

**TIIAP FY 1999**  
**Project Narrative**

Cleveland Housing Network, Inc.

Grant # 39-60-99003  
Community Networking  
Cleveland, Ohio

## 1. PROJECT DEFINITION

**PROBLEM:** Cleveland has a nationally recognized productive base of 45 community development corporations that produce nearly 1,000 units of affordable housing each year. Beyond the bricks and mortar of real estate development, Cleveland's industry of community developers has a proven track record of working together in building multi-faceted solutions to the issues of persistent poverty in Cleveland's neighborhoods. By design, an increasing number of these community developers intersect with the work of the area's 20 social service providers (see App. 8) to offer a full array of programs and services designed to bring stability to lives of families living in poverty. These community based organizations (CBOs) are now organizing to harness information technology to provide equal access to communication across organizations, shared data resources, and the opportunity to collaborate on solutions to address the needs of our great American city.

**SOLUTION & OUTCOMES:** T2K addresses common nationwide problems of fair and equal access to affordable housing, the impact of welfare reform and the ability of community based organizations to better serve populations in need through these innovations: 1) the direct delivery of advanced technologies to populations in need, 2) the coordination of services amongst disparate CBOs who serve the same populations, 3) strengthening capacity through the use of innovative technology and unique broad based public and private partnerships. The Internet has matured sufficiently and now offers a nationally replicable, cost-effective approach to a singular platform that will link CBOs and their public and private partners to strengthen business development and to deliver intensified services to all constituents. T2K will provide:

### ***Tools For Community Development:***

- ◆ On-line affordable housing database with audio-visual slide presentations of Cleveland's affordable housing inventory developed by CBOs, the public housing authority and Section 8 approved private landlords. (see App.9)
- ◆ On-line MIS system to manage a revolving home repair loan fund to support investment in quality housing throughout the neighborhoods of Cleveland.
- ◆ Neighborhood Indicators program outcome measurement tool, database of commercial and industrial vacant lots and a discussion database to be utilized by CBOs in the creation of strategic plans. (see Apps. 10 and 11).

### ***Tools For Social Service Providers:***

- ◆ An on-line comprehensive case management database to better support national Welfare reform employment goals for families currently receiving public assistance.
- ◆ Countywide on-line access to available childcare resources to assist families in securing quality, reliable childcare to support employment by heads of households. (see App. 12).

### ***Tools For Collaborative Business Development:***

- ◆ On-line database to efficiently administer Cleveland's Individual Development Account program to assist families living in poverty acquire net worth through homeownership, education or small business enterprises. (see App. 13).
- ◆ On-line reporting and communication system linking CBOs receiving federal Community Development Block with the City of Cleveland to provide more effective administration of the program and quicker delivery of funding. An electronic download and reference of required city forms for a variety of community programs will also be available.
- ◆ Free web page design and assistance to establish CBO web presence. Static maps will consolidate neighborhood raw data at the touch of a button.(see App. 14)
- ◆ Citywide help desk and technical assistance, ongoing monthly training sessions for CBOs to effectively integrate the T2K project into the core operations of CBOs. Skill development for welfare to work recipients through 11 community kiosk manager positions.

## 2. EVALUATION

The key to a successful *evaluation strategy* for this project is to develop available and quantifiable outcome measures that will capture the basics of all T2K proposals. These outcome measures must be quantifiable and available over time. The simplest form of research design, the one-group pretest-posttest design, is unsuitable for evaluating T2K since it is impossible to determine if the outcome was caused by the program or by other factors. Another form of reflexive design, the simple time-series design, is more appropriate to measure T2K. (see Apps. 14 and 15).

Time series designs will be utilized to answer the following *evaluation questions* and determine *outcomes* via these *data collection* techniques:

- ◆ At the end of three years, more than 1,500 units of housing will be available through the Sales and Leasing Center. Staffed kiosks will be located at area CBOs to provide assistance to potential residents to the Sales and Leasing Center and all other T2K applications. T2K will determine if creating the database of available affordable housing inventory causes units to be filled more quickly and if potential residents can more easily locate housing. This data will be collected by an electronic survey administered by the Kiosk Managers and the Multimedia Specialist and the establishment of a vacancy benchmark by the IT Director.
- ◆ Currently, no reliable list of vacant commercial or industrial city of Cleveland lots exists. T2K will determine whether more vacant commercial/industrial land is developed, or used productively. Data will be collected via an electronic survey conducted by the WebMaster.
- ◆ At the end of three years, CHN Family Development Specialists will help at least 200 welfare recipients obtain full-time employment. T2K will determine if the Welfare to Wages Case Management Tool will enable caseworkers to assist more welfare dependent families in obtaining employment through the use of the on-line client database and notebook computers for on-site visits. To collect data, caseworkers will conduct an electronic survey of clients, at the time of the intake visit. The CHN IT Director will create the benchmark/reporting tool.

- ◆ At the end of a local four year IDA pilot program, 540 Cleveland individuals will save money for a down payment on a home, education or small business start-up. T2K will determine if the IDA program tool results in more individuals participating in the IDA program from the original referral base and long-term, whether greater percentage of program participants actually complete the program. An electronic survey will be conducted by the CityWide Help Desk. Creating of the benchmark and reporting will be the duty of the CHN IT Director.

The following outcomes, while measurable, are not necessarily quantifiable. The evaluator shall develop a methodology to determine the following outcomes:

- ◆ Home Repair Program: If participants in the program, (includes on-line loan intake, repair specification, processing and loan disbursement administered by 4 CBOs and 3 loan service centers), are more easily and cost-effectively able to obtain financing to conduct home repairs.
- ◆ Neighborhood Indicators: If CBOs can more effectively and efficiently implement their target area agendas by utilizing Neighborhood Indicators, updated by CBOs equipped with wireless handheld personal digital assistants (PDAs,) with a long-term outcome of whether community strategies are more effectively implemented.
- ◆ Determine whether social service providers can more easily obtain childcare for clients.
- ◆ Discussion Database: If CBOs are more efficiently able to locate answers to policy, advocacy and operations questions and concerns. (T2K will utilize the web tool to assess web hits and stickiness to measure immediate impact of this application).
- ◆ Electronic CDBG reporting requirements: If community based organizations comply with CDBG reporting requirements in less time, utilizing more useful reporting tools and resulting in a quicker receipt of federal funding.
- ◆ Use of T2K: Determine whether CBOs experience a culture shift to utilizing technology to more effectively accomplish missions, coordinate services and administer programs.

All data collection tools will be designed by the Cleveland State University *Evaluator* (CSU staff not previously affiliated with the T2K project) while the actual data collection will be conducted by the CityWide Help Desk, WebMaster, Multimedia Specialist, Kiosk Managers and the Neighborhood Centers Association Technical Assistant, (see App. 16). The CHN IT Director will be responsible for working with the Evaluator to establish benchmarks and create reporting tools. The *data analysis* shall be conducted by the CSU Evaluator on an annual basis. There is \$50,613 *budgeted* for the CSU Evaluator and it is estimated that 12% of the data collectors' time will be utilized for evaluation (\$71,498), approximately 5% of the CHN IT Director's time (\$4,882) will be devoted to evaluation for a total of \$126,993, (9% of project).

### 3. SIGNIFICANCE

T2K addresses common nationwide problems of fair and equal access to affordable housing, the impact of welfare reform and the ability of community based organizations to better serve

populations in need through three *innovations*: 1) the direct delivery of advanced technologies to populations in need, 2) the coordination of services amongst disparate CBOs who serve the same populations, 3) strengthening capacity through the use of innovative technology and unique broad based public and private partnerships.

Across American cities, there is a critical need to match populations in most need with available affordable housing opportunities. The on-line inventory of available affordable housing units provides potential homebuyers and renters access to essential information. The Sales and Leasing Center offers a comprehensive, accessible inventory of the entire spectrum of affordable housing available from both the private non-profit and public housing sectors. The on-line audio visual slide presentation of available housing units will allow prospective homebuyers and renters to gather information, via the Internet, about current affordable housing opportunities, financing information and housing programs and services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The convenience of a web-enabled inventory permits a prospective buyer or renter to view more homes in less time and eliminates the traditional impediments of transportation, time and money that so often influence a resident's choice of housing. It is through this innovative system of matching qualified residents to affordable units that will break the barriers of access to fair and quality housing that are too often erected through economic, physical, or cultural hardships.

As welfare dependent families move from public assistance to self-sufficiency and full-time employment, there is an urgent need for coordinated and intensified case management services. To support a family's movement to employment, T2K will provide an on-line childcare resource and referral that will enable its users to conduct self-guided searches for regulated child care program referrals including family childcare, Head Start programs, child care centers, before and after school programs, summer camps, nursery schools, part-day programs, and public or private preschool programs. T2K tools will also be utilized by social service agencies and individual caseworkers equipped with notebook computers, who can access both the Welfare to Wages case management system and the other T2K applications to immediately administer real time services to families, at their home or at the provider's office.

In addition to CBOs, both the Sales and Leasing Center and the Childcare Resource and Referral system will be directly utilized by populations in need. To make the technology not only available, but navigable to the community, T2K will provide eleven kiosks with web-enabled touch screen technology located at CBO offices in Cleveland's inner-city, (see App. 17). These stations will be staffed by Kiosk Managers, with training and technical assistance provided by the CityWide Help Desk. This immediate delivery of technology through a supported structure will provide inner-city residents with direct access to the most useful applications.

T2K also brings together CBOs serving mutual clients with related, yet distinct programs. For example, the Individual Development Account (IDA) program that seeks to build wealth among families in poverty is jointly administered by several independent organizations each charged with specific roles with a mutual client base (the account holders). By providing access to vital client information, the shared database proposed in T2K will promote better service coordination among participating CBOs and will maximize quality interaction with participating families. The project also has potential as a model for the administration of IDA programs nationwide. Additional coordination of services includes the Discussion Database and the Home Repair program (uniting loan processors, CBOs and construction managers).

Finally, T2K builds critical capacity for the national problem of traditionally understaffed and underfunded CBOs. The Neighborhood Indicators System not only provides CBOs with information they need to create and implement their strategic plans, but also supplies the use of handheld personal digital assistants (PDAs). These PDAs will be available to CBOs, via a lending library, to update neighborhood indicators on a block by block basis. The T2K project provides unprecedented access to valuable planning information and the ability to analyze changes over time to determine program effectiveness. The technology precipitates the flow of real-time information, data, and communication, yet remains faithful to the CBO's grassroots missions, supporting capacity building in allowing providers to do more with less, (See App. 18)

*T2K builds upon the strengths of previous TIIAP grantee successes.* The proposed application that creates on-line reporting capabilities for CDBG recipients went a step beyond the Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles project of access to city databases by actually allowing CBOs to communicate directly with the city. Also an outgrowth of the L.A. project and the YorkCan project is the neighborhood mapping initiative that provides CBOs the ability to update their neighborhood information, through wireless technology. The Sales and Leasing Center/Childcare Resource and Referral kiosks are closely aligned with the Grace Hill Neighborhood Services system that installed computers at public places to make the state's labor resources available to residents.

#### 4. PROJECT FEASIBILITY

The Cleveland Housing Network has a proven track record in implementing advanced PC technologies for more than five years. It is this balance of community mission and an advanced degree of technical capacity that *uniquely qualifies* CHN as sponsor of the T2K project. (See Apps. 19,20,21 and 22). In 1997, CHN took a groundbreaking first step to incorporate technology into our decentralized business systems with our 18 member community development corporations. Along with on-going technical assistance and training, CHN member groups now have Internet access to six secured business applications with data updated on a nightly basis. Systems include maintenance, property management, acquisition, rehabilitation, work specification writing, homes for sale and contract management. CHN is currently transplanting the interoperable database system as a "fat-client" tool over a Virtual Private Network among its member CDCs using Cisco tunneling to allow for seamless and direct access to CHN's central data servers via a DMZ firewall protection.

Closely monitoring IT industry trends, CHN has traditionally placed less emphasis on the "hot tools of the month" *technical approach* and instead employs a consistent approach of modularity to all system design and business process improvement. With more than 20 separate database systems currently supported, information is broken down to its most logical business object. With this methodology, new information resources are more efficiently and cost-effectively engineered as customer demands change. T2K will use this *interoperability* as it builds the many modular systems proposed, ultimately accommodating maximum flexibility in shifting environments. CHN maintains a set of standards in the toolbox of applications that relies upon a host of Microsoft business tools from the Developer Studio environment including C++, Visual Basic and Foxpro. Currently, CHN is upgrading many larger applications to SQL Server as the

new database engine standard. CHN has forged strong partnerships with at least 8 different independent developers specialists who are familiar with CHN's standards and practices.

Importantly, T2K will benefit from the infrastructure already in place. Along with Microsoft products, CHN is also a growing web developer. CHN maintains a fractional T-1 data line, Cisco router, and a Sun Solaris UltraSPARC server running Solstice Firewall I software. CHN also maintains one Internet server outside the DMZ firewall in addition to three other Internet data servers inside the DMZ – all running Microsoft Internet Information Server and Webtrends monitoring software. Additionally, CHN maintains a Lotus Domino PC as our Groupware and Mail server. Finally, CHN hosts and maintains six current Web sites and is fluent in Java Script, HTML, Adobe Photoshop, Active Server, CGI scripting, and Emblaze Video Pro for creating streaming multi-media java applets.

In examining *Technical Alternatives*, it is clear that larger database system deployment over the web is still in its infancy and an immature model for larger system deployment. CHN intensely evaluated Windows Terminal Server and Citrix MetaFrame. CHN concluded that with the advent of fatter and cheaper pipes like DSL, greater remote data connectivity standards like ADO and RDS, (as well as the advent of XML), that the Citrix solution ultimately represents a more proprietary closed environment which may or may not become a greater future standard. It was determined that as long as CHN continues to build robust 32-bit object-oriented programming, all software investment will remain interoperable and can be migrated on to this solution at any point in the future with little re-writing.

Regarding *Scalability and Future Maintenance*, CHN will continue as a unique and critical partner in the evolution of technology and use among Cleveland's CBOs. Upon the successful completion of T2K, CHN anticipates a deployment of an increasing list of content as the network matures. Stressing the need to respond to the changing needs of the CBO industry, the formula for sustainability follows: 1) build a professional and reliable technical assistance and training mechanism to support the "cultural shift" citywide, 2) maintain a constant customer service loop back into system design, 3) have a flexible (modular) design to respond quickly to customer needs and wants, and 4) use advanced web monitoring tools to regularly study customers habits, tendencies and use or non-use of available information. With an absolute commitment to these tenets, the maintenance of the network becomes a logical cost of doing business. The broad range of Cleveland's community development funding infrastructure, as partners to the T2K project strengthens the future flow of resources needed to sustain this capacity for years to come.

***BUDGET, IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE AND TIMELINE:*** See attached Apps. 23 and 24)

## **5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

To maximize T2K's potential, a working group of *critical partners* has been assembled to form the T2K team and serve as the coordinating body for all technology development throughout Cleveland's CDC industry. The organizing team, who meets on a monthly basis, is comprised of representatives from Cleveland Housing Network, City of Cleveland, Cleveland Neighborhood Development Corporation, Neighborhood Progress, Inc., Cleveland State University, Neighborhood Centers Association, Enterprise Foundation and Local Initiatives Support

Corporation. T2K's extensive and varied partnerships encompass a wide spectrum of CBOs, government and business interests dedicated to improving the quality of life in Cleveland inner-city neighborhoods, (see Apps. 25, 26 and 27). The T2K partners include all members of the organizing team plus Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, Starting Point and National City Bank.

The partners of T2K, representing the interests of more than 50 CBOs, are uniquely positioned to be responsive to and *involve the needs of Cleveland's community* builders. Since early 1998, the T2K organizing team has been meeting on a monthly basis and works to crystallize the goals of the network, ensuring that the technology is established at its highest use for the utmost impact for all CBOs. A recent community meeting was held to introduce the project to more than 50 representatives of T2K partners, CBOs and local business interests.

T2K has dedicated a considerable amount of resources, including five positions, to training and technical assistance *support for end users*. More than half of those positions, the CityWide Help Desk, the NCA Technical Assistant and the Starting Point Technical Assistant Plans are committed full time to training and support activities. Additionally, all eleven touch screen kiosks will be staffed, 30 hours a week, by a fully trained Kiosk Manager whose time will be entirely devoted to assisting walk-in clients. The CityWide Help Desk will be conducting monthly training seminars for CBOs and WEP Kiosk Managers at Cleveland State University. Given the personal nature of the information gathered from clients *privacy* issues have been carefully addressed in the project and a security policy has been carefully crafted. For example, client information can only be accessed by authorized users with an assigned security clearance. Additionally, proprietary information of participating CBOs will be protected.

## 6. REDUCING DISPARITIES

**DISPARITY:** The incidence of poverty has increased dramatically in Cuyahoga County during the 1980s and 1990s. Cuyahoga County's percentage of poverty level persons grew by 49%, (Cleveland's poverty rate increased by 56%) between 1980 and 1994. Cleveland's poverty rate was 27% in 1980 and increased to 42% in 1994. Additionally, the statistics show that slightly more than 75% of Cuyahoga County's poor (about 209,200 people) live in the city of Cleveland.

Cleveland's most critical housing needs are a direct result of poverty. Almost 70% of our city's very low-income households are renters, according to Cleveland's Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy. An inadequate supply of housing affordable to residents is an acute problem in Cleveland where an individual earning minimum wage must work 80 hours a week to afford the average 2 bedroom apartment (\$537/month). Nationally, the average median rent of a 2 bedroom apartment is \$585/month, requiring almost a 90 hour work week to be affordable to a minimum wage earner, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the baseline problems of a high incidence of poverty and the lack of an adequate , supply of affordable housing, welfare reform poses an alarming challenge to low-income communities in Cleveland and nationwide. As welfare reform initiatives are fully implemented, CHN and other housing and social service providers face an alarming challenge to assist families

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<sup>1</sup> Out of Reach: Rental Housing at What Cost?, October, 1998.

in obtaining full-time employment to comply with the welfare to work requirements. On January 25, 1999, The Plain Dealer reported that “State records show that (Cuyahoga) county forced 81 families off the rolls in September for not meeting welfare-to-work rules. In October, the number was 185 and it has been climbing since: 220 in November and 516 in December. County commissioners said the number soon could hit 1,000 a month and stay there.”

T2K’s *strategy is to reduce economic disparities* throughout the neighborhoods of Cleveland by unifying the traditional entrepreneurs of community development (CDCs) with social service providers to deliver better coordinated services and programs to Cleveland’s populations most in need. T2K offers these CBOs the opportunity to redirect their efforts from “paperwork” and reporting to the more pressing needs of their clients. On a neighborhood level, CBOs will be able to maximize precious resources for strategic initiatives that benefit underrepresented populations, minimizing the energy drain of ineffective and duplicative communications.

T2K also breaks the barriers of economic disparity among underrepresented populations by integrating technology and programs at a grassroots level. Using notebook computers, the welfare to wages case management application will access technology directly from a client’s home. This project decentralizes and deploys caseworkers to where they can do the most good – assisting families secure lasting employment throughout the neighborhoods of the Cleveland. The establishment of community kiosks will not only provide a direct link of affordable housing and childcare resources to populations in need, but will also prepare WEP (welfare dependent) workers with valuable computer skills as they continue their search for full-time employment.

## 7. DOCUMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION

*Documentation* on the success of the T2K project will be assembled through the evaluation plan and carefully examined to assess the need for re-engineering in order to better serve the CBO industry. Evaluation reports will be submitted to the CHN IT Director and shared with the T2K team at the monthly organizing meeting. The first evaluation will be submitted in the summer of 2000, allowing the team to review the first year’s partial implementation of the program. Since T2K applications are designed to be rolled-out over a 36 month period, the initial evaluation will be critical to evaluate any mid-course corrections that may be needed to meet the overall objective of the project. All evaluation reports and recommendations from the T2K organizing team will be electronically scanned and accessible from the T2K web page.

The *dissemination of T2K information* has already begun as community development leaders throughout the country have been recognizing the project as an established cutting edge initiative. Last fall, CHN was selected to present the success story of the first phase of T2K (CHN’s network established with member CDCs) at the Enterprise Foundation’s annual conference of community development industry leaders. Earlier this year, CHN began working with the National Association of Housing Partnerships to discuss T2K and its applications as a national platform for community based developers. Future plans to disseminate T2K information include a follow-up report to the Enterprise Foundation’s 1999 conference, yearly summit of all public and private T2K stakeholders and a downloadable demonstration file directly accessible from the T2K web page at [www.t2k.org](http://www.t2k.org).