well written! Plugged In

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 95039

The creek which divides East Palo Alto and Palo Alto, California, marks the most dramatic gap between information "haves" and "have nots" in the nation. On one side of the creek is Silicon Valley, teaming with companies who are in the vanguard of shaping our nation's information infrastructure. Literally a block away is East Palo Alto, a city with no banks, no supermarkets and 23,500 low-income residents poised to be left behind in the information revolution unless swift and effective action is taken.

The project partners will take a comprehensive and individualized approach to introducing electronic communications in East Palo Alto, designing programs that address the specific needs of different segments of the community. Rather than offering one communications solution, the project partners will design a variety of programs to meet the needs of different parts of our population, bringing together powerful resources and partnerships in a community that is woefully ill prepared to meet the challenges of the information age.

B. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This project addresses two distinct sets of problems:

- The equity issue of assuring that our community does not get left out of the information revolution;
- A series of practical problems that electronic communications can effectively address.

1. The need to connect our community to the information infrastructure

Though conditions have improved since 1992, when East Palo Alto had the nation's highest per capita murder rate, East Palo Alto still has the county's lowest household income and presently only 900 jobs are available in the City[1]. Because the level of education is much lower than in neighboring cities, residents commute to low-paying jobs where they rarely use computers, much less electronic networks. Most parents struggle to make ends meet and can afford neither a home computer nor training programs for themselves or their children.

By contrast, Palo Alto which is 85% Caucasian and has a mean family income of $70,000, is buzzing with the excitement of the transformation into an information age:
- CommerceNet is developing a national model for commerce;
- the City of Palo Alto has developed a much-publicized presence on the Internet;
- a Palo Alto Community Network is in the making;
- the Smart Valley program is working with other groups on Smart Schools, to get all of the schools in Silicon Valley connected to the Internet, and Smart Libraries, to provide public access to the Internet;
- many of Silicon Valley's leading companies have their offices in Palo Alto;
- private organizations, including Score and FutureKids, provide for-fee computer learning activities for children after school.

The project partners are ready to take on the challenge of preparing East Palo Alto's citizens for the dramatic technological changes already occuring in their own backyard. We have a unique

[1] According to the Regional Data Center Census Data, only 22% of the population in East Palo Alto has a High School diploma, 40% of the households speak a language other than English at home, and 80% of the families receive public asistance. The population is approximately 42% African American, 34% Hispanic, with the balance being Pacific Islander, Asian and Caucasian.

opportunity to overcome traditional barriers and create much needed economic opportunities for our community.

2. The need to use information technologies to solve specific needs of different segments of our population

This project proposes to introduce electronic networks to the following poppulations in ways that address the specific issues and challenges of their academic, professional and personal lives:

- **Children** in our community need special programs to help level the playing field with children in neighboring affluent communities. Access to the Internet for information searches relevent to school assignments and email relationships with children and adults in different parts of the country will give our children a clearer notion of what they can hope for and what is necessary achieve those hopes. By using these technologies as part of their daily routines, our children will be prepared to successfully compete in tomorrow's job market;
- **Teens** in our community suffer from a lack of challenging yet engaging after-school activities. They need projects that give them opportunities to develop job skills and generate revenues, to develop leadership and self-esteem and to explore the life-choices they are facing. All of these opportunities are available in an electronic teen discussion forum in which our teens will take the lead;
- **Commmunity Adults** facing a highly competitive and technically sophisticated marketplace in which Internet literacy is increasingly required, need access and low-cost training in a supportive environment designed to address problems of fear and educational disadvantage.
- **Adults in recovery** from substance abuse need to share their successes with adults elsewhere in a way that broadens their support network and their sense of what is possible. They need innovative ways of ending the isolation that has plagued their lives along with challenging new life and learning experiences tailor-made to their needs;
- **Community leaders** are currently cut off from the many electronic discussion forums and resources available on electronic networks that would greatly enhance their organizational effectiveness. Even the simplest technologies will contribute to a much-needed imporvement in communication between local groups.

C. WHY THIS PROBLEM FITS THE TIIAP

In an information-based economy, familiarity with electronic networks and the ability to use electronic communications effectively, will be a major determinant of social mobility. Children who grow up using computers and electronic networks, whose parents use these tools as part of their personal and professional lives, will be well-prepared for tomorrow's workplace. Conversely, children who do not have access to these tools, who rarely use them to solve practical problems, and whose parents are not familiar with these tools, will be severely handicapped going into the workplace.

The extreme contrast between the access opportunities in East Palo Alto and those in neighboring communities, combined with the tremendous resources available in this area, provide a unique framework for an important access project that squarely fits the TIIAP goals and priorities.

This project fits the TIIAP goal of supporting technically sound programs that help reduce disparities of access and will serve as a model to other communities:

1. This project helps to reduce disparities of access

This project proposes to provide the citizens of East Palo Alto with access to electronic networks and, through these networks, to educational resources, government resources and social services. In doing so, the project reduces disparities of access, provides support to the efforts of existing agencies and helps prepare our community's citizens for careers in an information society.

2. This project is technically sound

This project has been carefully developed by technically skilled partners in order to provide a cost-effective and high-quality approach to introducing electronic communications in our community:

a. This project uses appropriate technology

This project will connect East Palo Alto to the ultimate "open network:" the Internet. It will do so in a non-proprietary fashion, using "off the shelf" hardware and software.

b. The project partners have the right set of skills

This project brings together non-profit and corporate partners with an broad and powerful range of expertise. Project partners have expertise in:

- Designing and implementing computer learning activities that respond to the needs of different segments of the East Palo Alto population (**Plugged In**);
- Offering social services to the East Palo Alto community (**Shule Mandela, Free At Last, Families In Transition**);
- Designing, implementing and maintaining LAN and WAN networks, including TCP/IP networks (**Bay Networks, Global Village**);
- Providing technical support in computer and communications applications to non-profit organizations in Northern California (**CompuMentor**);
- Designing and implementing high quality video projects for teenagers (**Community Television Network**);
- Getting community-based computer learning center from different parts of the country to work together on projects (**Playing To Win**).

c. This project is cost-effective

This project uses inexpensive but powerful technologies, most of which are donated by industry partners. Many of the support services (planning, design, accounting support) are donated by industry partners. The project relies on a small staff working with an extensive group of volunteers and part-time college students to secure the delivery of high quality yet cost-effective services.

3. This project can serve as a model to other communities

The project establishes a model for the meaningful implementation of communications technologies in underserved urban communities. There are many successful examples of how communications technologies can be introduced in middle-class communities - the community networking movement is a beautiful testimony to these efforts. Unfortunately, many of these models do not work well in a low-income setting, where people rarely have access to computers, and where there may not be a "hard core" pool of enthusiasts who drive many community networking efforts.

This project recognizes that as a low-income community we face serious obstacles in confronting the challenges of information technology. By using the information infrastructure to address the concrete issues and problems that different segments of the population struggle with on a daily basis, we will develop a successful model for the introduction of communications technologies to low-income, urban settings.

D. IMPLEMENTATION

1. Overview of our approach

The project partners propose to take a 3-prong approach to connecting East Palo Alto to the information infrastructure:

- **Access**: we will provide public access to the Internet in different parts of the community;
- **Training**: we will provide individual and group training to different segments of the population;
- **Support**: we will provide technical support to different agencies in our community and, more importantly, work with them to design programs that use communications technologies to solve specific needs which they and their clients face.

Rather than trying to design one solution to meet the needs of the entire community, we will provide access to open networks to work with different population segments to design solutions to real problems.

The different population groups will be able to communicate with each other through "lowest common denominator"-technologies: Internet electronic mail and telefax. Although an electronic bulletin board will be set up and will be accessible to the entire community, this information can also be obtained through electronic mail. Thus, a calendar of City Hall meetings and other community events will be available on a World Wide Web home page, but will also be sent directly by electronic mail and fax to individual subscribers.

We believe that this approach will succeed because it takes into consideration important characteristics of our community:

- There are few technology enthusiasts in our community who use this technology for its own sake. People will use this technology only if it solves important problems in a straightforward manner;
- Lowest common denominator technologies are key to the success of this project. Not all agencies will have access to the Internet, but almost all agencies have access to a fax machine. In many cases, electronic mail will be the "winner" application that gets people to use electronic networks;
- Access to electronic networks needs to be available in different parts of the community. Individuals need to have easy access to these technologies if they are to use them frequently.

2. Plan of work

A timeline for the project is provided in the Appendices.

a. Access

We will provide access to electronic networks in the following ways:

(i) A drop-in facility with extended open hours

Plugged In maintains a public access computer center in the heart of East Palo Alto. As part of this project, we will install additional workstations and provide Internet access to the entire community 7 days a week, for a total of 70 hours per week. Children, teenagers and adults will be able to have their own electronic mailbox and to use electronic networks with minimal restrictions. Because East Palo Alto is geographically small (2.5 square miles), this facility is accessible to the entire community.

(ii) A number of satellite facilities with more limited access

This project will set up and support public access terminals in at least 5 different locations in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park, including the public library, a private school, and a drop-in drug recovery center. In each of these locations, community members will be able to use the terminals. Also, the equipment will be set up so that individuals can log in to their mailboxes from any of these locations. This way, individuals can walk one block to the public library to check their mailbox and, after regular library hours, continue their work at Plugged In.

b. Training

As part of this project, we will provide training workshops on using electronic networks to children, teenagers and adults. In addition, we will provide advanced training to staff of agencies where we will be providing access to the Internet and we will train teenagers to be peer-mentors for children.

Training workshops will be offered on a weekly basis at no cost or for a nominal fee. In addition, training in the use of electronic networks will be incorporated into existing computer classes.

c. Support

Project partners will install and configure all the equipment. CompuMentor of San Francisco will assign mentors to each agency which will be provided with access to the Internet. These mentors will provide additional training and support to the staff of these agencies. Even more importantly, a

project staff person will work with individual agencies on designing programs which use new technologies to provide solutions to real problems.

Examples of the types of support which we will provide include:

(i) Getting an after-school program connected
Families In Transitions provides after-school services to elementary-school children. Children will be able to do research for their homework on the Internet and to check their electronic mailboxes.

(ii) A teen discussion forum
Teens from East Palo Alto will partner with teens from Chicago to take the lead in a national online teen discussion forum that will be created as part of this project. Participating teens will moderate forums on the Internet, which will be run as a business, and create part-time employment for participants.

(iii) Connecting a drug-rehabilitation program
Students from Free At Last, a community-based drug rehabilitation program, will receive basic training in how to use electronic networks. Students will use videoconferencing technology to meet electronic pen-pals and will use electronic mail to exchanges experiences with them. In addition, the students will create a bi-monthly newsletter, which will be available on the World Wide Web. Readers will be able to send electronic mail directly to the authors of the articles.

(iv) Connecting City Hall
We will provide access to the Internet to the City Manager's assistant, and set up an electronic mail and fax mailing list which will allow this person to automatically send invitations to city planning meetings to anyone who is interested.

(v) Connecting community leaders
Project staff will help community leaders get connected to discussion forums and other resources that will be useful to them, including the National Youth Center Network.

3. Monitoring the success of the project

please refer to section G: Evaluation, Sustainability and Dissemination, part 1: Evaluation.

E. QUALIFICATIONS & PARTNERS

This project brings together a diverse group of partners, each of whom have impressive backgrounds and have expertise in numerous areas and working with diverse segments of our population. This partnership is uniquely qualified to design, monitor and implement this project.

1. Qualifications of lead agency

Plugged In is a community-based computer learning center. Over the past three years, the organization has developed an international organization as a model for community-based computer learning programs. The organization has received several prestigious awards and has been featured on NPR, CNN, BBC World Television and national Japanese television. Plugged In has helped organizations from Compton, CA, to New Haven, Connecticut set up their own community computer centers. In addition, the organization is a partner in the National Youth Center Network, which received TIIAP support in 1994.

As demonstrated by the list of project partners, Plugged In has been extraordinarily successful in bringing together community-based agencies and Silicon Valley corporations, and, more generally, in helping to bridge the gap between the computer industry and our community's needs. Community members feel comfortable coming to Plugged In, where they can connect to the Internet, record music and work on their resume in a warm and caring environment. Plugged In's staff and

board of directors reflects the diversity of the East Palo Alto community and has proven expertise at translating technical innovations into applications that meet our community's needs.

2. Partners

a. Community partners

Community partners will be among the primary beneficiaries of this project, but they will also make important contributions to this project. Plugged In currently works in partnership with 8 community-based agencies, including the ones listed below. Participating agencies will play a key role in the design and implementation: they will help identify needs, and ways in which communications technologies can address these needs. Partner agencies will also be required to provide regular feedback, maintain usage logs and generally help assess the success of the project. In addition, these agencies will serve as satellite facilities where community members will have access to electronic networks.

- Free At Last is a community-based drug and alcohol recovery program. The Free At Last program is fast becoming a national model for recovery within a community. The organization has received numerous awards and is operating under contracts with the County Government;
- Shule Mandela is an independent, Afro-centric school in East Palo Alto. At Shule Mandela, elementary-school children from at-risk environments are provided with an environment that stresses pride, self-reliance and community engagement;
- Families In Transition provides comprehensive social services to first-generation immigrants and their families. At Families In Transition, children receive after school support, teen parents get GED training and adults come together for parent support meetings;
- the City of East Palo Alto has made major strides over the last two years, when East Palo Alto became nationally known as the murder capital of the United States. In partnership with neighboring cities, the city is implementing economic redevelopment plans, has increased safety for our citizens and is supporting a variety of programs that are strenghtening our community.

b. Other non-profit partners

- CompuMentor's mission is to assist non-profit agencies in Northern California in their plans to incorporate computers and communications technologies into their organizations and programs. Over the past 10 years, the organization has served over 300 non-profit agencies in Northern California, including a number of agencies in East Palo Alto;
- Community Television Network, based in Chicago, has been a leader in teen-produced video for over two decades. CTVN's mission is to provide urban teenagers with access to video production tool, with the goal of engaging participants in critical discussion about important issues that they face;
- the National Youth Center Network is designing a model to help leaders, staff and clients of community youth centers improve the lives and opportunities of children through the power of information technology;
- the Playing To Win network is a fast-growing network of over 30 community-based computer learning centers that provide access to computer technologies to underserved populations, and particularly inner-city children and teens. Playing To Win is 10 years old and is a leader in this area.

c. Corporate partners

- Bay Networks markets and manufactures a comprehensive line of networking products and services including high-speed routers, wide area network access devices, local area network switches, intelligent hubs, sophisticated management software, as well as network design and configuration services. Bay Networks will be donating networking and connectivity equipment and networking consulting services to this project.
- Global Village 's solutions for fax, on-line service, remote network access and Internet access make it easy for computer users to communicate information wherever and whenever they need it. Global Village will donate modems and other connectivity equipment to the project partners.

- InterNex Tiara features Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) for dial-up access at 56k to 128Kbps and Frame Relay for full-time 56Kbps to T1 connections. Internex will be providing access to the Internet and technical support to the project partners.

F. WHO WILL BENEFIT

Two distinct segments of our population will be affected by this project: individual community members, and agencies serving our community. Both types of constituencies have been closely involved in the design of this project, and will be involved in its implementation and assessment.

1. Community members

Community members will be the primary beneficiaries of this project. Community members have been closely involved in the design of the project:
- Plugged In has hosted a community open house to provide information about the planned project and generate feedback from community members. Over 300 community members attended this event;
- over the last 6 months, staff and board members at Plugged In have consulted with individual community members about how communications technologies can help them solve real problems;
- in the process of developing this project, a small number of community members has been interviewed in a more formal way to generate feedback about this project.

Community members will also be involved in the Project Advisory Council, which will help design the implementation plan of this project and which will monitor such implementation.

Community members will benefit from this project in the following ways:
- They will have access to communications technologies at Plugged In and at satellite facilities during extended hours. At each facility, they will be able to access electronic networks, including setting up their own mailboxes. Privacy will be ensured through personal passwords;
- Community members will be able to sign up for training workshops, for free or for a nominal fee;
- Individuals will be able to receive advice and support from project staff on setting up a home computer. Teenage staff will be available to provide off-site technical support at low-cost.

2. Agencies

Plugged In currently provides services in partnership with 8 local community-based agencies and 4 local schools. All of the agencies will be provided with the opportunity to participate in this project. Participating agencies will make key contributions to this project (cf. above), and will also benefit in important ways from this project:
- Participating agencies will be provided access to the Internet for free or for a nominal fee. If necessary, we will help partner agencies secure additional computer equipment;
- Participating agencies will receive training in how to use electronic networks and will be assigned mentors to provide them with ongoing technical support;
- Project staff will work with participating agencies to design programs that use electronic networks to solve problems these agencies encounter daily.

Each participating agency will have its own network accounts, which will be secured with passwords and, where necessary, with encryption and other privacy-enhancing technologies.

G. EVALUATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND DISSEMINATION

1. Evaluation

We will monitor two distinct components of this project for their success:
(1) The success of the different educational programs developed as part of this project in achieving their educational goals. Dr. Lucretia Peebles, one of Plugged In's board members has worked as a high-school principal for 15 years, and currently teaches methodology at the teacher's college at San Jose State University. Dr. Peebles will assist the project partners in identifying the goals and meaures of success for each programs and establishing a monitoring system for these projects.

(2) Our success in achieving the more quantitative objectives of providing access to the community in accordance with the timeline enclosed in the appendices. A very specific timeline, with measurable benchmarks of success will be developed in partnership with the Project Advisory Council. Project staff will report to the Project Advisory Council on the progress of the project. This Project Advisory Council will consist of community leaders and project partners. The success of the project will be monitored on an ongoing basis through regularly maintained usage logs and monthly feedback reports which each partner agency will be required to complete. These feedback reports will specifically list project goals and their achievement.

2. Sustainability

The project has been designed to be sustainable beyond the grant period:

- The involvement of numerous and diverse partners spreads the support for this project across a broad number of parties, which will make it easier to maintain support;
- There is little central overhead for this project: most of the costs associated with the project can be absorbed by participating agencies at the end of the grant period. This project does not establish a separate network with its own maintenance expenses, but uses the Internet instead;
- Revenue-models will be built-in to this project wherever possible. For example, training workshops for adults may be provided for a small fee, which will cover the marginal costs associated with these workshops. Likewise, Plugged In will provide access to the Internet to other agencies, but will try to recoup most of the marginal expenses associated with these services through modest usage fees;
- Off-site training and support will be provided for a fee covering at least marginal expenses associated with these services.

3. Dissemination

The results of this project will be disseminated in a number of ways:

- Dissemination on the Internet. Plugged In already makes organizational materials, curriculum materials and student projects available on the Internet[2]. An important part of this project will be to disseminate information about the successes and failures that are observed during implementation and evaluation. For example, usage logs and feedback reports may be published directly on the Internet;
- Off-site training and support. Plugged In has already provided off-site support to a community networking effort in Compton, CA. We will provide this type of support as part of this project, but will require beneficiary agencies to cover at least the marginal expenses associated with these services;
- Internships and on-site support. We have provided internships to staff of a community computer center in New Haven, Connecticut. We are working with another non-profit agency on develop a system where college students would come to Plugged In for one-month internships and then establish community-based computer centers in their home town. These and similar efforts provide tangible benefits to both Plugged In and the partner agency and involve no direct costs for Plugged In.

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[2] see http://www.pluggedin.org/