumbersome, working through the Self-Assessment helped them to both understand where they were on the accessibility continuum and determine the most logical next steps that they might take.

Together these two practices helped the project have significant impact beyond just the fourteen centers receiving the larger Accessibility Grants.

AccessNow Awards

The AccessNow Award technical assistance was intended to be used to help centers determine the best use of their \$1000, and then to support the implementation of assistive technologies as needed after their purchase. In reality, the allotted seventy-two hours was used and exceeded in working with the twenty-four centers on their purchases. While this was of value in terms of maximizing the impact of the funds, it indicates that we underestimated the time this would consume. ATA worked with many centers to provide information on various technologies that might support the specific populations they were working with as well as suggesting multiple sources for each. Inasmuch as it helped centers better understand the range of technology available and to become more discerning consumers of that technology it was useful. A significant portion of the time was also spent following up with some of the centers and encouraging them to follow through with their awards in a timely manner.

Best Practice #3: Differentiate between TA and grant administration

The lesson is increased awareness that it is difficult for busy centers to keep relatively small awards at the top of their priority list. We are hearing that these awards did indeed have positive impact for most centers receiving them, but need in the future to provide more time for TA or perhaps differentiate between TA and grant administration, which can often involve significant logistical reminding.

Accessibility Grants

As previously noted, the Accessibility Grants comprised the bulk of the C4All technical assistance. Each of the fourteen centers receiving an Accessibility Grant also received an average of thirty hours of TA through the ATA, for a total of 420 hours. The model used was to communicate with each center on the desired TA and then pair them with an appropriate organization or individual as TA consultant. It was then the responsibility of the pair to delineate the scope of work, provide/receive the TA, and collaborate on a final report. Whenever available and appropriate, awardees were paired with an ATA Center in their geographic area. When not available, other qualified organizations and/or individuals were selected based on geography and expertise area.

Best Practice #4: Make the right match between TA provider and recipient

Based on review of TA final reports, a best practice was individualizing the TA by first making an appropriate match based on the nature of the TA needed and then providing the pair with the freedom to design the use of the thirty hours to their best benefit. With only a couple of exceptions, the reports indicate that excellent use was made of the time in this manner. For example, a center in Los Angeles had a priority to increase the accessibility of their web site and online presence. They worked virtually with an individual consultant in northern California who was able to help them specify their exact needs and then develop a product for them that was an excellent fit.



Best Practice #5: Build in time to match, plan, implement, and assess

The short timeline of the project was a limiting factor for many of the centers and TA providers. This was more true of those centers just getting started on accessibility as time was used becoming aware of options and making good purchasing decisions. In some cases such as one of the Massachusetts centers this meant less than optimal time left for setup and training after the purchased assistive technology was delivered. Most of the centers reporting wished that there had been more time available to implement their grant projects.

Best Practice #6: Conceptualize and actualize accessibility within a continuum

In spite of the short timeline all participating centers reported significant accomplishments in moving along the continuum toward more access for participants with disabilities. In fact many indicated that the framing of accessibility as a continuum rather than just a yes or no made working on it a lot less threatening. They referred back to the institutes in which it was acknowledged that there is no absolute accessibility or inaccessibility, but a continuum moving always toward inclusion of more and more members of the community. The importance of identifying where one is on the continuum was identified as critical as well as discovery of the next logical steps for a given organization with a given population in a given community. The benchmarks have already been referred to as a best practice, but this feedback indicates that using the continuum model may well be a best practice itself and a watershed for many centers that made them less afraid and much more willing to embark on projects such as C4All.

Best Practice #7: Design for sustainability

Another best practices emerged related to sustainability of the project. Some TA providers, such as one in rural Massachusetts, focused on training the members of a community-based accessibility advisory board that had agreed to serve the center beyond the timeline of the grant. Others, notably one in Knoxville, TN based the project on community organizing and empowerment. One TA consultant was an organizer who was an accepted member of the community worked with three housing units to identify key people, another provided visioning and training for them and then both worked to empower them to own and operate their own accessible community computer lab. These efforts will definitely outlast the C4All initiative.

Best Practice #8: See it to believe it

A practice that could also be considered one of the best was the use of visits to community ATA Centers to better help grantees envision center and technology and accessibility, as well as see assistive technology tools in successful use. In Minneapolis and San Francisco awardees reported that this had helped them greatly in the initial stages of implementing their own C4All projects.

Best Practice #9: Document and disseminate

The development of easy to use materials for the use of current and future staff and volunteers was another best practice. This strategy acknowledges that there is a lot of staff and volunteer turnover and that awareness of and comfort with assistive technology tools and strategies can then also be transitory. It also is based on the fact that new staff are likely tech savvy if not accessibility savvy. In several centers, training product was developed and left with the assistive technology as a staff review aid and a new staff training aid. In Chicago, training CDs were developed by the ATA consultant covering the

specific assistive technology as well as local and other resources. In San Francisco, the TA consultant developed manuals to support the assistive technology: “This descriptive and graphical manual contained information on: the appropriateness of the Assistive Technology; a brief description of each device/software program; built-in accessibility features of Microsoft Windows; quick tutorial of the software programs; using Google to translate web sites into various languages; technical support and manufacturer contact information. Although the manual took a significant amount of time to develop, it provided in depth information about the Assistive Technology and its importance.” Both of these strategies demonstrate best practices that are replicable and will sustain the impact of the project after its conclusion.

Best Practice #10: Build a relationship that will last

Finally, the pairing of community technology centers with local ATA Centers and consultants looks like it will turn out to be a best practice as many of the reports indicated an intent on both parts to continue the relationships developed during the C4All project.

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.

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.

