FOREWORD

As part of the implementation of the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) project Getting Rural Virginia Connected: A Vision for the Future, funded by the United States Department of Commerce, we would like to provide you with a detailed report of project-related activities that were undertaken in Louisa County. We hope it will be useful to local government leaders, Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, Technology Leadership Team members, and all county residents with an interest in technology and economic development in Louisa County. Many of you were closely involved with the project on a regular basis, and much of the information provided is well known. At the same time we thought it was important to provide background material along with a detailed description of how the project unfolded and how decisions were made for those learning about it for the first time.

We wish to again acknowledge the matching funds of $6,000 provided to us by the Louisa Board of Supervisors which helped to make Louisa County's participation in this program possible. All of us in Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Blacksburg Electronic Village have enjoyed working with you over the past two years. We hope the Louisa Electronic Village http://www.louisaelectronicvillage.net will continue to make a difference in your community and that this report will be helpful as you continue to move ahead in the deployment of information technology to support the vision of your local leadership.

Virginia Cooperative Extension

Blacksburg Electronic Village

INTRODUCTION

Getting Rural Virginia Connected: A Vision for the Future, funded through the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) of the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), had its beginning in Spring 2001. At that time Dr. John Dooley, Associate Director for Family and Consumer Sciences and Community Initiatives in Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), and Dr. Andrew Cohill, Director of the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) at Virginia Tech, learned of this funding opportunity. The TOP project was designed to help rural communities in Virginia develop the capacities needed to prosper in the Information Age economy. The underlying purpose of the project was to empower citizens with the knowledge and tools to become active participants in their economic futures. This was accomplished through a participatory process of education on trends in the county, visioning for an improved future, and ways to make that future a reality. Technology was identified as one of the tools to create the kind of future citizens wanted in their counties.

The initial step in each county was the formation of a Technology Leadership Team with a broad representation of citizens from across the county that served as a steering committee to provide on-going direction to the local project. The next step was the implementation of *Take Charge*, an educational program designed to enable leaders, decision-makers, and residents in rural communities to review their strengths and weaknesses and develop a vision for the future. One component of this vision focused on how technology could be used to address issues in their communities. A central piece of the TOP program was the development of a community electronic network and web site that would increase citizen participation in local government, promote community connectedness, and support economic development.

The community networks were modeled after the Blacksburg Electronic Village and provide various features to assist communities in meeting the goals described above. The Community Connections program supports web sites for civic, faith-based, and other community organizations to inform county residents of the services and opportunities for personal development available in their county. A Community Calendar keeps folks informed of government meetings, church or club meetings, or recreational events. Posting the meeting times and agendas of the local Board of Supervisors promotes citizen participation in local government, and the web site Discussion Forum encourages public conversation and dialogue on matters of importance to the county. The Village Mall lists individual businesses, and county residents needing a particular product or service can use this business directory to find a provider in their own community and support the local economy. Tourists planning to visit the locality can find the name of a local bed and breakfast. Finally, the Virtual Business Incubator helps start-up businesses develop their own web site describing their products or services. Technology training for local citizens was also part of the TOP plan so that residents could develop the skills needed to use the web site and volunteers would be prepared to administer the site after the grant funding was completed. (A detailed description of the network services made available to each county by the Blacksburg Electronic Village can be found in Appendix A.)

In addition to their visioning process and community networks, each county received a technology assessment from which a technology master plan was developed. John Nichols, Information Technology Manager for Network Infrastructure and Services, spent time in each

county interviewing and researching businesses and network providers to provide a custom report for each county. This individualized master plan can serve as a blueprint for future plans to acquire high speed Internet access or other technology development.

The TOP program presented an opportunity for two entities within Virginia Tech, VCE and BEV, to develop a working partnership that would benefit rural Virginia communities. VCE has expertise and experience in helping small communities plan for and take control of their future, and BEV brings expertise and experience in technology assessment and building community networks. With this in mind, Dr. Dooley and Dr. Cohill developed a collaborative proposal that targeted nine rural, economically challenged counties across Virginia. They targeted counties with lower education and income levels and higher outward migration rates as compared to Virginia as a whole, and a need for economic growth. Each participating county pledged a contribution of $6,000 ($2,000 per year over three years) to meet the technical costs associated with maintaining their community networks on the BEV server. At the completion of the project, counties would decide if they wished to continue to host their community network sites with the BEV, or move to another Web hosting service provider.

As the target counties were identified, Dr. Dooley approached the local VCE agent regarding his/her willingness to serve as the local leader of the county project. The local agent carried the project forward to representatives of county government to obtain their approval and financial commitment. The grant proposal was submitted in Spring 2001 with letters of commitment from Carroll, Dickenson, and Grayson Counties in the VCE Southwest District; Craig County in the VCE Northwest District; Cumberland County in the VCE Central District; Louisa County in the VCE Northern District; King and Queen County in the VCE Northeast District; and Accomack and Northampton Counties in the VCE Southeast District. In Fall 2001 Virginia Tech was notified that the proposal was funded, with a start date of October 1, 2001. (The project scope was modified in August 2003 to exclude Grayson and Carroll counties since they had completed many of the project objectives prior to the onset of this project, and there were not sufficient resources to implement a modified project plan for these two counties.)

Unfortunately, personnel turnover at Virginia Tech delayed the start of the project. First, Dr. Dooley, the project leader for VCE, was assigned a new set of responsibilities as Interim Associate Provost for Outreach. About the same time Dr. Cohill resigned his position with the BEV. Also, State budget reductions resulted in the loss of VCE agents in several of the TOP counties and new local leadership had to be identified.

The VCE agents with TOP responsibilities in each of the nine counties were brought together in Blacksburg for a two-day orientation in March 2002. Project policies and procedures were established and a time line was developed for moving the project forward. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Eleanor Schlenker took over Dr. Dooley's responsibilities with the project, and Mathew Mathai was appointed Director of the BEV and Project Director for TOP. Tabitha Combs who was hired as the TOP Project Coordinator resigned her position at the BEV and Jaime Shetrone took her place in May 2002. The new project team met for the first time in June 2002, and work on the project was finally underway – eight months after the funding was awarded.

The geographic separation of the target counties presented a tremendous challenge in communication. To keep everyone informed, the BEV set up a TOP web site on which meeting

minutes, publicity materials, PowerPoint programs, pictures of local meetings and activities, and a calendar of events for each county were posted on a regular basis (http://top.bev.net/). A comprehensive Project Implementation Plan developed by Mathew Mathai provided a step by step outline with benchmarks to measure progress and the completion of required tasks. A handout describing the BEV in a BOX features was made available for local distribution. These materials were also posted on the TOP site for use by BEV and VCE staff. The Project Implementation Plan is found in Appendix A.

GETTING STARTED

Securing County Support

Early in 2001 Dr. John Dooley spoke with Extension Agent James Riddell about including Louisa County in the TOP project. Jim brought the TOP opportunity to the attention of the Louisa County government officials who expressed a strong interest in the project and pledged the $6,000 required. (A copy of the commitment letter from the Louisa Board of Supervisors can be found in Appendix A.) In Fall 2001 Virginia Tech was notified that the grant was funded with the start date of October 1, 2001.

Extension Agent Training

The first step in the Project Implementation Plan was orientation and training for the VCE agents who would be leading the county programs. Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Community Sciences, Food, Nutrition and Health, and 4-H agents were involved in respective counties. A two-day training held on March 6-7, 2002 at Virginia Tech provided an overview of the timeline and benchmarks for project tasks. Agents representing all nine counties along with their District Directors attended. Dr Andrew Cohill, the BEV Director, demonstrated the various options that would be included on the county sites. VCE Community Initiatives specialists Pamela Gibson and Gary Larrowe described the *Take Charge* process and the preparation required for those sessions.

A second training took place on November 12, 2002 at the Virginia Tech Center in Richmond. Mathew Mathai, TOP Project Director, and Jaime Shetrone, TOP Project Coordinator, reviewed the basic concepts of telecommunications infrastructure and the issues that rural communities face in obtaining Internet access for their homes, schools, and businesses. VCE Community Initiatives specialist Gary Larrowe explained the CSPP model to be used in evaluating current technology access and equipment in each county. (It was decided at a later time that John Nichols with Network Infrastructure and Services at Virginia Tech would carry out this assessment.) Finally, agents discussed the applications of community networks that could be helpful in their particular communities.

Forming a Technology Leadership Team

The next step in the Project Implementation Plan was recruiting a Technology Leadership Team (TLT). The TLT was the steering committee for the local project and needed to include representatives from all geographical locations and population groups in the county. TLT members were expected to keep their local groups informed of on-going project activities and encourage their participation. The proposal submitted to the DOC had indicated that each community within the county would have its own TLT. However, as the project began to move forward, it became obvious that all geographic areas of a county had to work together to support technology infrastructure and economic development, and all would be better served if there was one TLT providing leadership for the county. Ensuring broad representation from all areas of the county was a priority in recruiting TLT members.

Efforts to Recruit a Technology Leadership Team

The Louisa County Extension staff, James Riddell, Connie Laws, and Sarah Cooper, brought the TOP program to the attention of many government officials, community organizations, and the public at large in an effort to recruit a TLT that would represent all groups.

1) They made presentations to the Louisa County Board of Supervisors, the Louisa County Extension Leadership Council, the Louisa County Ruritan Club, and the Louisa County Rotary Club.

2) They visited many community leaders to tell them about the project.

These included:

- C. Edward Kube, Jr.—Chair, Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Jackson District
- Willie L. Harper—Vice Chair, Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Mineral District
- Jack Wright—Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Mountain Road District
- Fitzgerald Barnes—Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Patrick Henry District
- Edward Deale—Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Cuckoo District
- David B. Morgan, M.D—Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Green Springs District
- P.T. Spencer—Louisa County Board of Supervisors, Louisa District
- Lee Lintecum—County Administrator, Louisa County
- Dr. David Melton—Superintendent, Louisa County Public Schools
- F. Ward Harkrader—Judge, Louisa County Circuit Court
- Deborah Riddell—Chairman, Louisa County School Board, Mineral District
- Paul Oswell—Director of Social Services, Louisa County
- Nancy Pleasants—Commissioner of Revenue, Louisa County
- Linda Edwards—Director, Louisa County Economic Development
- Dean P. Agee—Clerk, Louisa County Circuit Court
- Charles Taylor—Chairman, Louisa County Planning Commission
- Henry Taylor—Member, Louisa County Comprehensive Plan Committee
- Cathy Collins—Editor, *Central Virginian* newspaper
- Bernice Kube—Editor, *Lake Anna Observer* newspaper
- David Watt—Manager, WJMA Radio

In the process of reviewing the areas of Louisa County that needed to be represented on the TLT, it was discovered that one of the participating communities listed in the grant proposal could not be identified. Locust Grove is not a town in Louisa County and did not appear to be an alternate name for any specific area, so it was dropped as a participating community.

3) The TOP project and electronic village concept was the subject of four front page newspaper articles in the *Central Virginian* and the *Lake Anna Observer*. The County Board of Supervisors included the project in their Plan of Work for the year and in their countywide newsletter. County leaders were asked for names of individuals who could contribute to the project.

The initial meeting of the TLT was set for May 30, 2002 with letters of invitation sent to 17 county leaders. A copy of this letter and its recipients, along with the list of TLT members recruited at this meeting and in the following months, are found in Appendix B.

IDENTIFYING COUNTY ISSUES AND SETTING GOALS

Changes in County Extension Personnel

Several circumstances hampered progress at this point and thereafter. Once the TLT was in place, the next step was the *Take Charge* process. *Take Charge* is an educational program that helps small communities identify their strengths, weaknesses, and goals. It was used in the TOP project to help Counties identify their goals for technology and develop an action plan to meet those goals. Louisa County had completed a strategic planning process two years earlier (2000) that included the development of a Comprehensive Plan with goals and action steps for the future. Local leaders were reluctant to go ahead with *Take Charge* which appeared to duplicate the previous work. As a result, there some delay while this situation was being resolved. Another occurrence that delayed the project was the turnover in Extension personnel in the County. James Riddell, the local leader when the project began, was reassigned during the first year. Connie Laws and Sarah Cooper took over at that time, but both resigned early into the second year. This loss of continuity as the new program leaders, Judy Stevens and Charles Rosson, became familiar with the project and its goals slowed the overall momentum.

Louisa County Comprehensive Plan

The Louisa County Comprehensive Plan was used in place of *Take Charge*. The Louisa Plan evolved from a community wide planning process that began with a Vision Forum that provided citizens with the opportunity to articulate their goals for the future. Eight citizen task forces appointed by the Louisa County Board of Supervisors expanded on these goals to develop plans and strategies to guide the County into the future. Retaining the rural character of the county, while accommodating growth and diversifying the tax base, was considered to be central to the quality of life for Louisa County citizens and guided the development of the Plan.

The nine goals of the Louisa County Comprehensive Plan are listed below. Economic development is addressed in several of the goals.

Goal One: To preserve the rural character of Louisa County

This goal is the guiding force for the recommendations in the Louisa Comprehensive Plan. The task forces addressed this goal by designating growth areas and recommended the County develop sub-area plans for each designated growth area to include standards for development, plans for infrastructure needs such as water and sewer, and created spaces for higher densities of mixed use development (residential, commercial, industrial). The growth areas are expected to be amended from time to time, but would be considered amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and, as such, subject to public hearings prior to any change.

The following are the current designated growth areas:

- Towns of Louisa and Mineral
- Louisa County Industrial Air Park

- Zion Crossroads
- Gordonsville
- Gum Spring
- Ferncliff
- Shannon Hill
- Buckner
- Shenandoah Crossing
- Blue Ridge Shores
- Wares Crossroads

Goal Two: To maintain a healthy, diverse economy and provide job opportunities for Louisa County residents

The Louisa County economy depends on revenues from the real estate tax and the Dominion North Anna Power Plant. Louisa County median household income is below the region and state median. Wages paid by employers in Louisa, however, are among the highest in the region. The goal is to diversify the tax base with higher paying jobs for Louisa County residents. This may be accomplished through economic development and educational strategies and forming partnerships to raise skill levels in the workforce. Louisa County participates in a number of regional programs, as well as having significant internal capacity to further this goal.

Goal Three: To prepare Louisa County children and adults for challenges of the new millennium

The disparities between household incomes and wages paid in the County suggest the need for workforce training. Partnerships between education and businesses will be critical to meeting this goal.

Goal Four: To preserve and protect the natural resources in Louisa County

Louisa County has numerous natural resources: agriculture and forested lands, views and vistas, historic sites, rivers and streams. These assets will remain assets with attention and care from the County residents and governments. This goal should be accomplished through development of standards and voluntary measures. Partnerships among the various state agencies working in Louisa County can support these efforts with their expertise.

Goal Five: To insure public infrastructure supports the comprehensive plan land use goals

The Water and Sewer Plan and Transportation Plan contained within this chapter should support the goal of maintaining the rural environment as well as providing the basis for cost-effective decisions regarding provision of publicly funded infrastructure. The cost of infrastructure demands careful use of public funds. The provision of infrastructure in designated areas supports the land use objectives of the Plan.

Goal Six: To insure provision of safe, affordable housing in the County

Louisa County is fortunate in having the assistance of the Louisa Housing Foundation in meeting this goal. The Foundation receives support from the County and leverages that support with private and state or federal funds. Additionally, the County is a member of the Thomas Jefferson HOME Consortium, which has a regular allocation of federal dollars that are distributed throughout the region. Meeting this goal insures a better quality of life for all of Louisa's citizens.

Goal Seven: To foster and enhance the sense of community

Louisa County residents have shown their commitment to Louisa as a community through their participation in the development of the Plan. The sense of community is a vital aspect of the quality of life in Louisa. Insuring full participation opportunities strengthens the existing level of participation and fosters the sense of community.

Goal Eight: To maximize regional opportunities

Louisa is experiencing the impacts of growth in neighboring jurisdictions as far away as Richmond, Charlottesville, and Fredericksburg. Exploring these impacts with the neighboring jurisdictions could bring about a change. Regional solutions often provide cost benefits from economies of scale and should be carefully considered in implementing this plan. Watersheds are not bound by county boundaries, nor are transportation, economic development or employment. Louisa is a participant in several regional governmental and non-governmental entities that provide additional support to the County. When economies of scale or greater impact can be realized, the County intends to use these partnerships. With clear articulation of County needs, the regional entities should be able to serve the needs of the County.

Goal Nine: To implement the Comprehensive Plan

Current ordinances meet the goals of the former Comprehensive Plan. To see the proposed Plan through, revisions may be needed in many of the existing ordinances. A number of initiatives are suggested in the Plan: development of a Fiscal Impact Model, review of zoning and subdivision ordinances, review of site plan ordinances, development and adoption of design standards (which apply only to entrance corridors), use of citizen expertise through advisory boards, and using regional entities to expand the influence of the County.

DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF THE WEB SITE

Following the decision to accept the Louisa County Comprehensive Plan in place of *Take Charge*, the project moved ahead. The TLT was organized in Summer 2002 and began to meet regularly in January 2003. The minutes of these meetings summarize the issues discussed, the decisions made, and the community partnerships established. This effort led to the deployment of the Louisa community network in Fall 2003.

Technology Leadership Team - January 15, 2003 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa

Update on community planning process: This was the first meeting of the TLT following its organization in May 2002. VCE Agent Jim Riddell informed the group that the TOP Project Management Team had reviewed the citizen planning process that formed the basis for the Louisa County Comprehensive Plan and agreed that it met the requirement for a *Take Charge* activity.

TLT training: TOP Project Director Mathew Mathai described the community network and how it can spur economic growth. Mathew also touched on the problems of infrastructure and Internet access in rural areas. Top Project Coordinator Jaime Shetrone reviewed the BEV in a BOX features that would be included on the Louisa web site.

Technology Leadership Team – February 11, 2003 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa

VCE Agent Jim Riddell called the meeting to order and welcomed new member Erin Paul, Public Information Officer for the Louisa County Public Schools.

Web site layout: TLT members devoted the remainder of the meeting to planning their web site layout and content. The name of the site will be the Louisa Electronic Village (LEV) and they will purchase that domain name. Under the title of Louisa Electronic Village there will be a tag line to summarize the project, something quick to read and catchy. Suggestions for the tag line included, " where community and technology come together," or "where people and technology come together in Louisa County." The site also will refer to and highlight the issues identified in the Louisa County Comprehensive plan, including the information collected from the community on: Where Are We Now?, Where Do We Want To Go?, and How Do We Get There?

Web site content: The following headings will go along the top of the first page.

1. People Directory -This is where people will register with personal information (similar to BEV's e-community)

2. Local businesses - Bernice Kube and Tom Filer

3. Community Groups - ALL

4. Search / Help / Search Engine/ Site Map -?
5. Education - Erin Paul
6. Health - Vickie Southall
7. Government - Matthias Smith
8. Youth - Sarah Cooper
9. Seniors - Paula Groome
10. News/Calendar - ?
11. Sports/Recreation - Paula Groome
12. Arts/Entertainment - Connie Laws
13. About Louisa Electronic Village - ?

The group assigned members to begin compiling content - the member named beside each heading was to contact organizations and businesses and gather links; the members agreed to have all basic information in place by March 14, the date of the next meeting. Forms were distributed for use with Local Businesses (the mall listing) and Community Groups (the organization listing).

The following questions and tasks still need to be handled:

- Someone needs to sign up for News/Calendar (Bernice will contact the webmaster for Louisaonline)
- There are questions for Jaime Shetrone, TOP Project Coordinator, about legal issues (managing discussion boards and filtering what people put on the site).
- Will discussion boards be listed under each heading or be separate?

Members were encouraged to provide their content in electronic form, if possible, so it could be e-mailed to Jaime to expedite the process. Examples of a name and URL site are given below.

Government

Louisa County--/www.louisacounty.com/default.htm
Treasurer---http://www.louisacounty.com/treasurer/default.htm

Technology Leadership Team - April 22, 2003 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa – 10:00 am

Present: 3 TLT members, VCE Agent Jim Riddell, VCE Agent Sarah Cooper, VCE Agent Connie Laws, VCE Area Specialist Jon Johnson

Web site update: Sarah Cooper shared the tentative schedule sent by Jaime Shetrone, TOP Project Coordinator, for sites to be opened to the public:

- The Louisa Electronic Village (LEV) - after May 15, 2003
- Community Connections - after June 15, 2003
- Community Calendar - after July 15, 2003
- Discussion Boards - after August 15, 2004

Using the computer lab of the meeting room, the group viewed the test site and discussed revisions and additions. The youth section needed more detail similar to the school section. The members wanted to see a more detailed description in all the content areas, using the education section as a model.

Louisa has purchased the domain names of LouisaeElectronicVillage.org and LouisaeElectronicVillage.net because the shorter versions of LEV.net and LEV.org were already taken.

Sarah and Connie posed the question, "What will make this project, home page, and overall site different?" Sarah suggested having a feature photo of the month on the home page, highlighting community members and businesses. She suggested naming the feature "Faces of Louisa." A "Business Spotlight" and "Community Focus" might be other features for the home page.

Marketing the web site: Connie shared a PowerPoint presentation on the TOP project and the Louisa Electronic Village that she developed for use with community groups and asked for feedback. The group suggested that she add Louisa County as an additional sponsor of the project; add telecommuting and distance learning as outcome possibilities; and add "fill out a survey" under "how to get involved." Jim proposed inserting slides of the site into the presentation to make the project seem more real and a true community initiative in progress.

Survey of Internet use: Sarah presented a survey on Internet/computer use to be distributed to citizens and community groups. These surveys will be used to identify the technology needs of the community and help decide the community readiness workshops to be offered. The group brainstormed ways to reach various segments of the population to spark interest in the site.

Work assignments:

The following tasks are to be completed by the next meeting:

- Develop forms for organization/civic group and local business listings with cover letter
- Develop informal LEV survey of computer and Internet use
- Encourage each TLT member to choose 5 groups to present a PowerPoint or paper presentation to
- Develop and send out information packets to the TLT to be used for publicity
- Brainstorm who else should be invited to join the TLT
- Consider including the LEV survey with Parks and Recreation or other county surveys

Technology issues: Jim led the group in an informal assessment of the current infrastructure within the county. TLT member Rick Crosby provided the following information:

- the residential, commercial, school system, and government infrastructure
- number of ISPs county-wide
- current activities of the county technology assessment team
- the Industrial Development Authority plans to provide high speed Internet access to prospective industries.

Rick also shared that the county technology assessment team is developing a county-wide survey that would include a technology use section. Jon Johnson described the technology assessment that is part of the TOP project.

Community readiness workshops: Jon mentioned that the community readiness workshops can be devised to address information barriers to computer and Internet use. Jim and Sarah suggested that workshops on an introduction to computers and basic web design, a computer club, and sponsoring a computer open house might all be useful to citizens in Louisa.

Technology Leadership Team - May 14, 2003 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa – 6:00 pm

Present: 11 TLT members, VCE Agent Jim Riddell, VCE Agent Sarah Cooper, VCE Agent Connie Laws, VCE Area Specialist Jon Johnson

Connie Laws welcomed the group and Sarah Cooper circulated permission forms that must be signed before TLT members can be listed on the TOP web site.

Marketing the web site: Connie reviewed the content of the information packet sent to TLT members (a copy of this packet is found in Appendix D). She also shared her revised PowerPoint intended to be a marketing and educational tool for TLT members to use with business and civic groups in community outreach. TLT member Vicki Southall requested clarification between the terms "mailing list" and "list serve." The group decided to use the term "list serve" for the purpose of this project.

Goals for the web site**:** Jim Riddell and Jon Johnson briefly reviewed the purpose of the TOP project and LEV in Louisa County. They emphasized that this is not just a technology development initiative, but is also about community and economic development within Louisa.

Web site update: Sarah reviewed five pages of the test site with the group. The concepts of the Faces of Louisa, Business Spotlight, and Community Focus features were reintroduced. How to determine the selection and rotation of these featured groups on the site will be decided in future meetings.

It was discovered that the town of Bumpass has not been included in the narrative section of the Government page. TLT member Matthias Smith volunteered to compose and submit this section.

Several content changes were proposed:

- The senior section is quite lengthy and takes too long to scroll down. To make the page more user-friendly, subcategories will be added with an alphabet guide at the top of the page for users to easily find what they are looking for

- TLT member Vicki Southall suggested improvements for the Health page that will be applied to other sections as well. Subcategories were not easily seen because the colors were similar; a break or white space between the tabs and the subcategories would help

- Vicki asked about the difference between the Search and Help tabs. The group will keep Search and discard Help

- The Discussion Board tab was too long, and the two words should be stacked to make space for another tab.

- Connie reintroduced the idea of adding an arts and entertainment section. The group would like to see an arts tab on the home page. Another proposal is to change the Sports and Recreation tab to Arts and Recreation. Group members brainstormed what content could be included in an arts and entertainment section. Connie proposed featuring local artists on this page, similar to the spotlights on the home page.

Marketing the web site: Sarah presented the LEV survey of Internet/computer use for review. TLT member Erin Paul asked about the purpose and collection and analysis procedures for the survey. The surveys are intended to identify the technology information needs of the community and help plan the community readiness workshops. Vicki noted that the district of Cuckoo needed to be included as an option for residence. The modified survey will be sent to members by e-mail later in the week. TLT members should come to the next meeting with collected surveys, and based on the number collected, the group will decide if they should continue to distribute the survey for one more month.

Sarah distributed the listing forms for business and civic groups and explained the need to promote participation. Before the next meeting TLT members are encouraged to visit five groups to present the LEV project, distribute and collect surveys, and distribute business and civic group listing forms. Connie asked the members to identify the groups they planned to visit. TLT members Tom Whitlock, Erin Paul, and Vicki Southall composed a diverse list of organizations for the TLT to use in this first phase of community outreach.

Work assignments:

Connie reviewed the following list of tasks to be completed by the next meeting:

- Distribute forms for organization/civic group and local business listings with cover letters
- Distribute and collect LEV survey of computer and Internet use
- Each TLT member choose 5 groups to visit with a PowerPoint or paper presentation about LEV
- Brainstorm and report: Who else should be invited to be a TLT member?

Technology Leadership Team - June 18, 2003 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa – 12:00 pm

Present: 10 TLT members, VCE Agent Sarah Cooper, VCE Agent Connie Laws, VCE Area Specialist Jon Johnson, TOP Project Coordinator Jaime Shetrone

Sarah Cooper called the meeting to order and welcomed the new members.

Surveys on Internet use: Connie invited the members to share their experiences in distributing the surveys on Internet and computer use.

- TLT member Erin Paul spoke with 15 area realtors as well as county teachers and students. She anticipates the remaining surveys will be returned shortly.

- TLT member Rick Crosby (who provided a delicious gumbo for this lunch meeting) made contact with two local businesses. He also provided surveys to several community members to give out in their churches and community groups.

- Connie collected surveys from VCE office visitors, county students, parents, and various other community members.

- Sarah visited the Resource Council, the American Association of Retired Persons, and several youth organizations.

- TLT member Paula Groome-Turney brought surveys from the parents of children in the county-wide after school program and delivered surveys to the offices in the Intergenerational Center. Paula also offered to include LEV content in the quarterly Leisure Times Parks and Recreation Activity Guide.

- TLT member Tom Whitlock spoke to the county Agriculture Fair Association and Historical Society members.

- TLT member Vanessa Reid-Hall visited several churches and spoke to clients in her nutrition classes.

The results from the surveys will be compiled for the next meeting. A mailing list will be developed from the contact information received to notify community members of the community readiness workshops to be scheduled.

Chamber of Commerce programs: TLT member Tom Filer announced that the Chamber of Commerce produced a flyer advertising the annual "Pig-Nic" social/business event in Louisa County. The form for listing a business on the web site was included on one side of this flyer. The TLT is also invited to set up an LEV display at this event. Tom offered to include LEV updates in future Chamber newsletters.

Web site administration: Jaime Shetrone reviewed the procedures, screening choices, and overall responsibilities of the designated web administrators. These folks will add or delete villagers or businesses or organizations on the site directories. Sarah asked the team if they preferred to have the administrators screen individuals as they log in, or let them become immediately active when they register. Tom and Paula emphasized the importance of maintaining as few barriers to registration as possible, and the team concurred. TLT member Gary Hall had several questions about how to find and use the directories. Jaime announced that the BEV is developing a "how-to" manual for use by the county TLTs, with directions on how to add, change, or delete categories in the local business and community organization sections. Tom suggested adding Hay, Agricultural, and Historical as categories.

Forming workgroups: Erin asked about the future roles and responsibilities of TLT members. Connie suggested forming workgroups as a way to multi-task and conduct more productive meetings**.**

Three workgroups were recommended with the following tasks:

- Administration—Erin and Rick suggested contacting some people in the Louisa public school system about creating community service/internship opportunities for students to participate in this project. Erin recommended a link on the web site with disclaimers. Tom raised the issue of registration for participation in the Discussion Forum, posing whether or not we should be able to trace users so they can be held accountable for their comments.

- Features—The group discussed a submission process for the Features site. All of the people/groups to be featured must be registered users beforehand. Members also agreed to use specified (interesting) interview questions.

- Promotion—Erin suggested contacting the local *Central Virginian* (CV) newspaper about an exchange of information agreement: a block of LEV ads in exchange for a weekly CV feature on the home page. LEV postcards have been created for distribution. A demonstration of the LEV will be featured at the Louisa County Chamber of Commerce annual "Pig-Nic."

Technology Leadership Team - September 17, 2003 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa

Present: 3 TLT members, VCE Agent Sarah Cooper, VCE Area Specialist Jon Johnson, Blacksburg Electronic Village Staff member Robert Roberts

Web site update: The Features section of the web site will soon be up and running. An outline form will be created on-line that can be used by the team and public to suggest people to be featured periodically.

The Calendar can go live when volunteer administrators are in place. Events are sent to the administrator for approval, and then entered. TLT members can log onto the test site to learn how to use the calendar.

The TLT must select an administrative team to manage the overall site on a day to day basis. BEV will help with technical assistance but the TLT must take over the daily management of listings and content by December 2003.

Social Services requested a tab on the LEV because they want to be listed under many of the topic headings. They are eligible for a site through the county.

Community Readiness Workshops: Sarah Cooper and Jon Johnson met with Steve Toler and Jim Baldwin at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the information needs of local businesses and what might be included in an upcoming Workshop. The tentative date is October 29, 2003. Steve's expertise is on-line marketing and Jim's is optimizing search engines.

Discussion Forum training: Robert Roberts demonstrated the use of the discussion board on the test site. The team found it difficult to read the black text on the blue background and suggested making the text white. The TLT will need to make some decisions about discussion board management. The administrator could receive an e-mail whenever a message is posted to alert him/her to review the content, or the administrator might just review posted messages regularly. A disclaimer statement about editing is needed. TLT member Paula Groome-Turney suggested that if messages are edited, a note should be added indicating that the moderator has edited this post.

Web site administration: Requirements for joining the web site as a villager need to be developed. For example, will businesses or people from Charlottesville or other areas outside of Louisa be allowed to register?

The need for volunteer help to continue improving and maintaining this site remains an issue. Administrators must be in place before the calendar and discussion forums are launched. Paula suggested that Extension agents make phone contact with all previous TLT members to see if they are still available to help. Larry Kavanaugh at the high school will be called about possible involvement of students. The Lake Anna population will also be targeted.

Technology Leadership Team - May 27, 2004 – Louisa County Office Building, Louisa – 12:00 pm

Present: 2 TLT members, VCE Agent Judy Stevens, VCE Agent Charles Rosson, TOP Project Coordinator Jaime Shetrone, VCE Community Initiatives Specialist Pamela Gibson, Blacksburg Electronic Village Director Bill Sanders

TOP project evaluation: The major agenda item was an evaluation of the TOP project led by Pamela Gibson. TLT members were asked to respond to a series of questions as to the successes and limitations of the project and give their suggestions for how things might be done differently in the future. TLT members who did not attend this meeting were given the opportunity to respond by e-mail to Jaime Shetrone. Bill Sanders, the incoming Director of the BEV, shared his ideas about the contribution of a community network to economic development. TLT members shared their ideas and concerns about the sustainability of the network after the grant expired.

COMMUNITY READINESS WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING

The community readiness workshops described in the Implementation Plan were intended to help county residents develop the technology skills they would need to participate in web site programs such as the Virtual Business Incubator and Community Connections. Another goal for these workshops was to train TLT members or other local volunteers to administer the county site and assume responsibility for its content when the grant was completed**.**

Training for the Technology Leadership Team

Early in the project training was offered to the local TLT with the expectation that they would share what they learned with the organizations or communities they represented. At the first meeting of the newly formed TLT on January 15, 2002 Top Project Director Mathew Mathai and TOP Project Coordinator Jaime Shetrone presented an introduction to community networks and demonstrated the features that would be included on the county web site. They also encouraged the TLT to begin thinking about the content that would be needed for each section. On June 18, 2003 Jaime Shetrone provided web administrator training to the TLT. BEV Staff Member Robert Roberts visited the TLT on September 17, 2003 to explain the use of the discussion forum and calendar programs and the responsibilities of the volunteer administrator. Jaime Shetone and Robert Roberts traveled to Louisa County on March 17, 2004 to provide transition training to five TLT members and prepare them to assume responsibility for managing site content.

Training for the Community

The Louisa TLT initiated several programs and workshops for community members. These included general information sessions to make residents aware of the features and best use of the web site and programs intended for entrepreneurs relating to e-commerce and Internet marketing.

Chamber of Commerce Community Picnic

The TLT sponsored a booth at the Chamber of Commerce "Pig-Nic" barbeque in June 2003. The Louisa Electronic Village postcards were available along with forms to register as a villager, or list a business or community organization on the web site directories. This social event attracts residents and businesses from across the County.

How To Get Noticed When No One Knows You're There

This workshop was led by Steve Toler and Jim Baldwin of Richmond who are affiliated with NetBaldwin/Mosbygrey. It was held on October 29, 2003 at the Louisa County Office Building. The speakers explained in laymen's terms how to make the most of your organization's presence on the web. Topics included**:**

- How to get your site to the top of search engine listings
- How you can cost effectively advertise on the Internet
- How to leverage conventional advertising to maximize your site traffic

Using Community Connections and the Virtual Business Incubator

The Community Connections and Virtual Business Incubator programs were officially launched in Louisa County on March 17, 2004. TOP Project Coordinator Jaime Shetrone demonstrated how to create a web page using Netscape Composer. At the close of the workshop, five people signed up for Virtual Business Incubator accounts.

MARKETING AND PUBLICITY EFFORTS

In an effort to inform all county residents about the TOP program and the opportunities to participate, the following articles were published in newspapers serving Louisa County. Other marketing materials were developed for distribution to the general public and use by the TLT. Copies of available materials are located in Appendix C.

Riddell, James: Press Release: Louisa County to get greater access to "Information Economy," Summer, 2002.

Karnes, Terry: "Electronic village status on horizon for Louisa County;" *The Lake Anna Observer*; December 1, 2001.

Chaplin, Judy: "Louisa dives into cyber age;" *The Lake Anna Observer*; June 1, 2002.

Use of the computer and Internet: A technology survey developed by the Technology Leadership Team was posted on the Louisa Electronic Village web site, published in the newspaper, and circulated at church, civic, and other community meetings.

The Louisa Electronic Village: Postcard developed by the Technology Leadership Team to publicize the web site. It was distributed around the county and at the Chamber of Commerce community Pig-Nic celebration.

Using the Louisa Electronic Village: Articles and updates have been included in the Leisure Times Parks and Recreation quarterly activity guide distributed free to all residents in Louisa.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The TOP Implementation Plan included several expected outcomes that could be used to measure the success of this project. First, we hoped to increase the participation of community residents in local government and decision-making. Second, it was important that community members begin to use the web site by registering as a Villager, registering their organization or business on the appropriate directory, and visiting the Discussion Forum. Finally, we looked to contribute to local economic development and new business start-ups as indicated by listings on the Business Directory and new accounts on the Virtual Business Incubator.

We also wanted to evaluate the methods used in carrying out this project and learn from participants what might have been done differently to improve the project. As VCE and BEV continue our partnership, it is important for us to recognize how to better help individuals and rural communities take advantage of technology to spur their economic growth.

We were not able to obtain quantitative information on each of these outcomes, but we have presented below the evaluation material that was available to us. Included are comments obtained from the TLT regarding the overall success of the project. We also have given statistics describing the levels of participation in web site features and the number of individuals signing up for Virtual Business Incubator and Community Connections accounts. Additional information is being collected by an external evaluator and will be available to each county.

Thoughts From the TLT

To learn more about the local reaction to the project, including its successes and limitations, Pamela Gibson, VCE Community Initiatives Specialist, met with the TLT on May 27, 2004. The questions she asked and responses she received are given below.

What are your general impressions of the project?

Initially they had visions about the value of the project, but those were overshadowed by high personnel turnover in the Louisa County Extension Office (they are now on their fourth leader of the project) and the fact that there was already a web site about Louisa, developed by a private party.

What are your feelings on the issue identification process you used?

Louisa County chose to use their Comprehensive Plan for issue identification. TLT members present weren't aware of how these issues were identified or integrated into the web site.

How do you feel about the technology related to this project?

The web site is good, the structure is good, and it has good links.

To what extent did the issues identification process influence the development of the technology piece?

Members were not aware of the issues identification process or how it tied into the project.

What were some of the things that went well?

There were some good, well-qualified people willing to volunteer to help. The web site is good with good links. People are still joining. TLT members are looking forward to the technology report from John Nichols.

What were some things that didn't go well?

The biggest problem was the lack of continuity in Extension personnel. There was a reluctance to volunteer to work on the project because of the turnover in the office. They were afraid of getting stuck with too much work.

There was very little marketing of the site or attempt to get merchants. The restriction of businesses with fewer than 5 employees (for the Virtual Business Incubator program) was too tight.

If you had to pick one major success as a result of this project, what would that be?

The web site is up and running, people are still meeting and joining the village.

What would you do differently?

There needs to be a patron to push the project and follow through with the marketing, advertising, and publicity. They should have gotten government officials involved early in the project to help with community buy-in. There needs to be better advertising and a way to reach merchants. A TLT member noted that she would like to talk to the other TOP counties to see how they are doing things.

What additional or unanticipated things, positive or negative, happened as a result of this project?

The biggest unanticipated thing to happen was the high turnover in the Extension Office. With no continuity in leadership, it was difficult to get the project off the ground.

What collaboration has resulted from this project?

Respondents couldn't think of any collaborative efforts in their county.

Participation in the Louisa Electronic Village

VISITS TO THE LOUISA ELECTRONIC VILLAGE SITE
(Data compiled on August 1, 2004)

Month	Total Visits	Unique Visitors	Calendar Visits	Village Mall Visits	Organization Directory Visits
5/2003	82	54	11	27	21
6/2003	262	124	29	113	83
7/2003	258	160	29	93	57
8/2003	218	158	22	57	38
9/2003	.283	165	40	67	57
10/2003	255	154	54	70	63
11/2003	307	181	31	56	48
12/2003	260	142	44	54	51
1/2004	467	281	75	96	75
2/2004	340	230	46	71	75
3/2004	521	240	87	27	103
4/2004	427	231	37	110	72
5/2004	538	318	62	107	40
6/2004	850	420	124	256	106
7/2004	597	333	47	119	64
Grand Totals	**5665**	**3190**	**738**	**1422**	**954**

LISTINGS ON THE LOUISA ELECTRONIC VILLAGE DIRECTORIES
(Data compiled on August 1, 2004)

Total Villagers	Total Businesses	Total Organizations
55	46	23

VIRTUAL BUSINESS INCUBATOR AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ACCOUNTS
(Data compiled August 1, 2004)

Virtual Business Incubator	Community Connections
5	1

EVENTS AND MEETINGS POSTED ON THE COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Government (recurring)
Review of North Anna Power Plant
Louisa County Commission on Aging
Louisa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting

Civic and Religious (recurring)
Louisa Electronic Village Technology Leadership Team
Louisa County Chamber of Commerce
Louisa County Lion's Club
Louisa County Rotary Club
Louisa County Garden Club
Louisa County Historical Society
Louisa County Democratic Committee
Louisa County Republican Committee
Louisa County Ruritan Club
Louisa County Veterans of Foreign Wars
Louisa County Senior Center
Louisa K. S. Club
Crime Solvers Meeting
Alliance of Black Churches
Friends of the Louisa County Library
Lake Anna Civic Association
Lake Anna Cruizers Car Club
Holly Grove Ruritan Club
NARFE Meeting
Singin' Seniors
Trevilian Station Battlefield Foundation
Volunteers of Louisa

Youth (recurring)
4-H Clover Bud Club
4-H Livestock Club
4-H Young Riders Horse and Pony Club
4-H Home-School Club
4-H Teen Club
Karate Class

Events
Community Awareness Day
Louisa County Make A Difference Day
Louisa Electronic Village On-line Marketing Workshop
Egg Hunt
Relay for Life
Louisa County Intergenerational Open House

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Louisa Electronic Village was the second TOP community network to be opened to the public in June 2003. The Louisa site has experienced continuing growth in total visits and in the number of civic and nonprofit organizations that have chosen to post their meetings or activities on the Community Calendar. The posting of all 4-H activities is attracting youth to the site. The unique accomplishments of the program in Louisa County are described below;

- Early on the Louisa TLT developed a community survey to estimate about how many families in Louisa had computers and Internet access. They also hoped to learn more about community training needs and use this information to plan the content of the community readiness workshops to be held later in the project. The survey was posted on the web site and distributed to community and civic groups across the county. The King and Queen TLT later adopted this idea of posting a computer needs and use survey on their web site.

- The Louisa TLT developed some marketing strategies for raising community awareness of their site that could be a model for other counties and future projects. The VCE leaders worked with the Louisa TLT to develop a PowerPoint presentation to market the web site with community groups. Each TLT member was asked to visit five organizations in their immediate community and use this presentation to promote participation in the Louisa Electronic Village. The original TOP proposal emphasized the importance of a diverse membership on the county TLT, with the intent that members could carry what they learned back to the individual community and organizations that they represented. The goal of the Louisa group to have each member visit several local government, social, or civic groups built on this idea.

- The Louisa TLT developed an orientation packet that included basic information about the Louisa Electronic Village and sign-up forms for the villager, business, and organization directories. Each TLT member received a packet for use with the organizations they visited. Packets were also distributed to various citizen groups.

- The Louisa TLT developed an attractive postcard to advertise the Louisa Electronic Village. This was a unique idea for cost-effective marketing as the postcard could easily be distributed by businesses, in schools, or at recreational events.

- The Louisa TLT sponsored several workshops and activities to promote community access and information about the web site. A demonstration booth at the annual Chamber of Commerce community picnic reached both youth and adults. A workshop describing on-line marketing techniques provided information to new business owners looking to establish a web presence through the Virtual Business Incubator and supported existing businesses in their efforts to market their products or services in Louisa or across Virginia and the world.

- The Louisa TLT has reached out to civic and business groups in the County. The Louisa Chamber of Commerce has included updates about the Louisa Electronic Village and forms for registering on the business directory in their regular newsletter. Updates on the community network appear in the quarterly publication of the Louisa Parks and Recreation Commission. The Public Information Officer of the Louisa County School District serves on the TLT and acts as a liaison for continuing cooperation and the potential development of student internships with web site design and community training.

- Over the 14 months that the site has been open to the public, there have been a total of 5,665 visits by 3,190 unique visitors. The Business Directory has received 1,422 visits although there were fewer visits (954) to the Community Directory. The Louisa site has been highly successful in attracting postings from many civic and social groups. Service organizations such as the Lions, Rotary, and Ruritans, interest groups including the garden, car, and historical societies, political parties, and Friends of the Library all post their regular meetings on the Community Calendar. County 4-H activities are included on the Calendar for the convenience of both youth and their parents. The Commission on Aging and Parks and Recreation Commission post all meetings. Other governing boards such as the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, School Board, or local Town Councils may be encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to post meetings and agendas.

- The Louisa program has assisted in the development of tutorials that will accompany a new web site design program and web content management system soon to be available to all TOP counties. The Blacksburg Electronic Village is finalizing these programs to simplify the process for businesses and organizations who wish to develop a web site and also reduce the time and effort required of the volunteer web site administrators. The Louisa Extension agent who recently participated in a web site design class provided peer review with suggestions for making the tutorials more user-friendly.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Louisa has joined the POWER program (Power Offers Web Economic Resources) of the Blacksburg Electronic Village that will provide both local and remote volunteers with experience in web site design. Cooperative arrangements with community colleges, noncredit training programs, and schools are making available opportunities for students to not only learn web site design, but also gain experience by developing web pages for participants in the TOP Virtual Business Incubator and Community Connections programs in Louisa. These web pages will be linked to the Louisa Electronic Village. Businesses and nonprofit groups will benefit from this assistance with their web pages, and students will obtain work experience and hone skills valuable in the job market. The Extension Agent in Louisa County also has arranged for a staff member of the Blacksburg Electronic Village to conduct a web design workshop in their county this fall.

Extension Agent Judy Stevens is developing a bi-lingual section on the Louisa Electronic Village to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic population in that County.

The Technology Assessment and Master Plan made available through the TOP program will assist leaders as they look forward to expanding high speed Internet access in Louisa.

LESSONS LEARNED

The TOP Project was developed to bring a new vision of prosperity through technology to seven rural Virginia counties. Although previous experience provided a basis for the TOP project, counties are different just as individuals are different, and methods successful in one situation may not be successful in another. With this in mind, we have looked back across all counties and developed a series of "Lessons Learned"— things that might have been done differently and would have contributed to overall project success. These lessons could be guideposts for future projects, assisting both counties and implementation teams as they develop new approaches to bring technology to rural communities.

Conduct a Situation Analysis

Identifying competing projects

In several TOP counties community networks had already been established under public or private sponsorship. Although the TOP project was intended to complement, not replace these existing networks, on-going questions about duplication of effort hampered progress and prevented the community from seeing alternative benefits.

Recommendation: Implement new technology projects in counties or communities where the concept of a community network is brand new.

Focusing on counties rather than individual communities

The TOP proposal defined the working unit for the project as individual participating communities within a county, rather than the county as a whole. In some rural counties there are no incorporated towns, and units within the county are actually "settlement areas" or voting districts. Also, local government leaders became concerned that working with individual communities would promote the idea that one area of the county was being targeted and not another. The driving force for this project was economic development and the growth and support of new micro and home-based businesses. Funding for small business incubators and overall initiatives for rural economic development are more effective when launched as part of a county-wide rather than an individual community effort.

Recommendation: In rural areas focus on the county rather than on individual communities to provide stronger support for the development of technology infrastructure and overall economic growth.

Ensuring availability of sufficient volunteers

Individual communities with very small populations present a limited number of volunteers to support the project. Agents in all counties were having trouble recruiting Technology Leadership Team members from participating communities with few residents. To illustrate this

point, a table containing the grant-listed participating communities and their populations appears below.

Populations, Based on U.S. Bureau of Census Estimates (2000)

County	**Community**	**Population**
Accomack County		38,305
	Onancock	1,525
	Locust Mount (Wachapreague)	236
	Horntown	No data
Craig County		5,091
	New Castle	179
	Sinking Creek Valley	No data
	John's Creek Valley	No data
	Paint Bank	No data
Cumberland County		9,017
	Cartersville	No data
	Cumberland Courthouse	No data
Dickenson County		16,395
	Clintwood	1,549
	Haysi	186
Louisa County		25,627
	Mineral	424
	Bumpass	No data
King & Queen County		6,630
	King & Queen Courthouse	No data
	Newtown	No data
Northampton County		13,093
	Cheapside	No data
	Cape Charles	1,134
	Bayview	No data
	Nassawadox	572
	New Road	No data

Recommendation: Select a unit of organization, either a county or a combination of counties, with a large enough population to provide the necessary number of volunteers to carry out the tasks required.

Seeking an enthusiastic leader

When the project leader is overburdened with too many competing responsibilities or lacks commitment to the project, for whatever reason, progress is slow. An enthusiastic leader keeps people interested and the project moving ahead. Moreover, the leader doesn't necessarily have to understand all the technical details as long as he/she has a good idea of the general breadth of the project and its goals.

Recommendation: Actively seek a volunteer to lead the project, rather than assigning an individual who may not have a true interest in the project or bring the enthusiasm necessary to recruit others. The county leader may be paid staff or a community member who is willing to donate his/her time.

Arranging for training facilities

Several counties did not have a local facility for hands-on computer training. When a computer-equipped facility was not available, both TLT members and the general public did not receive the same quality of training as in those counties with an accessible computer laboratory.

Recommendation: Identify and secure a suitable technology training facility when the project is in the planning stage. If none can be found in the county, arrange for a site nearby, and include fees for facility use and travel in the budget.

Plans for Project Implementation

Conducting *Take Charge*

Several participating counties had completed a community planning forum and developed a county comprehensive plan within two years of the start of the project, and chose to use that plan to guide their vision, rather than carrying out *Take Charge*. In these counties there tended to be less direction as to the potential benefits of technology in support of economic growth, and the project had less momentum to move it forward. *Take Charge* not only provided a means to identify issues in the county and specifically relate them to technology, but also attracted people to the TOP project in general and helped to build a sense of community that supported future activities of the TLT. Even among those counties that carried out the *Take Charge* program, the

connectivity between the community network and economic development and community participation became less clear as the project continued.

Recommendation: Complete *Take Charge* in all counties. Schedule follow-up sessions to *Take Charge*, about every six months, to link the issues and goals identified by the community and the emerging technology.

Recruiting a Technology Leadership Team

In some counties the TLT was recruited primarily through letters of invitation to county leaders holding office in local government or in civic or community organizations. People who already are very active in county-based projects or programs may not feel that they have the time or energy for yet another monthly meeting. A broad mix of people including youth provided a source of energy and enthusiasm for technology that helped to keep a project moving forward.

Recommendation: Develop a broad-based strategy to assemble members for the TLT, using newspaper and radio advertising, letters to the faith-based community, and flyers or posters in public places such as stores, the post office, and theaters.

Attracting volunteers both with and without technical skills

The use of the term Technology Leadership Team to designate the local steering committee may have implied that members were expected to have a high level of technical proficiency. Overall, rather few residents with limited technology background volunteered to serve on their TLT. When this project was first conceived, it was based on the idea that volunteers would not have to be technically proficient in order to participate. We still hold this belief to be true. A variety of skills added strength to the team, especially when participants were willing to learn and move outside of their established comfort zone. Sometimes those who are very technically adept are less experienced at marketing or presenting. There was room for and need in this project for people with a variety of skills, abilities, and interests.

Recommendation: Select a name for the local steering committee that is more inclusive, and will attract not only those with technical expertise, but others who bring skills in communication, group facilitation, and marketing.

Scheduling meeting times

Technology Leadership Teams that met during the work day or at noon had lower attendance. People often find it difficult to attend a voluntary meeting during the work day, especially when they have a long commute as was true for many of the people in these rural communities.

Recommendation: Schedule meetings in the evening, possibly with a supper option, to encourage people to attend.

Estimating time commitment

The time commitment required of local leaders turned out to be more than was expected when the project was conceived. The project became a burden on the team leader, and there was no provision for a back-up person to assume responsibility when the team leader was called away because of personal or work issues.

Recommendation: Provide funding to support a paid, part-time person in each county to assist the local agent or volunteer leader with project tasks.

Setting web site policies and procedures

Web site security was an issue with all of the county projects.

Examples of questions forwarded to the BEV team included:

- What security measures are/will be in place to protect the county sites?
- How is content regulated during the life of the grant? For instance, can a local witchcraft shop be prevented from listing its address on the village mall?
- How can links to porn sites or other sites not supported by the community be prevented?
- What kinds of policies should be in place after the grant is completed and the county site continues to operate?

Recommendation: 1) Develop security and operating procedures before the project starts, so questions can be answered in a timely manner. 2) Make available a resource on web site policies, because volunteers do not feel qualified or able to create policy. 3) Involve the university attorney or other qualified person in developing web content policy.

Appendix A – Project Implementation Materials

Contents:

- Services Provided to the TOP Counties by the Blacksburg Electronic Village
- TOP Implementation Plan
- Letter of Commitment from Louisa Board of Supervisors

SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE TOP COUNTIES BY THE BLACKSBURG ELECTRONIC VILLAGE

BEV IN A BOX

Community Web Site Hosting

Each community received web space and server administration for a community web site. This is a full service, permanent site with nightly backups, complete statistics reporting, full text search engine, and 125 megabytes of space.

Community Web Site Design

BEV web design staff designed a community web site in collaboration with the Technology Leadership Team. The BEV elicited input from the committee, developed an overall site design, developed pre-coded HTML templates for all content areas on the site, and provided training to the committee on how to update and maintain the pages.

Community Village Mall (Business Directory)

The BEV provided an automated online business directory (identical in functionality to the BEV Village Mall) for each community to help local businesses gain more recognition online, especially from local customers. The BEV Village Mall is the most popular part of the BEV web site, and use continues to rise steadily. Local businesses can create and edit their own entries/links--no manual support is needed. The look of the pages will be fully integrated into the community web site.

Online Community Directory

The BEV provided an automated online directory (identical in function to the BEV Community Directory). The directory allows individuals and organizations in the community to create and maintain their own directory entries, which include their name, e-mail address, and URL/link to a web site (if one exists). Directory entries can also include telephone numbers and addresses if the person/organization wants to share that.

Online Community Calendar

The BEV provided each community with an online, interactive community calendar. The community web site committee will be able to add, delete, and update events as needed. The calendar will be integrated into the main web site.

Online Discussion Forum

The BEV provided a complete online forum system for use by community and civic groups and local government. Online conference systems make it easy to talk about and organize community projects and initiatives, to hold town meetings about important issues, or just to help people meet and learn about their neighbors.

Community Connections (Community Group Web Sites)

The BEV is providing community and civic groups with the same web site hosting services that the BEV provides in Blacksburg. Currently, over 150 organizations use BEV Community Connections services.

The BEV will set up an online registration system so that no local technical or setup support is required, and will provide the community a URL (e.g. civic.ourtown.org, or whatever is requested).

Groups receiving a Community Connections account get:

- A web site (up to 20 megabytes of text and graphics)
  Sample URL: *http://civic.yourcountyaddress.net/yourgroup/*
- Two permanent email addresses for group use (with forwarding, if needed), and webmail access.
  Sample address: *yourgroup@civic.yourcountyaddress.net*
- A broadcast mailing list that makes it easy to send messages to your members (up to 100 subscribers).
  Example: *yourgroup@civic.yourcountyaddress.net*

Please note: This package does not include web site design and development. Community groups are responsible for the development of their own web site.

Virtual Business Incubator

BEV provides a virtual business incubator service to help home-based and microbusiness enterprises (businesses with fewer than 5 employees) get started. This service is similar to the Community Connections service.

Groups receiving a Virtual Business Incubator account get:

- A web site (up to 20 megabytes of text and graphics)
  Sample URL: *http://vbi.yourcountyaddress.net/yourgroup/*

- Two permanent email addresses for group use (with forwarding, if needed), and webmail access.
  Sample address: *yourgroup@vbi.yourcountyaddress.net*
- A broadcast mailing list that makes it easy to send messages to your members (up to 100 subscribers).
  Example: *yourgroup@vbi.yourcountyaddress.net*

Participating businesses also receive marketing and business management assistance to help understand how to successfully integrate the Internet into their business.

Please note: This package does not include web site design and development. Businesses are responsible for the development of their own web site.

Implementation plan for the "Getting Rural Virginia Connected" TOP grant funded project

Goal

To allow counties listed below (also referred to as "participating communities" in this document) to use technology effectively to improve local social and economic conditions while including as many citizens as possible in each community's decision-making process.

Counties

- Accomack
- Craig
- Cumberland
- Dickenson
- King and Queen
- Louisa
- Northampton

Key Outcomes

1. Increased attendance at public meetings on key community issues by 15% per year.
2. A technology plan for each community with measurable milestones that directly address at least four serious social and/or economic issues identified by the community itself.
3. Increased Internet use in each community by 15% per year.
4. A fully functional, community network using local community members to manage content.
5. At least three new home-based and small business startups in each community each year.
6. At least six civic groups and organizations online in each community each year
7. An Information Technology Master Plan for each community
8. Permanent increased capacity in each community to use technology and the
9. Identification of and planning for regional technology corridors linking multiple communities

Implementation Task List

1. **Conduct Extension Agent Training**
   Extension agents will be briefed about the proposed implementation plan for this project. They will also receive training in the following areas:

   a. **Introduction to telecommunications infrastructure**
   Help extension agents become familiar with the telecomm infrastructure issues facing rural communities. Agents will learn how to help communities become more independent in setting local agendas for telecommunications.

   b. **Community assessment**
   Extension agents will learn how to conduct community assessment, with a special focus on telecommunications. An Extension specialist will lead this section, with assistance from

Information Systems staff. The CSPP model will be used as a starting point for technology assessment.

c. **Introduction to community networks**
Extension agents will learn how community networks make local communities more effective in solving problems, engaging citizens in local issues and creating a stronger sense of community.

In addition to these training sessions, agents will also be informed about the evaluation component of this project and their role in collecting relevant data for the evaluation process. See Appendix A: Evaluation Plan for Key Outcomes for an overview of the evaluation process.

2. **Obtain support from county administrators and leaders within the county**
For this project to be a success, administrators and other leaders within each of the nine counties must support this effort in their respective counties. Extension agents will contact county administrators and leaders (preferably with a personal phone call) to explain project goals and outcomes and request their support for the project. The list of people to be contacted includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- Board of Supervisors
- County administrator
- Chamber of Commerce
- Representatives of Industrial/Economic Development groups
- Superintendent of Schools
- School Board
- Extension Leadership Council

Agents will also request these leaders to provide names of citizens that they know especially within participating communities who they think might be willing to serve on the technology leadership teams.

3. **Identify Local Technology Leadership Teams**
Each ***participating community*** will have a citizen team, referred to in the grant document as the Technology Leadership Team. Using the process described in the section titled Recruiting members for the TLT, agents will recruit ten to twelve citizens from each participating community. These individuals will have a strong interest and commitment to the effort and willingness to contribute time and energy to provide leadership and direction. This group will include representatives from local governments, business and agribusiness, industry, public education, the faith community, civic organizations, youth, and seniors. **Technology Leadership Teams will play a pivotal role in the overall success of this project.**

These teams will perform the following functions:

0. Serve as the core group for planning and implementing the Take Charge program that will reach out to the entire community. In their capacity as the planning committee for the Take Charge process, they will undertake the preparatory tasks needed to facilitate this process successfully within their communities. These tasks are listed in Appendix B: Getting Ready for the Take Charge Process

1. Advise and coordinate local program planning and to communicate and advocate the process to all segments of the community.

2. Work with project staff and Virginia Tech faculty to perform an assessment of current technology in the community using the CSPP model and other instruments.

3. Serve as facilitators in community workshops and forums to enhance the understanding of the general public on the potential of technology.

4. Work with project staff to identify and secure the resources necessary to fulfill and sustain the strategies of the local plan.

5. Remain in place after the end of the TOP funding with a commitment to continuing to provide technology leadership in the county.

Recruiting members for the TLT: Extension Agents are fundamental to the process of recruiting these members because they know their communities and the members that represent the power base. They will use the following process to recruit members for the Technology Teams *in each participating community*:

6. Begin by inviting members of the local government board or council. This is usually best accomplished by a personal phone call explaining the process and intended outcomes. Agents should get a firm commitment from at least one member of the board or council in each of the participating communities.

7. Create a list of other leaders in the communities using Appendix C: Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers as a guideline. Every effort should be made to include as many sectors as possible. Inform these individuals about the project and invite them to join this effort.

8. Contact individuals identified by local leaders as most active and likely to champion the process. Request these individuals that if they cannot participate that they recommend likely individuals who could then be invited to serve on the leadership team. In most cases, several follow-ups may be necessary to fill all segments of the community.

9. Publicize the project and the need for participants from within the general population using a combination of the following suggestions:

    1. Plan an informational meeting to collect interested parties

    2. Meet and make informal presentations to local groups to generate interest

    3. Run advertisements for the informational meeting in the local papers

    4. Distribute and flyers place posters within the community

    5. Send out personal invitations to groups such as, but not limited to:

        - Clubs and organizations in the community
        - Fire/Rescue
        - Service organizations
        - NAACP
        - Churches
        - Principals and staff of all schools

- Historical societies
- Business heads that have shown support for progress in the county
- Private residents that have shown interest in economic growt
- Senior Citizens groups

This process is designed to provide an opportunity for citizens from all walks of life within participating communities to volunteer for this project. Standardizing on a recruitment process ensures that all interested parties have the same opportunities for volunteering for this effort. It also allows the project management team to document and report efforts made within each community to the Department of Commerce (the organization that's funding this effort).

Selecting team members for the TLT: TLT members will be selected based upon the following criteria:

10. They have a personal commitment to using technology to improve the community
11. They are willing to participate actively in both training and ongoing citizen team training
12. They represent a broad cross section of the community
13. They remain in place past the end of the grant period in order to help their communities with their ongoing technology needs

As part of the selection process, **agents will inform each member that unless otherwise requested, their names and the community they are representing will be displayed on the TOP Website and also supplied to the Department of Commerce for record keeping purposes.** *No other personal information will be displayed on the Web site or provided to the Department of Commerce.* Members have the freedom to list other information in the community directory if they choose to do so.

Agents will email the TOP Coordinator (jaime.dunton@vt.edu) the following:

14. A summary of the steps they took to recruit the team
15. A list of its members selected including name, occupation (specific companies are not required)/segment of society they represent, and community they are representing.

Note: Where appropriate, activities of the various community citizen teams will be combined and coordinated at the county level in order to simplify the logistics of providing training and related information to these teams.

4. **Train Technology Leadership Teams**
TLT members receive training in three areas:

. **Introduction to telecommunications**
Team members will become familiar with the telecomm infrastructure issues facing rural communities. Team members would learn how to help their communities become more independent in setting local agendas for telecommunications.

a. **Take Charge**
Team members will learn how the Take Charge program works, key aspects and phases of the initiative, and how to participate effectively in Take Charge. During this session, responsibilities for finding suitable locations in three areas of the county, establishing dates

for the community meetings, finding sponsors for food, notebooks, copying, workshop materials, and establishing a plan for advertising the Take Charge program will be divided among various team members. See Appendix B: Getting Ready for the Take Charge Process for details.

b. **Introduction to community networks**
Team members will learn how community networks make local communities more effective in solving problems, engaging citizens in local issues, and creating a stronger sense of community. Team members would also receive training in how to use email and the Web (if needed), and how to use online tools effectively to support communication within the community.

5. **Conduct Take Charge Workshops**
Extension agents will facilitate the Take Charge program that includes three, three-hour workshops. These workshops are designed to foster collaboration among the citizens of each community, to move the group toward consensus, and to provide a framework for creating a vision for the county. *All participating communities within a county will come together for these workshops.*

Workshop #1 - Where Are We Now?

- Examine historical and current trends and characteristics of the community and consider implications for the future.
- Self examination of the community's strengths and vulnerabilities in terms of financial, social, human, and natural assets.

Workshop #2 - Where Do We Want To Be?

- Develop a collective vision for the future of the community. Findings for each community will be combined to develop a collective vision for the future of the county.
- Assess the opportunities for and threats to achieving that vision.

Workshop #3 - How Do We Get There?

- Identify and frame overarching development issues
- Identify existing resources to help address these issues
- Explore alternative ways to organize the community for action

Issues identified by the Technology Leadership Teams during the Take Charge process will be highlighted on each community's Web site.

6. **Hold Community Readiness Workshops**
These workshops are open to citizens at large and local community teams. Topics include:

. Why community networks and technology investments help communities make the transition to the Information Economy

a. How community networks increase worker job skills and expand the pool of high tech workers

b. How technology can help rural communities retain traditional "small town" qualities and remain active, vibrant communities

c. What communities have to do to attract high tech companies

d. How to set up and run a community network

7. **Perform Community Technology Assessments**
   Extension agents work with TLT members to perform an assessment of current technology in the community, using the CSPP model and other instruments developed by Virginia Tech. These assessments will be used to guide the development of technology master plans for the community.

8. **Deploy Community Network**
   Each community will receive professional support and all systems needed to have a complete local version of the Blacksburg Electronic Village services referred to as ***BEV in a Box*** customized for the community. Design team meetings will be held with each community team to design the community Web site and services. This deployment of BEV in a Box will be done in stages and will include the following activities:

   0. Meeting to discuss and finalize design issues

   1. Training on the use of the various components of BEV in a Box i.e. discussion forum, community calendar, community directory, community village mall

   2. Training on maintaining the Community Network and Community Connection accounts.

9. **Develop Technology Master Plan**
   BEV staff and Extension agents will meet with community leaders over a nine month period to develop Technology Master plans for each community. They will also develop regional Master Plans that will help develop regional technology corridors.

10. **Conduct Citizen Team Meetings**
    Each community team will have ongoing meetings with the project coordinator and the local Extension agent. Community teams will also participate in cluster meetings and quarterly project meetings (all communities) to ensure constant communication and the development of regional technology corridors.

11. **Prepare Report for communities**
    A comprehensive report will be produced in partnership with local teams and disseminated to all project partners within three months following the completion of the 24 months of TOP funding.

12. **Prepare Public Report**
    Write, edit, review, and print the final public report on the effort. This report will document the model used throughout the life of the effort, include all relevant assessment data, will document the impacts of the program, and be oriented specifically to be useful by other communities and regions.

13. **Perform Assessment Research**
    The assessments conducted for each community will be used as the basis of an ongoing research effort during the two years of the project to document differences and similarities in the communities related to technology needs and impacts. BEV staff and VCE researchers will seek to discover common issues among these communities, try to identify common strategies that worked across multiple communities, and document this work in technical reports and published papers, including peer-reviewed journals.

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan for Key Outcomes

Outcome 1: Increased attendance at public meetings on key community issues by 15% per year.
Evaluation plan: Attendance lists and agendas of all public meetings will be maintained and examined through the project (this will include any public meetings that take place to address issues identified in the

Take Charge Program). This tracking should begin with the Take Charge public meetings. Items will include: meeting topic, date, location, agenda items, and total number of participants.

Outcome 2: A technology plan for each community with measurable milestones that directly address at least four serious social and/or economic issues identified by the community itself. An information technology master plan for each community.
Evaluation plan: A format for the technology master plan will be developed by project personnel. A panel of experts will be formed to review the technology master plan for each community. The panel will critique the master plan for appropriateness and practicality using a review sheet that will be developed. Once the measurable milestones have been identified, the evaluation team will work with the community to determine measurement strategies.

Outcome 3: Increased Internet use in each community by 15% per year.
Evaluation plan: Once the community website is developed and online, usage statistics will be monitored on a monthly basis to determine change in Internet use over time.

Outcome 4: A fully functional community network using local members to manage content.
Evaluation plan: Establishment of a functional and operating technology team will serve as evidence that this outcome has been achieved.

Outcome 5: At least three new home-based and small business startups in each community each year.
Evaluation plan: The community web site will be monitored for new business presence (e.g., Virtual Business Incubator, Village Mall). A survey may be developed and administered to the new startups to determine the extent to which the web presence affected their business.

Outcome 6: At least six civic groups and organizations online in each community each year.
Evaluation plan: The community web site will be monitored for civic groups' and organizations' presence (e.g., Community Connections, Organization Directory).

Outcome 7: An Information Technology Plan for each community.
Evaluation plan: The Information Technology Plan for each community will be reviewed to ensure that it contains the outcomes of the Technology Assessments conducted in each community.

Outcome 8: Permanent increased capacity in each community to use technology and the Take Charge planning process to address community needs well beyond the end of the grant period.
Evaluation plan: The Take Charge process will be evaluated at each of the three meetings as well as a follow-up survey/interview with members of the planning committee.

Outcome 9: Identification of and planning for regional technology corridors linking multiple communities.
Evaluation plan: Evidence to document this outcome will be contained in the technology master plan.

Appendix B: Getting Ready for the Take Charge Process (Pam Gibson)

Before the three community-wide meetings can take place, a planning committee made up of a cross-section of the community leadership whose activities will be coordinated by the county extension agent will have to perform the following preparatory tasks to ensure the success of this process:

1. The planning committee should reflect the various interests of the community. Please see the checklist in Appendix C: Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers for use as a guideline. Getting commitment from community sectors to work on the Take Charge program will help to guarantee that those sectors of the community will come to the community meetings. For success, there needs to be community wide buy-in by every sector in the community. It is imperative that members of the county board and town council participate. They control the budget and will have the power to implement the changes the community identifies.

2. The three community wide meetings typically occur one night a week for three consecutive weeks for three (3) hours. Typically the meetings run from 6pm to 9pm or 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm. The meeting dates should be established. Every attempt must be made to publicize these meetings at least two weeks in advance.

3. The meeting locations should vary according to the community. By varying the location, it makes at least one meeting very accessible to one portion of the county. The meeting room should accommodate 50 to 100 people with tables for work areas, room for food set up, accessible restrooms. School lunchrooms have worked well.

4. Once dates and locations are established, it is time to find some sponsors to prepare food for the three evenings. Many people have to come directly from work to attend the meeting and don't have time to eat dinner, so having things like sandwiches available makes it easier for them to attend.

5. There will need to be commitments by the planning committee to purchase or find sponsors for notebooks, create notebooks, photocopy materials, stuff notebooks.

6. Participants will need to be registered for each meeting, given name tags and notebook materials.

7. The meeting locations need to have numerous flipcharts with paper, overhead projector or other audio visual aids.

8. After dates and locations have been established, the planning committee can begin to identify how to ensure that every member of the community knows about the meetings. Pam Gibson has a brochure in MS Word that can be adapted for each county. Putting ads in the newspaper, community newsletters, hanging posters in prominent places, sending notices home with school children are some of the ways to reach members of the community. It is also important that the identified movers and shakers attend the meetings and invite their constituencies.

9. As it closer to the time of the community-wide meetings, facilitators will want to enlist others to help work with the break out groups.

10. Facilitators may also want input from local historians for the first meeting. In the past, it has been popular to have the community history prepared for the notebooks on the first night and have the local historian(s) talk about the founding of the community.

11. Someone has to agree to take notes, collect information and have it ready for the notebooks the following week.

Appendix C: Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers

(Reproduced from the Take Charge Manual, Appendix A Page 81)

- Agriculture
- Banks/Financial Institutions
- Chamber of Commerce/ Commercial Clubs
- Churches
- Civic Organizations
- Community Improvement/ Betterment Groups
- Educational Organizations
    - Schools
    - Extension Service

    - Other
- Elderly
- Health Care
- Industry
- Local Development Organizations
- Local Government
    - Town Board or City Council
    - Park Board
    - Zoning Board or Planning Commission
    - Economic Development Commission
- Professionals (Attorneys, Accountants, Architects, Marketing Specialists)
- Real Estate
- Retail Businesses
- Unions
- Utility Companies
    - (Electric, Gas, Railroads)
- Youth

LETTER OF COMMITMENT FROM THE LOUISA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

County of Louisa
Post Office Box 160
Louisa, VA 23093
540-967-0401 • • FAX 540-967-3411
www.louisacounty.com

March 12, 2001

Dr. Andrew Cohill
Director
The Blacksburg Electronic Village
840 University City Boulevard
Suite 5
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060

Dear Dr. Cohill:

The County of Louisa is excited about plans to partner with Blacksburg Electronic Village and Virginia Tech to broaden the social and economic opportunities for our citizens through the development of our own electronic village.

We envision significant local benefits including economic development, increased citizen participation in local political affairs, an increased knowledge base, a more attractive local workforce, a 21st century telecommunications infrastructure, new markets for the private sector, and new and improved ways for our citizens to communicate. We believe the creation of this community network will pay big dividends for our local government and for every citizen.

The Louisa County Board of Supervisors supports and endorses the electronic village proposal and will provide local staffing needs for this effort through the Virginia Cooperative Extension Office. $2,000 will also be provided for three years to meet the financial requirements of this grant.

We look forward to the opportunities that this project will provide to our community.

Thank you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

C. Lee Lintecum
County Administrator

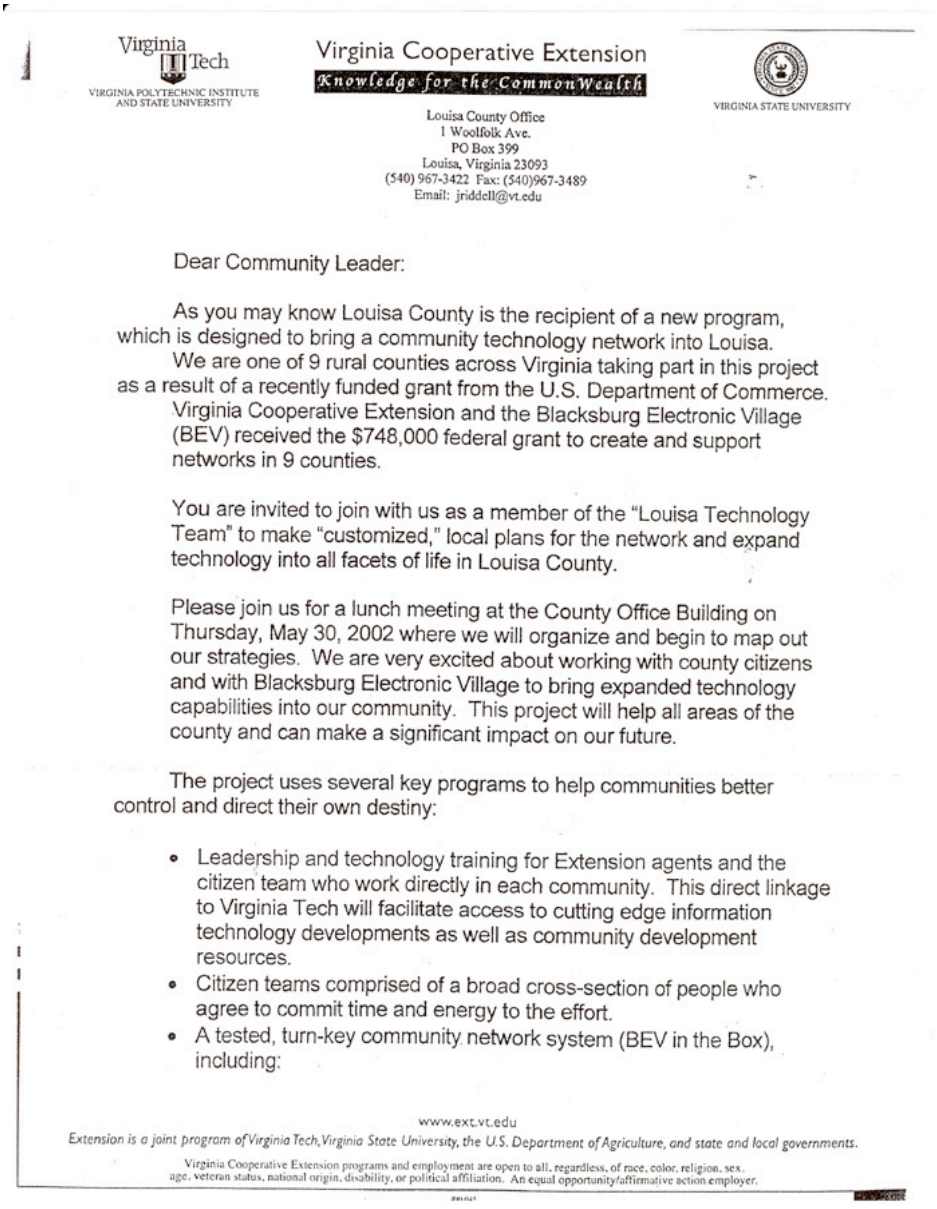
LOUISA 540-967-0401 | GOOCHLAND 804-556-3732 | RICHMOND 804-648-4115 | CHARLOTTESVILLE 804-979-0479 | GORDONSVILLE 540-832-3112 | PALMYRA 804-589-3090

Appendix B – Recruitment and Composition of the Technology Leadership Team

Contents:

- Letter of invitation to the organizational meeting of the Technology Leadership Team
- Individuals receiving a letter of invitation to join the Technology Leadership Team
- Members of the Louisa County Technology Leadership Team

LETTER OF INVITATION TO JOIN THE LOUISA COUNTY TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP TEAM



Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Virginia Cooperative Extension
Knowledge for the Commonwealth

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Louisa County Office
1 Woolfolk Ave.
PO Box 399
Louisa, Virginia 23093
(540) 967-3422 Fax: (540)967-3489
Email: jriddell@vt.edu

Dear Community Leader:

As you may know Louisa County is the recipient of a new program, which is designed to bring a community technology network into Louisa.

We are one of 9 rural counties across Virginia taking part in this project as a result of a recently funded grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce. Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) received the $748,000 federal grant to create and support networks in 9 counties.

You are invited to join with us as a member of the "Louisa Technology Team" to make "customized," local plans for the network and expand technology into all facets of life in Louisa County.

Please join us for a lunch meeting at the County Office Building on Thursday, May 30, 2002 where we will organize and begin to map out our strategies. We are very excited about working with county citizens and with Blacksburg Electronic Village to bring expanded technology capabilities into our community. This project will help all areas of the county and can make a significant impact on our future.

The project uses several key programs to help communities better control and direct their own destiny:

- Leadership and technology training for Extension agents and the citizen team who work directly in each community. This direct linkage to Virginia Tech will facilitate access to cutting edge information technology developments as well as community development resources.
- Citizen teams comprised of a broad cross-section of people who agree to commit time and energy to the effort.
- A tested, turn-key community network system (BEV in the Box), including:

www.ext.vt.edu

Extension is a joint program of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless, of race, color, religion, sex, age, veteran status, national origin, disability, or political affiliation. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

Recipients Receiving A Letter of Invitation

Name	Town	Occupation/Affiliation
Bonnie Harris	Louisa	Louisa County Administration
Connie Laws	Louisa	Louisa County Extension Office
David Melton	Mineral	Superintendent of Schools, Louisa County Public Schools
Deanna Meredith	Louisa	The Central Virginian newspaper
Fitzgerald Barnes	Louisa	Louisa County Board of Supervisors
Gail Martin	Bumpass	Lake Anna Observer
George Morrison	Louisa	Town of Louisa
Jim Candeto	Mineral	Town of Mineral
Jim Riddell	Louisa	Louisa County Extension Office
Josie Kincade	Louisa	Doctor
Linda Edwards	Louisa	Economic Development
Matthias Smith	Louisa	Information Technology/GIS, Louisa County
Patricia Robinson	Louisa	Louisa County Extension Office
Paul Oswell	Louisa	Louisa County Department of Social Services
Paula Groome-Turney	Louisa	Louisa County Department of Parks & Recreation
Phyllis Johnson	Gordonsville	
Rick Crosby	Louisa	Information Technology, Louisa County
Ron Basso	Louisa	Louisa County Department of Parks & Recreation
Shirley Stewart		Louisa County Resource Council
Tom Filer	Louisa	Louisa County Chamber of Commerce
Tom Whitlock	Louisa	Louisa County Fair, Inc.
Vicki Southall	Louisa	Nurse, member of Louisa County Extension Leadership Council

Members of the Louisa County Technology Leadership Team

Member	Town	Occupation/Affiliation
Bernice Kube	Bumpass	Lake Anna Observer
Bonnie Harris	Thelma	Religious community
Connie Laws	Mineral	Consumer Sciences and Community Initiatives Agent, Louisa County Extension Office
David Melton	Bumpass	Superintendent of Schools, Louisa County
David Morgan	Zion Crossroads	Louisa County Board of Supervisors
Erin Paul	Mineral	
Fitzgerald Barnes	Louisa	Louisa County Board of Supervisors
Fred Reid		
Hope Robarge	Louisa	
James Riddell	Mineral	Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, Louisa County Extension Office
Julia Guill-Bigelow		
Lisa Lockhart	Bumpass	
Mathias Smith	Mineral	Information Technology/GIS, Louisa County
Pat Wilson	Louisa	Lake Anna Observer
Paula Groome-Turney	Mineral	Louisa County Parks and Recreation
Rick Crosby	Bumpass	Information Technology, Louisa County
Sarah Cooper	Gordonsville	4-H Youth Development Agent, Louisa County Extension Office
Shirley Stewart	Gordonsville	
Tom Filer	Louisa	Virginia Community Bank
Tom Whitlock	Louisa	
Vicki Southall	Mineral	Nurse

Appendix C – Marketing and Publicity Materials

Contents:

- Riddell. James: Press Release: Louisa County to get greater access to the "Information Economy," Summer, 2002.
- Karnes, Terry: "Electronic village status on horizon for Louisa County;" *The Lake Anna Observer*; December 1, 2001.
- Chaplin, Judy: "Louisa dives into cyber age;" *The Lake Anna Observer*; June 1, 2002.
- "Louisa Electronic Village uses technology for the county;"
- Use of the computer and Internet: A technology survey developed by the Technology Leadership Team was posted on the Louisa Electronic Village web site, published in the newspaper, and circulated at church, civic, and other community meetings.
- The Louisa Electronic Village: Postcard developed by the Technology Leadership Team to publicize the web site. It has been distributed around the county and at the Chamber of Commerce community Pig-Nic celebration.
- Set of PowerPoint slides to market the web site to community groups

Press Release About TOP Project, Summer 2002

Contact: James Riddell
540-967-3422

Press Release

Louisa County to get greater access to "Information Economy"

Louisa County is the recipient of a new program, which is designed to bring community technology networks into 9 rural counties across Virginia. This special project is the result of a recently funded grant from the U.S Department of Commerce.

Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) received the $748,000 federal grant to create and support networks in 29 communities within the 9 counties.

"We are excited about working with county citizens and with Blacksburg Electronic Village to bring expanded technology capabilities into our community," said Jim Riddell, Louisa County Extension Agent. " This project will help all areas of the county and can make a significant impact on our future."

C. Lee Lintecum, Louisa County administrator, said, " We see this as a way to broaden the social and economic opportunities for our citizens. We envision significant local benefits, including economic development, increased citizen participation in local political affairs, an increased knowledge base, a more attractive local workforce, a 21st Century telecommunications infrastructure, new markets for the private sector, and new and improved ways for our citizens to communicate."

Andrew Cohill, Director of the BEV, said, "The project will help rural communities in Virginia develop the capacities needed to prosper in the Information Age economy. It will permanently increase the capacity of these communities to take control of and use technology effectively to improve local economic conditions, while including many more citizens in the decision making process."

BEV, a part of Virginia Tech's Information Systems, and Virginia Cooperative Extension will jointly administer the project, "Getting Rural Virginia Connected."

In an innovative partnership, Virginia Cooperative Extension's community planning process is being allied with the Blacksburg Electronic Village's "BEV in a Box" program. BEV's staff will work closely with the local citizens and Extension agents to bring the participating counties a broad combination of technical expertise from Virginia Tech.

J. David Barrett, Director of Cooperative Extension, said, "We are excited to be able to extend technology and new community planning programs to rural communities from the Eastern Shore to far southwest Virginia. We are taking the time-tested Extension model into the 21st century. Extension's mission has always been to provide education for people -- in their communities -- to improve their livelihood and their lives. This is one more way that we are fulfilling that mission."

BEV, originally created by Virginia Tech and Blacksburg area citizens in 1993, is one of the oldest continuously operated community networks in the country. "This funding will allow us to fulfill one of the original goals of our project, which was to share what we have learned with communities across the Commonwealth," Cohill said.

The communities selected for the program are Accomack, Carroll, Craig, Cumberland, Dickenson, Grayson, Louisa, King and Queen, and Northampton counties.

The differences in the technology capabilities between rural and suburban/urban areas are not unique to these Virginia counties. Most rural communities across the U.S. lag significantly behind their urban counterparts. A primary reason Louisa County was selected was that it is similar in some aspects to other rural counties in Virginia and the nation. Additionally, local government has shown strong support for partnering with Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Blacksburg Electronic Village.

The project uses four key programs to help communities better control and direct their own destiny:

- Leadership and technology training for local and area Extension agents who work directly in each community. This direct linkage to Virginia Tech will facilitate access to cutting edge information technology developments as well as community development resources.
- Citizen teams comprised of a broad cross-section of people who agree to commit significant time and energy to the effort.

- A special program which helps communities reach consensus on future needs and provides ongoing support and resources for the citizen-based planning process.
- A tested, turn-key community network system (BEV in a Box), including: email; Web hosting and design assistance; mailing lists; resident, business, civic and arts directories; online conference system; and professional technical support throughout the life of the project and beyond, coupled with extensive technical training for Extension agents and citizen teams.

Work on the new technology network is expected to begin this fall.

The Lake Anna Observer, December 1, 2001

The Lake Anna OBSERVER

December 1, 2001 LAKE ANNA'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER VOL. 6, NO. 17 50¢

Electronic village status on horizon for Louisa County

By TERRY KARNES
Observer staff

The Virginia Cooperative Extension will begin work on a virtual community for its Louisa County residents this fall with the help from a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the expertise of Virginia Tech and the Blacksburg Electronic Village.

The BEV is based entirely on the Internet and is an outreach project of Virginia Tech in partnership with the Town of Blacksburg.

The Extension and BEV received the $748,000 federal grant to create and support networks in 29 rural communities within nine counties - Louisa being one of them. The project is called "Getting Rural Virginia Connected."

"We are excited about working with county citizens and with Blacksburg Electronic Village to

Becoming a virtual community via internet is on horizon for Louisa County

continued from page 1

bring expanded technology capabilities into our community," said Jim Riddell, Louisa County Extension agent. "This is a way for us to bring more knowledge to the community and that is what extension is all about."

C. Lee Listecom, Louisa County administrator said, "We envision significant local benefits, including economic development, increased citizen participation in local political affairs, an increased knowledge base, a more attractive local workforce, a 21st Century telecommunications infrastructure, new markets for the private sector and new and improved ways for our citizens to communicate."

BEV's staff will work closely with these communities to build a solid technology footing for them using the "BEV in a Box" program.

Technicians will use the successful BEV program, which was begun in Blacksburg in 1993, to help develop individual Web site for the 29 rural communities BEV chose for this grant.

"The project will help rural communities take control of and use technology effectively to improve local economic conditions, while including many more citizens in the decision-making process," said Andrew Cohill, director of the BEV.

"We're not exactly sure where this will take us, but it has a lot of potential," Riddell said. He also said the site will have its own look and will be formatted to fit the community of Louisa.

According to its Web site, the BEV is one of the oldest Internet-based community networks in the country and has one of the largest proportions of online residents- more than 87 percent of the town's 38,000 residents. Local residents are actively engaged in a wide variety of network activities, such as contributing to the BEV Web site, using email to keep in touch with friends and family, discussing local issues online, and publishing information about themselves, their work, and their personal interests.

More than 475 of Blacksburg's businesses are online, which is more than 75 percent of all businesses within the town, according to the BEV site.

"BEV is committed to community-wide, ubiquitous and inexpensive access for all members of the community," the Web site stated. "Through strong cooperative efforts with the public schools and the public library, all school children and citizens who desire it have free, direct access to the Internet, including personal electronic mail accounts."

According to BEV's Web site the goals of the BEV are to:

* Continue to foster the virtual community that has been created to complement and enhance the physical community.

* Further refine the model for creating electronic communities in other towns.

* Investigate the factors that make community networks self-supporting and responsive to user needs.

* Provide support and assistance to other communities that are trying to develop healthy community networks.

* E-commerce opportunities.

Louisa has around 25,000 residents, Riddell said. He said there are Web sites for several businesses and other community organizations in Louisa, bût this will "pull it together in one location and create a virtual community." He said many residents, including area farmers, already integrate the Internet into their working lives.

"This program will facilitate more community interaction," Riddell said.

Technicians from BEV and Virginia Tech will take between 18 and 24 months to set up the Louisa Electronic Village, Riddell said. They will train and assist local volunteer groups, businesses and government personnel in setting up Web sites.

Other areas selected for the program were Accomack, Carroll, Craig, Cumberland, Dickenson, Grayson, King and Queen and Northampton counties. To see more information on the BEV, visit www.bev.net.

The Lake Anna Observer, June 1, 2002

The Lake Anna OBSERVER

June 1, 2002 LAKE ANNA'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER VOL. 7, NO. 5 50

Louisa dives into cyber age

By JUDY CHAPLIN
Observer staff

Louisa County has kicked off its partnership with Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension in a $748,000 program to provide new educational and economic opportunities through the development of an electronic village.

The Louisa Board of Supervisors got a look at the program last month when the Virginia Cooperative Extension Leadership Council demonstrated how the community could be more informed on a daily basis about what is going on in the area and how the local businesses and services can provide citizens with the assistance they may need.

The program explained by Extension Agent Jim Riddell is called BEV in a Box. Mr. Riddell said that the plan is to have the BEV system completely up and functioning this fall in Louisa.

By using technology, the Supervisors were able to see and hear from Dr. Andrew Cohill, who spoke from Virginia Tech.

He talked about the Electronic Village already in place in Blacksburg, which is considered the "most wired community in the world."

Since the Blacksburg community has this program in place, officials there can help set up a similar one in Louisa for the fraction of the cost.

The BEV program can set up an online interactive community calendar system, which can be updated by the community Web site committee. This will help citizens to keep informed on current local happenings.

The BEV can also provide an online directory which allows individuals and organizations in the community to create and maintain their own directory entries. This will be available for civic groups, artists and art organizations.

The people in Blacksburg found that local businesses profited by getting their names out in the community.

The BEV can provide a complete online conference system which makes it easy for the citizens to talk about and organize community projects and initiatives, to hold town meetings, or help people meet and learn about their neighbors.

Louisa Electronic Village uses technology for the county

Louisa County is one of nine rural Virginia counties selected by the Technology Opportunity Program (TOP) grant, funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce, and has joined in efforts to "Get Rural Virginia Connected." The TOP Project is led by Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV), Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and a Technology Leadership Team (TLT) of Louisa citizen volunteers. The development of the Louisa Electronic Village (LEV) website, www.louisaelectronicvillage.net, is now activated for business, civic groups and community members to utilize.

LEV is designed to permit communities to take control of and use technology as a way to improve local economic conditions, include more citizens in community decision-making processes and strengthen community connections. Each church, fire department, civic organization, business, government agency and others can be linked and communicate across the county. Not only can residents access information about the county in which they live, people from all over the world can discover the uniqueness of Louisa County.

The success and sustainability of the Louisa Electronic Village is dependent upon citizen participation and input. There are several ways community and business members can become involved:

•Visit the Louisa Electronic Village website: www.louisaelectronicvillage.net.

•Fill or pass out a survey on internet and computer use. These surveys will be used to identify the needs of the community concerning technology and help determine what educational workshops will be planned and offered.

•List business and civic group information and URL for free on the LEV website.

•Participate in educational workshops.

•Encourage others to visit the site.

•Volunteer to be part of the Technology Leadership Team (TLT).

Interested business, community leaders and residents are invited to attend the monthly LEV meetings held in the Cooperative Extension Meeting Room of the Louisa County Office Building. The next meeting is Wed., June 18 at noon.

For more information, call Connie Laws or Sarah Cooper at the Louisa Extension Office, Virginia Cooperative Extension, (540) 967-3422, or e-mail claws@vt.edu or sacooper@vt.edu.

LOUISA SURVEY ON COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE

Louisa Electronic Village Survey

Do you own or use a computer at home? ☐ yes ☐ no

Do you use a computer at work? ☐ yes ☐ no

Do you use the Internet? ☐ yes ☐ no

Where do you use the Internet? ☐ home ☐ work ☐ library ☐ other _____

How often do you use the Internet? ☐ none ☐ monthly ☐ weekly ☐ daily

If none, what are reasons why you do not use computers or the Internet?

_____

What Internet Service provider do you use? (Who does your Internet bill go to?)

_____

What type of service do you have? ☐Dial-up(phone line) ☐Satellite/Wireless ☐Cable ☐Other_____

What do you use the Internet for? ☐Entertainment ☐work/business ☐telecommuting ☐distance education ☐bill paying ☐email ☐online purchasing ☐research ☐ Other_____

Do you have a website for personal use? ☐ yes ☐ no
For business use? ☐ yes ☐ no
Would you like to have a website? ☐ yes ☐ no

What District do you live in? ☐Mineral ☐Green Springs ☐Louisa ☐Patrick Henry ☐Jackson ☐Mountain Road

Please Circle workshops you would be interested in participating in:
☐Introduction to the Internet ☐Introduction to computers
☐Web-site design ☐Computer Open-House (gathering of computer-related businesses)
☐Office Software, word processing ☐ Impacts of having your business online
☐ Other _____

Please list your contact information if you would like to receive information on the above topics: (optional)

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____
Address _____
Age (optional) _____

Please Return to Virginia Cooperative Extension, PO Box 399, Louisa, VA 23093, Attn: LEV

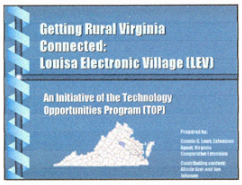
POSTCARD TO MARKET THE LOUISA ELECTRONIC VILLAGE

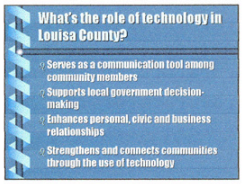
www.louisaelectronicvillage.net

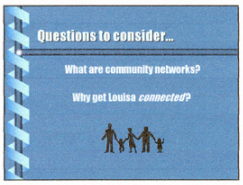
- **Log on and register as a LEV "Villager"**
- **List your business or community organization for FREE!**
- **List your ongoing community events**

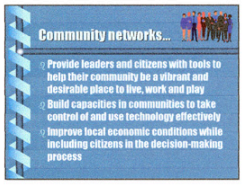
To find out more about this project made possible by the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) grant, funded by the US Department of Commerce, log on to
www.top.bev.net
For more information, contact Virginia Cooperative Extension, Louisa County at (540) 967-3422

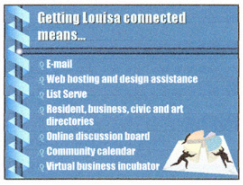
POWERPOINT SLIDES FOR USE IN MARKETING THE LOUISA ELECTRONIC VILLAGE











Getting Louisa connected means... (cont.)

- Telecommuting and distance learning opportunities
- Residents and businesses can be linked and communicate across the county
- People all over the world can discover the uniqueness of and opportunities in Louisa County

Possible Community Outcomes

- Community develops capacities to prosper
- Creates a trained workforce
- A "wired" community is more attractive to all business as technology becomes more prevalent
- People feel more connected to one another
- More citizen participation in community and civic activities

Why use Louisa Electronic Village (LEV)?

- Grassroots initiative
- Unbiased, objective, non-commercial, citizen-designed and volunteer-led venture
- Promotes community pride, citizenship and computer literacy
- Incorporates educational workshops and other on-going training
- Prepares community for future grant opportunities

How can YOU get involved?

- Tell a friend!
- Join the Technology Leadership Team (TLT)
- Fill out a survey
- Participate in Community Readiness Workshops
- Utilize the public computers at VCE
- Utilize the virtual business incubator for your micro business

Find out more!

www.louisaelectronicvillage.net
www.top.bev.net
www.bev.net
www.ecorridors.vt.edu

Louisa County Extension Office:
540-967-5427
Connie Lowe, Extension Agent, clowe2@vt.edu
Sarah Cooper, Extension Agent, sacooper1@vt.edu
Jon F. Johnson, Area Specialist, jonfjohn@vt.edu

Louisa Electronic Village (LEV) Home Page

Appendix D – Benchmark Report

BENCHMARK REPORT

Prepared by

Pamela Gibson
Community Initiatives Specialist
Virginia Cooperative Extension

Early in the process, specific benchmarks were identified as necessary for successful completion of this project. The following table lists the fourteen benchmarks identified in the project. While each of the counties included in the study satisfied completion of these benchmarks, there were differences among the localities. This report includes some of the notable differences.

	TOP Benchmarks						
	Accomack	**Craig**	**Cumberland**	**Dickenson**	**King & Queen**	**Louisa**	**Northampton**
1 Extension agent training	11/7/02	11/7/02	11/7/02	11/7/02	11/7/02	11/7/02	11/7/02
2 Obtain support from county leaders	3/9/01	3/13/01	3/16/01	3/3/01	3/19/01	3/12/01	3/7/01
3 Technology Team recruitment	11/17/02	6/5/02	1/21/03	7/16/03	7/22/02	12/20/02	11/26/02
4 Technology Teams formed	9/26/02	4/28/03	11/14/02	7/18/03	8/1/02	1/15/03	11/21/02
5 Technology Team training	11/20/02	4/28/03	4/28/03	7/18/03	11/19/02	1/15/03	11/21/02
6 Take Charge Mtg 1	2/5/03	N/A	3/20/03	N/A	1/9/03	N/A	1/15/03
7 Take Charge Mtg 2	2/25/03	N/A	3/27/03	N/A	1/16/03	N/A	1/22/03
8 Take Charge Mtg 3	3/4/03	N/A	4/3/03	N/A	1/23/03	N/A	1/29/03
9 Community Readiness Workshops	5/20/04	3/15/04	10/15/03	10/1/03	5/9/03	10/29/03	10/6/03
10 Technology Assessments	9/03-04/04	9/03-04/04	9/03-04/04	9/03-04/04	9/03-04/04	9/03-04/04	9/03-04/04
11 Initial web site development mtg	3/12/03	7/14/03	5/15/03	7/18/03	3/11/03	2/11/03	3/13/03
12 Transition training	N/A	2/10/04	3/8/03	3/10/03	3/24/04	3/17/04	N/A
13 Web site deployment	N/A	10/1/03	10/1/03	10/1/03	6/10/03	5/27/03	N/A
14 Technology Master Plans	6/30/04	6/30/04	6/30/04	6/30/04	6/30/04	6/30/04	6/30/04

Extension personnel from each of the participating counties attended a day-long training program in Richmond, VA on November 7, 2002. The program provided introduction to the TOP team from Extension and BEV who would be in each county, the process involved to complete the project, and the commitment needed from agents in each county. This program was taped so that others working on the project could review information.

For the second benchmark, support from county leaders was identified. The date in the table represents the initial letter of intent from each of the participating counties. This information was important to assure that the $6,000 required from each county would be committed. It was hoped that the support would include participation by local leaders in the project. Participation by local leaders in the Technology Leadership Teams and the *Take Charge* meetings was not consistent across the seven participating counties. Extension agents were given guidelines for recruitment that included securing participation of key local leaders. In some counties, participation was active in the beginning of the project but waned months later. Several counties have had consistent participation from a variety of local leadership throughout the project. Cumberland county maintained consistent participation from local leaders, and Van Petty won a seat on the Board of Supervisors.

Technology Team recruitment was the third benchmark. The dates in the table reflect the beginning dates for this process. In some cases, the recruitment process went much slower than expected, suffered lapses because of personnel turnover, and often did not meet the expectations of the recruitment process. The process for recruitment stressed the need to attract members of all segments of the community, but there was a perception that one needed to be technologically savvy to participate. For a few counties such as Craig and Dickenson, this perception created a significant roadblock in recruiting the number of members needed for the longevity of the project. All of the counties found the necessity to have members of all sectors of the community to do things such as information gathering, speaking to clubs and organizations, and general brainstorming. Northampton and Accomack counties had unique problems. First, they had a competing website for the Eastern Shore and didn't see the need for a duplicate site and being next door to one another had difficulty determining whether it was best to work on the county level or as a shore (regional basis). Initial efforts were on a county level with each county recruiting members but later folded membership into the Networked Future Task Force that served the shore technology efforts. Many of the members of the TLTs were already active in this task force and found it useful to put energy into one organizational effort.

Formation of Technology Leadership Teams was the fourth benchmark. This process involved getting commitments from those members of the Technology teams who would be responsible for the updating and maintenance of the websites. In the counties of Accomack and Cumberland, this phase took place before general recruitment took place.

For all of the counties, team recruitment has continued to be part of the process to keep the project alive. Counties having the most difficulty with this step were those who didn't advertise broad base recruitment. By limiting team membership to only those known to have technical skills, participation by the community became significantly restricted and left all of the work to a few.

The Technology Team training was an ongoing process during the course of the project. The date in the table reflects the first major training opportunity for technology team members. The BEV team gave each county a set of job titles and descriptions for TLT members who will be needed to maintain the website:

1) Web Site Administrator-responsible for managing the content on the Community Web site
2) Directory Administrator-responsible for People, Business, and Organization Directories:
   a) Approves or blocks requests of individuals who register using the "Become a Villager" link on the County Web site.
   b) Add, modify, delete or reassign business entries as needed if individuals who created them can't do so (for some reason, e.g., forgot their password.)
   c) Reset passwords for individuals, community connections and virtual business incubator accounts.
3) Calendar Administrator-responsible for Online Calendar:
   a) Approve calendar entries sent in by individuals in the community.
   b) Add, modify and delete entries from the Online Calendar
4) Discussion Forum Administrator-responsible for Online Discussion forum:
   a) Create moderator
   b) Stop discussion forum
5) Discussion Forum Moderator-monitor Discussion Forum
   a) Ensure appropriateness of posts
   b) Hide or delete threads
6) Registrar-responsible for BEV Incubator Services
   a) Verify credentials for community connections accounts
   b) Verify credentials for virtual business incubator accounts

For a small county such as Craig, identifying willing volunteers to take these positions became a challenge and took some time. Because Accomack and Northampton chose not to develop their unique websites, they needed fewer volunteers to maintain the elements that would be incorporated into the Eastern Shore Virginia Portal website.

The three *Take Charge* meetings comprise benchmarks 6-8. This program provided a bone of contention from the very beginning. Extension Agents said that they were not aware that they had to go through this program in order to be part of the TOP project. In order to compromise on the considerable time this program would require of agents, the TOP leadership agreed to use comprehensive plans if they were up-to-date or a comparable community visioning process. Craig and Louisa used their comprehensive plan to identify community issues for their TOP site. Dickenson county was part of another study in which community focus groups were organized to identify issues and used the data from this project for the TOP program. The four remaining counties used the *Take Charge* process to involve citizens in issue identification and action plans. Of those four counties, Cumberland and King and Queen counties embraced the project enthusiastically and followed the guidelines for success. Agents in Northampton and Accomack had little time to devote to the project and did not make its success a priority. They did not publicize and invite attendees and had fewer participants than anticipated and fewer attendees participating in all three meetings. Evaluations from the *Take Charge* meetings indicate that the

programs were well received by participants and led to further involvement in the TOP project and community activities. Even the two less successful counties found that this community empowerment program resulted in new involvement for citizens and their communities. In addition, this process provided improved membership in the TLTs.

The next benchmark is Community Readiness Workshops. These workshops provided a great opportunity for communities to share with citizens all of the things technology and networks could do for them. Members of BEV traveled to communities and provided demonstrations. Several counties readily took advantage of this opportunity to use experts to share the technology and held several of these workshops, with the initial workshop date appearing in the Benchmark table. A few counties such as Accomack and Dickenson devoted little attention to this process and held only one meeting for citizens. The workshops not only informed citizens of opportunities but gave county extension agents and TLT members models for future demonstrations throughout their counties after the BEV support ended.

Technology assessments were performed by John Nichols toward the end of the funding period. The TOP team was fortunate to have this expert join the project and perform this process. John began meeting with counties and doing assessments in the Fall of 2003 and completed the process in April 2004.

The initial web site development meeting was enthusiastically attended by TLT members in most of the participating counties. Because of the existing website in Accomack and Northampton counties, some issues had to be settled. It was ultimately decided that the unique Bev-in-a-Box tools could be added onto their existing site, thus eliminating two competing websites. This website development meeting helped TLT members select those elements that would make the site personal for their particular county. This is where counties could plug in the issues identified in their issue identification meetings, determine methods for naming their site, and particular pictures they wanted to showcase. For many of the TLTs, this meeting sparked renewed enthusiasm for the project.

The twelfth benchmark was the transition training meeting. This meeting served the purpose of training the responsible TLT members to take over particular duties for website maintenance. Volunteers for the specific positions were either trained at Virginia Tech or in their communities and were given reference materials to keep for the continuation of their site. Because Accomack and Northampton opted to use the Portal Website, this step and the deployment were not needed in these counties. Appropriate county members were trained to do the selected components of BEV to the existing Portal website.

Web site deployment is probably the most significant benchmark as identified by a number of counties in their focus group evaluations. The fact that they actually got a site up and running was seen as a big step. Several counties had celebrations to mark the unveiling of the county website. Cumberland and King and Queen counties had articles in the local newspapers and community meetings to demonstrate their new sites.

John Nichols used the information he gathered doing the Technology Assessments in each of the counties to develop a Technology Master Plan. The Technology Master Plans are the 14th and

final benchmark for this project. These plans will be completed at the end of the funding cycle and will be shared with the counties.