

Cleveland Digital Vision's

**Program to Narrow Our City's Digital Opportunity Gap  
2004 to 2008**

Adopted by the Cleveland Digital Vision Board of Directors on October 20, 2003

**CLEVELAND DIGITAL VISION  
3328 Carnegie Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44115  
(216) 391-0900 ext 40**

**[www.clevelanddigitalvision.org](http://www.clevelanddigitalvision.org)**

## Introduction

In 2003, Cleveland is a city where:

- most working adults have no education past high school, and a large percentage lack even a high school diploma;
- most of these same adults lack any meaningful training or experience in the use of computer technology;
- most households still lack modern computers or Internet connections.

This combination of *educational and digital underdevelopment* means that Northeast Ohio could achieve its announced New Economy goals -- e.g. 60,000 new information technology jobs by 2010 -- with no significant gain for Cleveland's working poor families. Indeed, the growth of a higher-tech economy in Northeast Ohio could actually widen the opportunity gap between Cleveland citizens and the rest of the region. But this doesn't have to happen.

Digital Vision advocates an aggressive five-year program (2004-2008) -- led by the City of Cleveland in collaboration with the Cleveland Municipal School District, the Cleveland Public Library, neighborhood organizations and many others -- to narrow our Digital Opportunity Gap and bring tens of thousands of low-income working families into the new economy and culture of "Digital Cleveland".

We propose to begin this program with concrete initiatives in four key areas:

1. Household computer ownership and network access
2. Neighborhood technology training, support and leadership
3. A clear community-wide standard for basic computer and information literacy
4. Increasing the number of city residents who are educated to take advantage of new opportunities in technology-driven sectors, as they develop in our regional economy.

## **OUR DIGITAL VISION: 2008**

*"The best way to predict the future is to invent it." – Alan Kay*

In 2008, Cleveland is one of the most computer-literate and networked cities in the U.S. As a result, our residents are becoming better educated; more people are engaged in civic life from their blocks to City Hall and beyond; and thousands of formerly low-income Clevelanders are making good livings in a growing regional technology sector, in IT-enhanced jobs in traditional industries, and in their own small businesses.

A typical home in every neighborhood of the city has at least one modern computer with a high-speed connection to the Internet and other local networks. Everyone in the house knows how to use it.

Computer literacy and network access have become parts of every neighborhood's strategic plan. Knowledgeable neighborhood leaders collaborate with citywide institutions to assure their residents excellent IT training and technical support.

State of the art network infrastructure is available in every neighborhood and is being used innovatively -- for small business development, recreation, parent-teacher contact, distance learning, access to government resources, community organization, grassroots media.

Schools, community computer centers, workforce trainers, colleges, political and business leaders are engaged in a common effort to get our entire workforce certified "IT literate". We're able to measure our progress because a common certification tool for basic computer and information literacy is used throughout the community. By 2008, we're at least halfway to our goal.

The number of adults without high school degrees in every neighborhood is being significantly reduced. The number of adults and youth in every neighborhood enrolled in higher education is being significantly increased. The "average worker" in Cleveland now has some postsecondary education and intends to get more.

As a result of these changes, thousands of formerly low-income Cleveland residents are now competing for skilled, well-paid employment in the region's growing IT and biotech sectors, as well as in health care, banking, insurance, and advanced manufacturing. And new small businesses are emerging from Cleveland basements, garages and storefronts.

**That's the future we want to invent. How do we get started?**

## 1. Household computer ownership and network access

- **Make affordable, workable computer systems available to at least 50,000 lower-income households over the next five years**

1. Several thousand workable PC systems are discarded annually by Cleveland's hospitals, banks, insurance firms, law firms and others. The City's Office of Information Technology and Planning (OITP) should take the lead in organizing a single coordinated effort to acquire these discarded systems, get them tested, rehabbed and loaded with legal software, and make them available at low cost to low-income families through neighborhood computer centers and other nonprofit groups.
2. The City's Department of Community Development and the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority should adopt a policy that, within five years, all publicly owned or subsidized low-income housing units in Cleveland will have computer systems and broadband Internet connections provided as standard appliances. Community Development and CMHA should lead the effort to identify appropriate financing mechanisms for implementation of this policy, starting with units under construction or renovation.
3. A significant number of working poor households will simply buy new computer systems on their own. Low-interest loans, rebates, group discounts and other incentives can accelerate this process. The City should strongly encourage community computer programs, CDCs and private businesses to experiment with incentive financing programs for new computer purchases, with the goal of taking successful models "to scale" throughout the city.

- **Make very fast network access available and affordable to households in every Cleveland neighborhood.**

"Very fast network access" means going beyond current residential broadband Internet services (ADSL, cable modem) to fully exploit the possibilities of fiber optic and wireless networking for widespread use by Cleveland households and small businesses. One Cleveland and IdeaStream are both working to develop elements of this state-of-the-art capability through community partnerships.

The City Administration and City Council should encourage and support the efforts of One Cleveland and IdeaStream to deploy very fast network infrastructure to neighborhoods throughout the city, *on the condition that planning will take place in cooperation with community organizations, schools and public officials to ensure the network can be used by residents of all income levels.* (An example would be provision of affordable gigabyte fiber to a local school or computer center which extends the access to residents through a local wireless network.)

## 2. Neighborhood technology training, support and leadership

The City Administration and Cleveland City Council should adopt as policy the goal of **a community computer training and technical support program, available to the general public, in every neighborhood of the city**. This goal should be pursued at the neighborhood level with the greatest possible collaboration among City Council Members, existing community technology providers, the Cleveland Municipal School District, the Cleveland Public Library, community development corporations and neighborhood centers.

- **Funding**

1. Cleveland City Council should continue to seek additional funding for the Adelphia–Cleveland City Council Neighborhood Technology Fund (NTF) as the primary mechanism to provide operating support to neighborhood computer literacy programs. The NTF will need at least an additional \$3 million in the next five years to provide ongoing core funding for computer centers in all Cleveland neighborhoods.
2. The Department of Community Development should provide clear guidelines for the legal use of Community Development Block Grant funds and other funds under its control to support computer literacy and access activities, in order to help Council Members and neighborhood organizations think creatively about using “ward allocations” for community technology initiatives.
3. The City’s Office of Workforce Development should work with Digital Vision and other allies to develop a strategy to use Workforce Investment Act funds to support basic computer skills certification classes offered by community technology centers.
4. The City’s Office of IT and Planning should take the lead in developing a Comprehensive Community Technology Needs Inventory that includes the new hardware and software acquisition needs of community technology centers, as well as City Recreation Center computer labs, throughout Cleveland. The OITP, in partnership with Digital Vision and other allies, should aggressively seek to meet these needs at no cost through donations from hardware and software manufacturers.

- **Collaboration and planning**

1. The NTF should immediately begin to provide modest planning grants for broadly collaborative neighborhood efforts to develop ambitious, outcome-driven Digital Opportunity Plans. Beginning with the next round of grants for Community Technology Center operating support (in 2004, we hope), NTF should require this kind of local collaborative strategy as a condition of funding, *along with appropriate increases in maximum grant funding*.
2. Digital Vision proposes the creation of a *Neighborhood Technology Resources Coordination Council* with representatives of the City of Cleveland, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland Municipal School District and other organizations that fund or sponsor the deployment of IT resources in Cleveland neighborhoods. The Council’s mission would have two parts:
  - a) to coordinate its members' overall strategies and resource allocation, and standards for community IT;
  - b) to cooperate in developing transparent, functional content that can’t be done on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis, but responds to the needs articulated in local planning processes.
3. A Neighborhood Digital Opportunity Plan should be incorporated in the Planning Commission’s regular neighborhood planning process for each Statistical Planning Area.

### 3. A clear community-wide standard for basic computer and information literacy

- The City's Office of IT and Planning should initiate a broad community effort to **identify and adopt a single community-wide certification tool for basic computer and information literacy**. This effort should include the City and County Workforce Investment Boards, the CMSD, local colleges, job training providers, libraries, representatives of major employers as well as small business, and community technology providers.

Once adopted, this certification tool -- which could be Certiport's Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3), the International Computer Driver's License (ICDL), or some other similar tool -- would become the agreed standard for funding and evaluating basic training programs, and would be extensively promoted as a standard "threshold credential" to employers throughout the community.

(The model for this proposal is the recent adoption of the ICDL certification tool by a task force convened by the City of Philadelphia.)

#### 4. Increasing the number of city residents who are educated to take advantage of new opportunities in technology-driven sectors as they develop in our region

- **Higher education.** The single best strategy to get more Cleveland residents ready for well-paid opportunities in information technology and other technical sectors is to *get more working poor residents in every neighborhood to go to college*. Unlike most public workforce-oriented programs now in the field, such a strategy cannot be built around short-term job placement. Both individuals and neighborhoods must begin to approach higher education as a critical long-term investment in their human potential, rather than a short-term job fix. This is what Community Reinvestment must mean in the 21<sup>st</sup> century... reinvestment not just in buildings, but in our communities' people.

*We advocate a new strategic alliance to promote and support tech-oriented college education for thousands of new adult learners, with*

- ... a commitment by the City and local colleges to enable qualified residents to go to college for four years without tuition cost
- ... neighborhood-based systems for marketing, counseling, financial and educational support
- ... distance learning facilities in computer centers and homes.

- **Workforce training.** In the near term it will be counterproductive for Cleveland's workforce training programs to keep recruiting hundreds of new trainees for low-end IT certifications such as A+ and Cisco Networking. Throwing a glut of inexperienced job-seekers into competition for the few such positions now open in the regional economy is unfair to all concerned.

Instead, the Workforce Investment Boards, along with concerned training and placement agencies, should:

- ... Make a commitment to follow up with the hundreds of recently-certified IT trainees to insure that they succeed, i.e. find employment in their fields, gain experience and contacts, and move toward additional education
- ... Find ways to use Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and other funds to support basic computer literacy certification training for every WIA trainee in every field.

**Cleveland Digital Vision** is a coalition of community, business, labor and educational organizations which exists to advocate and support “community efforts toward universal computer literacy, access to computer and network technologies, and expanded information technology employment opportunities for all residents of Cleveland and surrounding communities.”

This program was adopted by our Board of Directors following a five-month process of meetings and discussions with our member organizations and others who share our goals. We thank all those who participated in this process.

*The members of Digital Vision’s Board of Directors are:*

**James Cookinham**, President, NEOSA  
**Don Slocum**, Executive Director, Cleveland Neighborhood Leadership Institute  
**David Megenhardt**, Executive Director, United Labor Agency  
**Willard Brown**, President-Elect, BDPA Information Technology Thought Leaders - Cleveland  
**Diane Euchenhofer**, Director, Employer & Community Relations, Greater Cleveland Growth Association  
**Tracie Brooks**, Bellaire-Puritas Development Corporation  
**Wanda Davis**, Director, Ashbury Senior Community Computer Center  
**Charles McDowell**, Director, The Thea Bowman Center  
**Stanley Miller**, Executive Director, Greater Cleveland Neighborhood Centers Association  
**Dan Valerian**, Vice-President, Cleveland Scholarships Program  
**L. Tiffany Barnes**, District Director of Learning Resources, Cuyahoga Community College  
**Tony Jordan**, MIS Director, Goodwill Industries of Greater Cleveland

We welcome any questions and comments about this program. And of course, we welcome your support for our efforts to make it a reality. Please contact:

**Bill Callahan, Director**  
(216) 391-0900 ext 40  
bill@clevelanddigitalvision.org

October 23, 2003