

# VII. Summary and Conclusions

---

Overall, the data collected through the surveys and case studies of the 1994 and 1995 grant recipients provide substantial evidence that the program is effective and has contributed significantly to enhancing the technology and telecommunications infrastructure across the nation. By targeting areas where telecommunications has been problematic (e.g., because of geographic or economic barriers), the activities supported by TIIAP have increased access to a variety of technology-based services and enhanced collaborations within and across a variety of communities. While not all projects have been successful, the majority have met their goals and brought changes at the local, state, and national levels.

While skeptics might discount some of the data obtained through the surveys as being based on self-report, the case studies provide broad and convincing evidence that the program has made important contributions to the way citizens access and use information. The benefits, although not always formally documented, were apparent in the schools, medical facilities, and public service agencies visited. There has been considerable spread of impact whether assessed in terms of end users or indirect beneficiaries. And, the interest that these projects has engendered, as evidenced by the visits to view the activities and the number inquiries received, suggests that there is a good chance that many of the activities can, and will be, replicated elsewhere.

The emerging evidence for the sustainability of these early efforts is encouraging. Over 90 percent of the demonstration and access projects were still in operation at the time of the survey. While some

were no longer at full strength, others have expanded and even engendered additional spin-off activities. Admittedly, it is still too early to talk with great confidence about whether the projects will survive after TIIAP funding is completed—TIIAP funding and technical assistance support have only recently ceased for many of the projects in the study universe. What happens to these projects and the extent to which they do provide models for others are issues that should therefore be tracked over time.

While it is always chancy to deal with “what ifs,” grant recipients strongly believe that without TIIAP their work would not have been brought to fruition or, if implemented, would have provided fewer services to fewer people. TIIAP began at a time when support for innovative uses of technology was not easy to acquire; indeed, many of the technologies that we would consider innovative today were just on the verge of erupting. The monies provided by TIIAP were both an incentive for exploring the applications of the new technologies and, even more importantly, an inducement for targeting these efforts in traditionally underserved areas.

The current challenge for TIIAP is different in many ways than it was when the program began. Many of the technologies that were only on the drawing board are now part of our everyday life. Telephone access is almost universal and telephone lines are being used for a variety of activities that only a few envisioned a decade ago. Computers and the Internet are but one example of technological advancements that have become almost commonplace. But in other ways, the

challenge has not changed that much. There are still the haves and the have-nots. There is still a need to bring “commonplace” services to the rural and poor communities. And, there is still a need to develop new applications of the myriad of emerging technologies to enhance communities’ access to knowledge, skills, and services.

It is clear that the need for TIIAP continues to be strong. While financial support is critical, equally consequential is the need to provide timely guidance and technical assistance to communities

that seek to increase their access to the expanding information infrastructure. Having proven its value during the emergence of the new technological age, TIIAP is well positioned to apply what it has learned as it helps the next generation of grant recipients take advantage of the technological innovations of the 21st century. As such, the true test of TIIAP’s enduring value may well be the extent to which it can continue to identify and nurture projects as technological applications become more diverse, complex, and challenging to implement.