

Introduction

Communities Connect Network (CCN)* is a statewide coalition of public and private organizations working to ensure that Washington State is a leader in “**Digital Inclusion**”—that all individuals have access and the skills to use the Internet and its resources/information through community technology centers (CTCs). These community-based organizations provide public access to computer and Internet training for **underserved populations**.

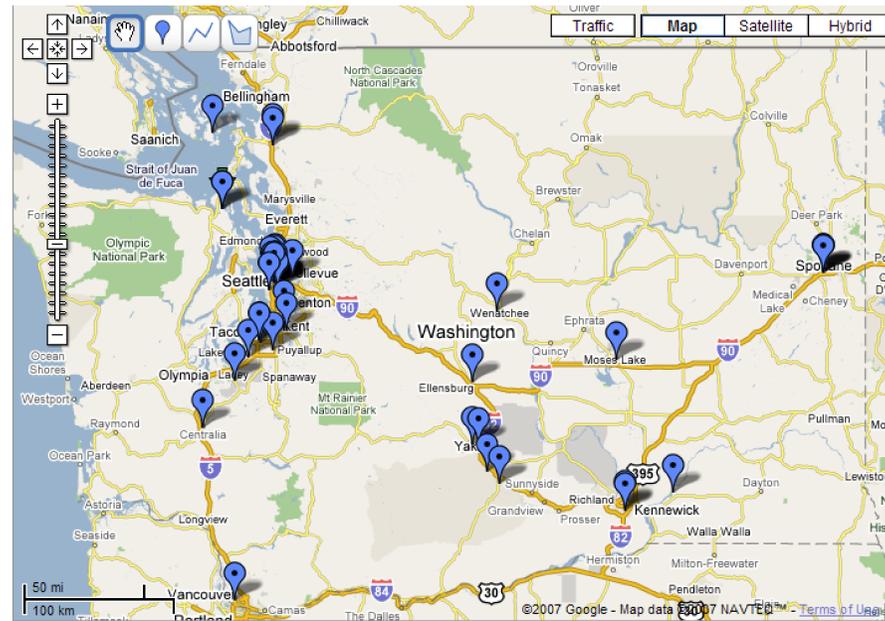
As discussed by Crandall and Fisher (Forthcoming) and in the seminal “Falling through the Net: Toward digital inclusion” NTIA report (2000), digital inclusion goes beyond access to include **technology literacy** and **relevant content and services** as the cornerstones of **full engagement in the iSociety**. The Communities Connect Network adopted this framework in their work to develop a statewide network of CTCs over the past two years, through **targeted training** activities for CT providers, development of an **online community network** for the providers, and **advocacy** efforts in which the providers were engaged to present a common voice to the state legislature.

As a member of CCN, the purpose of our research was to gauge how people of Washington State were (a) using and (b) benefitting from CT services in terms of individuals, families, and communities; and then derive aggregate statewide benefits.

Methodology

- Durrance & Fisher’s outcomes-based toolkit (2005)
- Dervin’s Sense-Making approach (c.f., Naumer, Fisher & Dervin, 2008)
- Telephone survey with staff from 211 CTCs
 - identified from available CTC directories and lists
- Usage frequency data was augmented by grantee reports from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Community Access to Technology program.
- 7 case studies to explore user & staff perceptions regarding benefits obtained from using the CTCs
 - Unobtrusive observation of CTCs
 - Semi-structured interviews
 - 38 CTC users (each paid \$10)
 - 16 CTC staff
- Peer debriefing with case study staff and CCN members during analytic phase

* For more information about Communities Connect Network, see <http://communitiesconnect.org>.



Map of Survey and Site Visit CTC Programs

How Many People Served? (Survey & BMGF)

Based on information from **about half** (n=103) of the known community technology providers in the state—these agencies serve:
99,467 unique users per year.

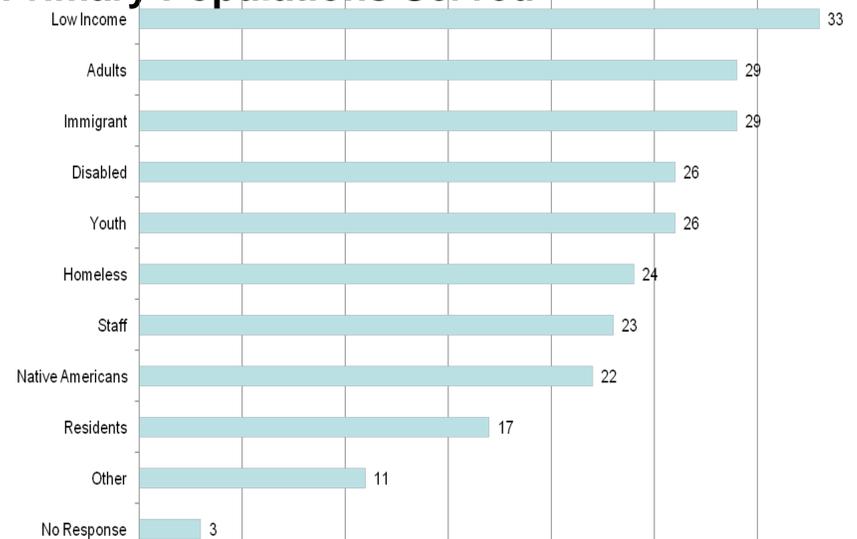
Weekly counts show that **on average, a user visits 14 times** during the year.

Resulting in an estimated total of
1,392,538 visits per year.

Amount of time User spent at CTC each week (n=21)

- <1-3 hours per week – 24%
- 4-6 hours per week – 38%
- 7-10 hours per week - 10%
- >than 10 hours per week – 14%
- Don’t know—too irregular to determine – 14%

Primary Populations Served



Actual Count from CTC Provider Telephone Survey

Selected Findings from the Case Studies

Individuals (n=235 incidents)

Employment/Economic Benefits

- Developed job skills that prepared people to get a job
- Empowered people to obtain additional technical skills
- Helped gain employment

Academic Skills and Literacy Benefits

- Providing references and/or resumes for college or jobs
- Academic improvement like raising math scores one letter grade
- Preparing users to obtain a GED or go to college

Social Inclusion and Personal Growth Benefits

- Relationship building/friendship
- Staying out of trouble
- Developing or expanding interests
- Tangible skill development (e.g. leadership, public speaking)
- Providing connections to community leaders
- Building confidence and elevating expectations

Families (n=50)

Academic Skills and Literacy Benefits

- Parents able to help school-aged children
- Connecting families to technology

Communications Benefits

- Keeps families connected (e.g. Mexico)

Social Inclusion and Personal Growth Benefits

- Keeping kids safe by checking on online activities
- Improving family relations

Employment/Economic Benefits

- Helped users to get better paying jobs

Communities (n=76)

Social Inclusion and Personal Growth Benefits

- Community building
- Developing future leaders
- Motivates users to take action in their communities

Employment/Economic Benefits

- More skilled labor force
- Better educated populations

Independence Benefit

- Immigrants able to speak & be understood without translators

References

- Crandall, M., and Fisher, K. E. Forthcoming. *Digital Inclusion: Communicating Impact through Practice and Research*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). 2000. *Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion*. Washington, DC. <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn00/contents00.html>.
- Durrance, J. C., and Fisher, K. E. 2005. *How Libraries and Librarians Help: A Guide to Identifying User-Centered Outcomes*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Naumer, C. M., Fisher, K. E., and B. Dervin. 2008. *Sense-Making: A Methodological Perspective. Sensemaking Workshop @ CHI 2008*. ACM SIG CHI Conference, Florence, Italy, April 6, 2008.