

TIIAP FY 1999
Project Narrative

Union County College

Grant # 34-60-99033
Education, Culture, and Lifelong Learning
Cranford, New Jersey

The Community Learning Network - An Education, Culture and Lifelong Learning Project
A Proposal to the TIIAP Program from Union County College - Elizabeth, New Jersey

① **Project Definition**

The Problem. Elizabeth, New Jersey, is a designated Federal Enterprise Community and a historically significant seaport settlement. It is home to a large number of persons for whom English is not the primary language of communication, and also to large numbers of native-born persons who are chronically unemployed or underemployed. Both populaces are economically disadvantaged and meet the Federal guidelines for being at or below the poverty level. Elizabeth is the fourth largest city in New Jersey, with a population of 110,002 persons according to 1990 U.S. Census figures. Of the total populace, nearly 15% are immigrants with limited English speaking ability; 28%, or 3,576, of the 12,772 foreign-born residents lack a high school diploma. There are 4,474 persons receiving public assistance in the City of Elizabeth. Those that are foreign-born are among the working poor. Those that are native-born are among the nonworking poor. These individuals are culturally and economically isolated from Elizabeth's mainstream population. They are educationally underserved, have numerous barriers preventing them from obtaining a job and if they are fortunate enough to be employed, from advancing beyond minimum wage. Neither group has been responsive to Union County College's (UCC's) recruitment efforts to enroll them in campus-based programs. Research conducted by UCC on both target groups shows that each group has an interest in pursuing further education, but because of transportation issues, cultural barriers, or general embarrassment over their degree of illiteracy, they have given up hope of improving their education and employment status. UCC's application to TIIAP is a hopeful step in trying to address educational insufficiency issues for low- to no-income but educable adults. Demographics for the City of Elizabeth paint a grim picture for any adult who cannot understand English or function at the very basic competency level for obtaining and advancing in a job.

Linguistic and cultural barriers to self-sufficiency for limited English speaking residents: Of the county's 90,735 foreign-born residents, 25% speak one of 64 native languages—but not English. The four largest ethnic subgroups outside of Hispanic are Portuguese, Polish, French, and Italian. A needs assessment of this target group conducted by UCC and the Elizabeth Public Library (EPL) shows that while English as a Second Language (ESL) residents want to improve their economic situation, they have little chance to advance beyond minimum wage, obtain a GED or meet the prerequisites for enrolling in a college-level training program without basic literacy skills. These individuals take their children to the public library on a regular basis and frequently ask library staff for help in all areas of basic literacy, including reading, writing and finding a job. While they have a high trust level for the library and its staff, they are not yet confident enough to visit the UCC campus, which can provide them the same sort of help.

Economic and geographic barriers to self-sufficiency for public housing residents: A survey taken by the Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth (HACE) shows that only 33% of public housing residents are currently in the workforce; 38.4% are unemployed but looking for work. Eighty-three percent of the residents being served by the HACE are African-American. Resident responses to the survey indicated that 52.6% completed 12 years of education; 21.9% finished 11 years; 16.1% finished 10 years; and 7.3% finished 9 years. Yet, at each education level, nearly half of the respondents identified their lack of education as the number one barrier to obtaining a job or advancing beyond minimum wage. Poverty conditions are so harsh that the largest HACE public housing complex (located in the neighborhood of Elizabethport, one of the oldest sections of the

City of Elizabeth) is in the center of a state-designated Urban Enterprise Zone. Because this target group is isolated by poverty and a limited education, HACE has requested and received a federal HOPE VI grant to replace the existing public housing units in Elizabethport with 540 new units (apartments, row houses, twin and single-family homes, and a 60-unit senior building). A new partnership between HACE and other local “One-Stop” service providers, including UCC, will develop a Community Enterprise Center to provide recreational, educational and job training.

The Solution. Union County College will partner with the library and housing authority in Elizabeth to connect unemployed and underemployed older youth and adults to the college’s lifelong learning literacy and occupational training programs. UCC will use network technology to create two community learning labs and one interactive television (ITV) classroom. The service numbers represent a 24-month timeframe.

Site/Potential number of service recipients	Network Technology	Mechanism for addressing unemployment and underemployment
HACE Elizabethport Community Enterprise Center/250 residents with economic, education and transportation barriers	New community learning lab, with video teleconferencing capabilities and multimedia workstations. (specs below)	Academic and career counseling support by UCC counselors Literacy training (reading, writing and math skills) and occupational training (home health, customer service and office skills) by UCC staff
UCC Elizabeth Campus/500 unemployed or underemployed members from both target groups with access to transportation	Existing ITV classroom New community learning lab (same as above)	Job placement assistance and referrals to and from “One-Stop” Centers managed by the local Workforce Investment Board
EPL/500 individuals with linguistic, cultural and economic barriers	New ITV classroom with full video teleconferencing equipment and multimedia workstations	ESL training by UCC staff Education and career information and referrals to community learning labs by UCC counselors

All three sites will be connected to UCC’s Elizabeth Campus file server or have their own server. This interconnection will facilitate a student’s movement from one training site to another. Students will be able to access their previous work and continue their educational plan on an anytime-anywhere, open-entry, open-exit learning basis.

Measurable Outcomes. UCC believes that the proposed technology network will allow 1,250 or more educationally and economically disadvantaged residents of Elizabeth to improve their employment situation and become economically self-sufficient. The improved level of literacy and job training skills gained by 90% or more of the participants at the community learning labs or through the ITV classrooms will enable participants to change their economic status. By participating in our project, 100% of these individuals will become familiar with UCC staff and the resources of the campus. It is our hope that this neighborhood-based learning approach will embed in their life goals the connection between education and gainful employment. The methods for

identifying and documenting these outcomes throughout the project are described in the Evaluation section.

② Evaluation

Evaluation Questions. The project will be assessed for program quality and effectiveness. Evaluation questions will include, but not be limited to: Were the educational outreach activities adequate for enrolling the anticipated number of participants at each site over the 24-month timeframe? Was a goals-based education plan completed by each participant with the assistance of a UCC counselor? Were there measurable gains in pre- and post-project competencies for each participant? What was the frequency of visits to a lab or ITV classroom? Did the computer-based time-on-task log indicate the attainment of an education plan benchmark? Did technology contribute to the participant's ability to understand their coursework and complete each module of assignments satisfactorily? Did the real-time analysis of progress meet the original education plan timeframe? Did remote electronic mentoring by UCC staff members contribute to the overall project retention rate for participants? What percentage of the unemployed participants exited to a UCC campus-based job skills program or gainful employment? What percentage of underemployed participants exited to a UCC campus-based job skills program, were promoted by their existing employer to a better paying job or found new employment at a higher wage? What were the reasons that participants did not complete their education plans? How can the project be redesigned to meet the needs of the participants who were not retained? What was the overall percentage of participants who attained economic self-sufficiency during or upon completion of their education plan? Are the existing community partners sufficient to meet the needs of the target population or are new community partners/learning sites needed? Was the information infrastructure sufficient to meet the demand of network users?

Evaluation Strategy. UCC will purchase an instructional management system linked to applied academic courseware. The system will enable UCC staff and the contracted evaluator to assess this open-entry, open-exit learning approach by providing continuous accountability on each participant's progress. The Instructional Systems Inc. (ISI) system is capable of keeping a detailed educational profile on each student and can generate diagnostic reports in a variety of measurable formats. Counselor and trainer observations and recommendations will be added to each participant's electronic profile. Assessment and curricular information on the ISI system is in **Appendix 1**. The evaluator, who is a distance education consultant, will also work with UCC project staff to assess the entire information infrastructure and its capabilities in delivering quality distance education to the target group. One hundred percent of the project's participants will be included in the evaluation.

Data Collection. The data collection plan will include pre- and post-literacy testing results, pre-training occupational interest testing results, the number of participants completing ESL and remedial coursework, the number of students passing their high school proficiency test, the number of students completing an occupational program and entering first-time employment, and the number of students completing applied workplace skills training and receiving job promotions. The ISI assessment system, combined with personal interviews, telephone interviews, employer surveys, and postage-paid mail questionnaires, will be used to determine the project's quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Project staff from the three sites will meet quarterly to discuss and plan their role in the data collection process and to coordinate their reports with the evaluator's visits.

Data Analysis. *Cognitive skills* - The evaluator will review the data to determine the effectiveness of the self-instructional courseware (with some direct instructor contact) within each target group (LEP and low/no job skills). The control group will be UCC students enrolled in traditional classroom remedial and occupational courses. The experimental learners will be those at the community learning labs and ITV classrooms. A standard level of significance will be established for each group. The groups will be compared by their levels of mastery learning (distance education versus standard instructional delivery). *Affective skills* - The evaluator will study the HACE participants and the EPL participants to determine the role that distance education played in their socialization and affective growth (this is especially important for those participants who entered the project with cultural barriers). *Other areas of data analysis* - The evaluator will analyze reasons for dropping out, accessibility issues, the overall quality of instructional materials, the effectiveness and efficiency of the project, and the impact of distance education on UCC's resource capacity. All data will be coded to insure participant confidentiality.

Evaluator. Arlene Krebs, a 15-year distance education consultant, will serve as the project's contracted evaluator. She is currently the director of the Center for Distance Education Learning in New York City and has over 25 years of experience in higher and secondary education. Ms. Krebs has conducted evaluations for the Satellite Education Resources Consortium and for the ITV Teleteaching Training project. Her qualifications are detailed in the personnel section of the budget narrative and in **Appendix 2**. Ms. Krebs will conduct the evaluation and prepare written formative and summative evaluation reports, as well as assist the college with the dissemination of the research. The evaluator will confer actively with the project staff, faculty and participants, and with the community partners. The project director and the training staff will be responsible for providing the evaluator with the electronic assessment data and with any data collected offline.

Timeframe and Budgeting of Resources and Staff for the Evaluation. Evaluation activities will begin upon notification of a TIIAP grant award. Measurements will be piloted and tested in the first quarter of year 1. Thereafter, the evaluation strategy, data collection and data analysis will be planned and refined on a monthly basis. UCC staff will allocate up to five hours weekly to this process. The budget line item for evaluation represents 10% of the project's direct cost over a 24-month timeframe.

③ **Significance**

Innovation and Potential as a Model for Other Communities. The Community Learning Network offers an innovative model for other Federal Enterprise Communities to follow. Its innovation lies within its organizational model, ease of replicability, and versatility of purpose. The UCC model includes an imaginative partnership between a large publicly funded college (over 27,000 students), an urban public housing authority, a public library (the gathering place for immigrant families), and the local Workforce Investment Board (created by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998) and its "One-Stop" service providers (UCC and 20 others in Union County). Together the partners have developed nontraditional distance education strategies for overcoming historical barriers to access, to learning literacy and occupational programs among the target populations. The Community Learning Network developed under the grant will be a complete package of technology-based instruction delivered to adult learners where they live and gather for other community resources. The contribution by HACE is being done with Federal housing funds. The contribution by the EPL is coming from their operating budget. UCC's contribution is coming from technology infrastructure funds and other College resources. The

Community Learning Network model can be emulated or adopted by other Federal Enterprise Communities around the country where Enterprise Zone funds are available to establish Enterprise Centers for “One-Stop” human and social services resources and employment and training resources. The Workforce Investment Act will fund employment and training activities through the year 2003. It was designed to aid communities in addressing the myriad needs of low-income unemployed and underemployed persons. The technology network proposed will enable UCC to provide participants at any of the three sites with preliminary assessment of their skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, and support service needs. They will receive a full array of employment-related services, financial aid, literacy, ESL and job skills training, career counseling, and job search and placement assistance. Other state and local agencies will provide UCC with up-to-date labor market information, which identifies job vacancies, skills necessary for in-demand jobs, and provides information about local, regional and national employment trends. The learning labs and ITV classrooms will become “family affairs,” promoting and supporting lifelong learning. By the time the Community Learning Network approach to educational outreach is evaluated, it will be a working model for other urban areas. It will be adopted most by other colleges seeking to implement welfare-to-work and dislocated worker programs where geographic, cultural and economic barriers to self-sufficiency exist.

④ **Project Feasibility**

Technical Approach. UCC is proposing to create three interconnected Community Learning Network facilities in Elizabeth, New Jersey. All sites will have a PC LAN and two will have ITV classrooms. The infrastructure equipment list is in **Appendix 3**. The Community Learning Network will use frame relay and IDLS connectivity. Other proposed infrastructure improvements include one ITV classroom; networked Windows NT servers; Cisco router components; multimedia projection units; and Dell PCs (16 at HACE and 24 at UCC). UCC’s existing network technologies include an ITV classroom at its Elizabeth campus. The library has six computers on a LAN with a small file server. Aspects of this project make it ideal for effective sharing of resources among New Jersey institutions of higher education, public housing authorities and public libraries. The IDLS communications mode is the current standard for video exchange in the state. Windows NT is the industry standard operating system. The Cisco line of communications equipment is dominant in the industry. These choices ensure the **interoperability** of the Network’s video and data communications. In the event of unforeseen needs that might require the use of equipment proposed in this plan for other functions, **technical alternatives** are possible. The ITV classrooms, Dell PCs, the Cisco router components, and the Windows NT server are general purpose in nature and can be used for a variety of different applications, both academic and administrative. In several ways, this grant application allows for **scalability** in anticipation of future growth. The selection of servers was based on the ability to add additional processing modules, auxiliary storage and main memory components. The Cisco router can be configured as a secure and efficient fire wall protective device, while accommodating multiple high-speed data connections. The proposed LANs will support the project’s PCs, yet have the service and infrastructure for growth to accommodate at least three times the number of systems implemented with TIIAP grant funds. Maintenance contracts will be obtained for all hardware and software components of this proposal. These contracts will ensure that as updates and modifications are developed by the vendors to fix a bug or to provide additional functionality, the investment in the proposed equipment will be protected. Project technical staff will be responsible for maintaining the system.

Applicant Qualifications. Personnel profiles for each known member of the project team and the job description for the yet-to-be hired **Project Director** are in **Appendix 2**. The 0.25 FTE **Project Administrator, John R. Farrell, Jr.**, Ed.D., CCP, has been Vice President of Administrative Services and Executive Assistant to the UCC President since 1991. Demonstrated in his accomplishments, and extremely relevant to this TIIAP grant application, are his two graduate degrees from Rutgers University in Adult and Continuing Education. Dr. Farrell's key accomplishments include coordinating the construction of the Elizabeth urban campus; implementing 24 computer labs College-wide; developing extensive computer literacy training for faculty and staff, including establishment of a Self-Directed Learning Center; establishing electronic strategic planning processes for College-wide information technology systems; and implementing voice and data communications networks. Dr. Farrell understands both programmatic and technical issues and is well placed in the organization to ensure the project's success. Other UCC team members include the 0.25 FTE **Trainer for Information Technology**, the 0.10 FTE **Information Technology Director** and the 0.25 FTE **Project Administrative Assistant**. In addition to the several team members listed in the appendices, UCC will recruit a full-time **Project Director**. Arlene Krebs, President of New Orbit Communications, will serve as the **Contracted Evaluator** for the project. Her extensive experience in educational telecommunications and the new media is highlighted in **Appendix 2**. This appendix also contains UCC's capacity, mission and goals.

Budget, Implementation Schedule and Timeline. Having submitted an unsuccessful TIIAP grant application in 1998, UCC has worked earnestly to develop a budget that reflects the College's serious commitment to implementing the Community Learning Network in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Once the network technology is up and running, sustaining and maintaining it will be of minimal cost and financially manageable by UCC. The salaries for the project director and part-time instructors are being requested from federal funds; all other personnel salaries are matching funds. Fringe benefits and staff travel costs are also matching funds; only travel for the evaluator is being requested from TIIAP. UCC is matching \$210,336 of the total \$371,050 equipment line item and an additional \$61,200 for the network installation and operating charges. The remaining line items reflect UCC's commitment to presenting a highly successful TIIAP grant application for the 1999 funding cycle. Considerable detail appears in the Budget Narrative. A detailed Implementation Schedule and Timeline for this 24-month project appears in **Appendix 4**.

Sustainability. The partners for the Community Learning Network will aggressively seek funding support both within their organizations and from outside sources to maintain and to expand this project. Specifically, UCC will seek funding from its traditional sources which are forwarded through the County Manager to County Freeholders, as well as funding from the county and state departments of human services and through the Workforce Investment Act, to continue the education and training activities proposed in this grant application.

⑤ **Community Involvement**

Partnerships. UCC chose its partners after conducting a regional needs assessment to identify underserved populations most in need of lifelong learning opportunities. The **EPL** is a vital entity in that it has a high patronage of LEP immigrants who are steadily seeking information literacy. The library has operated a literacy instruction program for over 11 years. The program recruits and trains volunteer tutors and matches them with adult learners with very low levels of skills in English literacy. The library has a proven record of successfully raising the levels of LEP adults. Until UCC approached the library last year about a community network to combine human and physical

resources, the vision for distance education seemed beyond EPL's reach. UCC noted the library's inner-city location as the reason for over 2,000 adult learners seeking basic literacy services since 1986. In its present capacity, the library cannot offer any education or training services beyond tutoring. The project, delivered via ITV, will bring a new dimension to the library's thousands of LEP patrons. The library is renovating space to accommodate the proposed ITV classroom. Additional in-kind commitment includes a part-time staff person to monitor the ITV classroom when in use, a technical support person, the IDLS line charges, and six existing PC workstations to support the project. **HACE** is providing space in its proposed Community Enterprise Center for a Community Learning Lab. It has developed a five-year public housing infrastructure replacement program (over 600 new units will replace existing dilapidated housing) that includes positive incentives for resident self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency will be accomplished through integrated job training and job finding programs that enable residents to develop their ability to enter the job market, increase their income levels and move out of public housing into housing of their choice within a traditional neighborhood environment. HACE has forged partnerships with national and local developers, local nonprofits, the State of New Jersey, City of Elizabeth, and local institutions, including UCC, for services leading to resident self-sufficiency. UCC will also seek grant funds from and partner with the local **Workforce Investment Board** to expand the project's scope of services and the number of participants served, upon completion of TIIAP funding. Letters from each partner specifying their commitment and contributions are attached in **Appendix 5**.

Involvement of the Community. UCC has sought community involvement in the design of its grant application in several important ways. UCC began by reviewing data about the communities drawn from census records and similar sources. The project administrator, Dr. Farrell, met with the EPL and HACE directors to plan and confirm their involvement in the project. Brainstorming and discussions of the needs of each target group have taken place among UCC personnel and representatives from community-based organizations providing services to welfare recipients, public housing residents and immigrants. To maintain continuing community involvement during the course of the project, UCC will appoint a Steering Committee whose members (faculty, students, adult learners, counselors and a representative from each community partner) will ensure that the project develops in ways that best meet the needs of stakeholders.

Support for End-users. A major strength of the Community Learning Network will be that it will focus entirely on the end-users—adult learners in Union County. The planned infrastructure will support a network that provides high-speed video and data transmission between sites. This connectivity will open UCC's bank of instructional offerings to hundreds of underserved adult learners with access barriers. The ITV classrooms will accommodate 12 to 15 students at a time. Each site will have a staff person from the partner agency or a UCC employee to provide technical assistance and facilitate each end-user's educational needs. Faculty and students will be trained in ITV multimedia instructional applications. Active recruitment of students for each ITV site will begin immediately upon notification of TIIAP funding. EPL will use its existing immigrant network to recruit students. HACE will use its resident council members to recruit tenants for participation in the project. Courses will begin as quickly as the technology infrastructure is in place, no later than January 2000.

Privacy. All UCC personnel are already well aware of issues of confidentiality relating to student records—an important consideration of the project evaluation—and will ensure that there is no unauthorized access to such data. A written policy will further protect students' privacy. The

software installed at the three sites will anonymously meter usage. Private user-selected passwords will be used for accessing education plans developed and stored electronically.

⑥ Reducing Disparities

Description and Documentation of Disparities. According to the 1990 Census, with 90,735 foreign-born residents, Union County has the second largest immigrant population in New Jersey. The immigrant workers earn \$15,000 per year; 11,000 workers have incomes below the poverty level. Of adults between the ages of 18 and 64, 26,418 do not speak English well; 23,025 speak no English. Over 75% of this group work in the service sector; 2,757 have less than a ninth grade education. Union County has more than 10,000 welfare recipients, most of whom reside in public housing. When New Jersey's welfare reform initiative, Work First New Jersey, comes to full term in four years, the state will require that 7,022 adults in Union County seek employment and become self-sufficient. Many of the state's welfare recipients are second and third generation American-born individuals who have no marketable work skills, no transportation, and no resources to support themselves when they no longer can draw public assistance stipends. Through their participation in the Community Learning Network, two very distinct subgroups will make measurable economic gains. The project's evaluation will track these gains for five years (two years of TIIAP and three years of post-grant funding).

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Access. The Community Learning Network is designed to provide access to underserved populations and will forge stronger links between two public agencies (EPL and HACE) and the UCC's Elizabeth Campus. UCC's counselors and academic staff will work aggressively with the project's participants to retain their interest in lifelong learning by offering prescriptive courses to meet their individual needs. The entire state of New Jersey, not just Union County, stands to benefit economically.

⑦ Documentation and Dissemination

Documentation Plan. Documentation of the evaluation findings will be available in print and electronic versions of academic journals and appropriate technology-based Web sites. It will be disseminated through partner meetings, the Union County Department of Human Services, the New Jersey State Commission on Higher Education, the NJIN and other relevant state, regional and national agencies to inform and to motivate others interested in replicating the network approach to teaching and learning. All aspects of this project will be included in the documentation: the technology plan, the budget, the implementation plan, key research findings from the formative evaluation study and the final summative report.

Information Dissemination Plan. The College will actively disseminate the Community Learning Network model to the postsecondary education network in New Jersey and nationally through meetings, conferences and seminars. The data collection will be ongoing throughout the timeframe of this grant. Formative evaluation reports will be disseminated to existing partners and to potential new partners within Union County. The final report will be used to attract funding to sustain and to expand the Community Learning Network by reaching out to new sites and by forming new partnerships with community-based organizations serving the needs of the most economically disadvantaged residents. These organizations will include other county public libraries, community centers (especially those located in low-income housing areas), K-12 schools and local small and mid-sized businesses employing LEP workers and those requiring GED education.