Community Technology Fund
Special Project Proposal

May 12, 2004

Project Name: Building Information Age Communities Planning Mini Grants Year 3

Sponsoring Entity: University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in cooperation with Technologies Across Nebraska and the Nebraska Information Technology Commission Community Council

Amount Requested: $20,000

Executive Summary

The University of Nebraska's Technologies Across Nebraska initiative, in partnership with the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Community Council, is proposing an additional year of funding for the IT Planning and Mini Grant Program. The program assists communities and regional groups in conducting community information technology assessments and in developing technology plans to utilize information technology to enhance community and economic development.   The Community IT Planning and Mini Grant program has energized local technology committees and focused their efforts.   All of the 8 communities participating in year one of the IT Planning and Mini Grant program have completed technology plans and two have received grants totaling over $400,000 to begin implementing their plans. Seven additional communities participating in year 2 of the program are in the process of conducting assessments and developing technology plans.

Funding the program for a third year will allow Technologies Across Nebraska to expand the program to eight additional communities or regional groups. The $20,000 requested will provide the 8 community or regional groups participating in year two of the program with up to $2,500 in funding for conducting community surveys or other planning related activities.

Project Description

The Community IT Planning and Mini Grant program provides assistance in conducting community or regional information technology assessments and in developing technology plans.   Participating communities are encouraged to use the *Community IT Planning Workbook* to simplify the daunting task of conducting a community technology assessment and developing a technology plan.   The workbook is available at http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/workbook/index.htm. The workbook has received positive reviews from community leaders and leading community technology consultants in the United States.   Assistance to communities is also provided by University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Educators and by the project manager, Anne Byers.

The $2,500 mini grants to communities serve two important purposes. First, it provides an incentive for communities to focus efforts on IT-related development. All of the participants in the first year of the program indicated that the availability of mini grant funding was the primary reason they applied to participate in the program. Secondly, the mini grant money provides the financial assistance needed to conduct an in-depth community assessments through community surveys or engineering studies. The data obtained from these assessments has enabled two communities to prepare success grant applications, resulting in approximately $400,000 in funding. The communities of Crawford and Harrison focused initial efforts on the preparation of a grant application for the RUS Community Connect broadband program.   On September 30, 2003, Crawford was awarded a $153,328 grant from the USDA Rural Utilities Service to provide broadband and develop a community technology center.   The Edgar technology committee used the results from their community assessment to prepare a Community Development Block Grant application to build a community center.   With the award of $250,000 grant in July, 2003, Edgar is now implementing a key component of their technology plan, The new Edgar community center will incorporate spaces for a multimedia center and an information technology learning center, including teleconferencing capability.

Funding the program for a third year will allow Technologies Across Nebraska and the NITC Community Council to build upon the lessons learned from year 1 and expand the program to eight additional communities or regional groups. The mini grant program will provide eight additional Nebraska communities or regional groups with up to $2,500 in funding for conducting community assessments or other activities which support the development of community or regional plans to utilize information technology to enhance community and economic development.

Year 3 Project Goal:

Building leadership capacity in Nebraska's rural communities to address IT development.

Year 3 Project Activities and Timeline

June

- Form selection committee.
- Develop guidelines and application form.
- Publicize availability of the planning mini grants.
- Update toolkit materials based upon final evaluation of year one participants.

August, 2004

- Select and announce the 8 community or regional groups selected to participate in year 2 of the program.

September-October, 2004

- Hold an initial meeting with each participating community or regional group to introduce them to the Community IT Planning and Assessment Workbook and to begin the assessment process.

November, 2004 – September, 2005

- Work with communities to develop IT plans. Communities will be required to submit a written work plan and budget in order to receive mini planning grant funds.

Expected Outcomes, Project Deliverables, and Evaluation Data Collection

Project Outcome: Eight communities or regional groups will develop IT plans.

> **Quantitative Data Collection:** The number of communities or regional groups participating in the planning process and the number of communities or regional groups completing IT plans will be reported.

> **Project Deliverable:** Local IT plans and any materials developed will be made available on the Community IT Toolkit Web site.

Project Outcome: Development of additional toolkit materials and/or revisions to toolkit materials which can be used to help other communities.

Project Deliverable: A report summarizing the project and lessons learned will be written and made available from the Community IT Toolkit Web site.   Any other materials developed or revised will be made available from the Community IT Toolkit Web site. In the project's final report, these materials will be listed with links to their location on the Web site.

Project Outcome: Community leaders will be better prepared to address IT-related community and development

Quantitative Data Collection: Community leaders will be asked to fill out a brief survey indicating their satisfaction with the process and how the process has impacted their ability to address IT-related development.

Qualitative Data Collection: Regional focus groups will be conducted to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the toolkit materials and the planning process and to solicit suggestions.

Project Deliverable: A report summarizing the project and lessons learned will be written and made available from the Community IT Toolkit Web site.

Project Outcome: Nebraska's communities will begin to utilize information technology in ways that enhance community and economic development.

This expected outcome will probably not be realized until after the one-year time limit of this grant.   However, every effort will be made to follow-up with the communities to document the ways in which information technology is being used to enhance community and economic development.

Budget

$20,000 for eight $2,500 mini grants to community or regional groups.