



## Connecting Communities

### Sustainable Adoption of Broadband Technologies through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

October 2009

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#### The Opportunity

The passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), with the provision of \$7.2 billion towards the expansion of broadband Internet access, represents a huge opportunity for millions of Americans, particularly in rural areas of the country. However, the amount earmarked for broadband stimulus, while necessary, is not sufficient. An estimated \$40 billion is actually required to supply quality broadband access to all parts of the United States.

Thus, it is essential that the money allocated for broadband stimulus be spent to allow for both the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people and to ensure that we lay the groundwork for *a scalable broadband policy and delivery network*. Above all, we should learn from the past and recognize that it is not enough to simply provide broadband equipment and connectivity, absent the other prerequisites for *sustainable adoption of broadband technologies*.

#### Connecting Community

What is the value of widespread broadband Internet access throughout the country? Why is this a worthwhile investment? While no one disputes the benefit of broadband-for-all, the method in which it is provisioned has major implications for the overall ROI. With only \$7.2 billion available of the estimated \$40 billion that is required to achieve this goal, we will be forced to make key decisions on where to invest these funds and whom to connect.

Simply put, we will have to select a specific social framework within which broadband can be deployed. The resources are too finite to deploy broadband ubiquitously. The available amount of fiber (in ground and to be constructed) has to go somewhere. It cannot go everywhere. Not all at once. In time, connectivity can be extended from hubs to something approaching ubiquity. The question is: Within the confines of available funding, where do we start? Where do we find the optimum hubs?

Recognizing that there are alternatives, we at TechSoup Global strongly recommend that we, as a nation, connect the civic hubs of communities to the Internet and, more importantly, to each other. These civic hubs are the schools, libraries, health clinics, religious institutions, and nonprofit organizations that form the fabric of our communities. They provide essential services that benefit entire communities. And, most importantly, they touch everyone in the community and are optimally positioned to serve as hubs for a scaleable and sustainable approach.

By connecting these organizations, we would provide a civic backbone to any larger national broadband effort while meeting the public needs of local communities by investing in and improving the organizations that provide the services upon which they already rely. Once established, this connectivity can then spread to individuals and businesses to meet their private needs.

## How TechSoup Global Can Help

TechSoup Global is the leading and largest nonprofit provider of technology assistance services to nonprofits and libraries in the United States. We've recently expanded internationally, and now work in 31 countries through partnerships with 16 international capacity-building NGOs. In 2008, our staff of 170, based in San Francisco, provided transactional services to almost 41,000 American 501(c)(3)s and served another 65,000 individuals with downloads, community forums, online content, webinars, and other forms of technology training and support.

We offer very specific and unique assets that are relevant to a range of AARA-supported programs:

- **Extensive reach to the nonprofit sector**

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, TechSoup.org has extensive reach in the U.S. nonprofit sector and beyond — providing over 300,000 unique monthly website visitors with articles, worksheets, and other resources to help them make more informed technology decisions; and more than 107,000 nonprofits with discounted and donated technology products from major technology providers, including Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Symantec, Intuit, and Adobe.

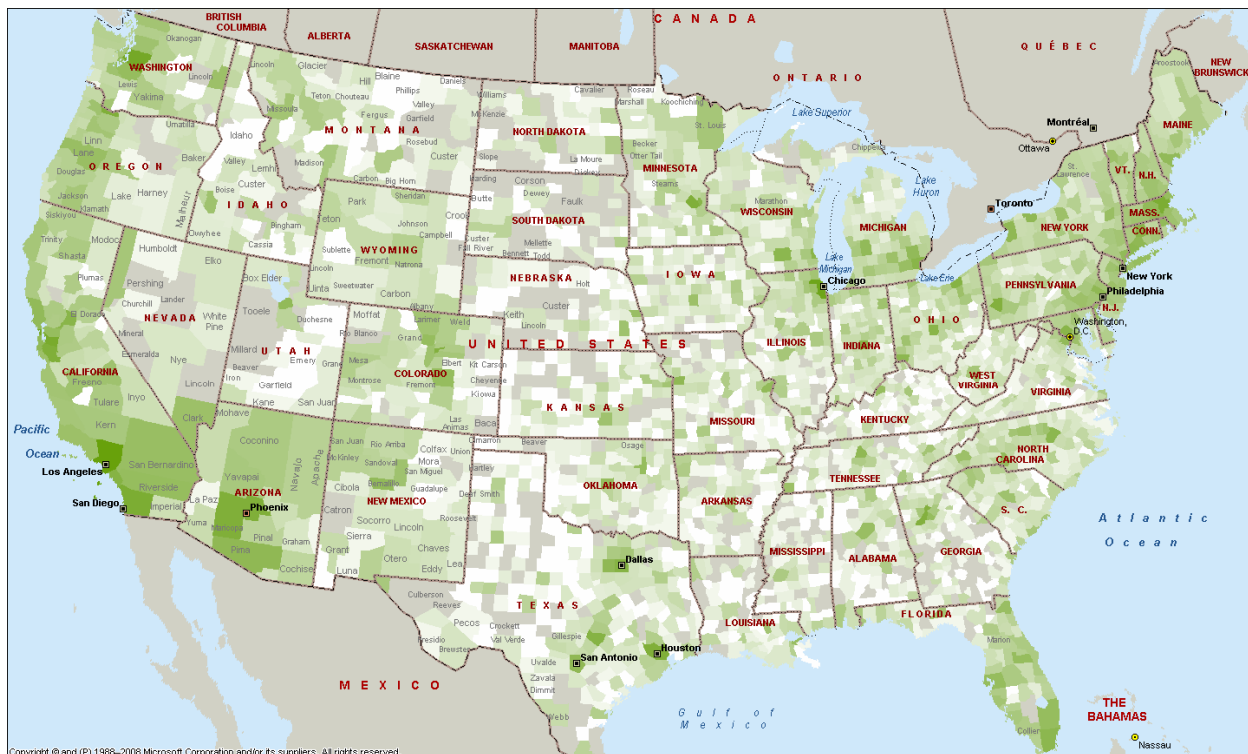


Figure 1. By county, the number of nonprofit organizations in the continental United States served by TechSoup Global services.

- **Extensive reach to libraries**

Our TechSoup for Libraries project uses a dynamic peer-to-peer learning strategy that helps librarians to support, maintain, and sustain public technology. Over the last two years, over 4000 how-to manuals were downloaded; more than 1000 case studies were distributed at conferences and through trainings; and over 1200 librarians and library staff attended at least one regional training.



- **Close relationships with corporate philanthropy in the technology sector**  
Through our product philanthropy service, we have distributed over \$1.5 billion in technology products to over 107,000 nonprofits around the world. Based on highly effective working partnerships with 40 major technology product providers, this service allows us to provide significant, tangible support to the nonprofit sector — for example, by providing at the lowest possible cost the technology equipment needed to effectively use broadband access, such as routers, switches, and firewalls from Cisco Systems, Exchange Server Enterprise Edition from Microsoft, and Backup Exec from Symantec Corporation.
- **Extensive reach to technology assistance providers**  
We have a long history of collaboration within the community of technology assistance providers. For more than 22 years, TechSoup has been a trusted knowledge base for technology assistance providers worldwide, from our collaboration with N-TEN to our TechFinder resource that connects organizations to local technical support. These collaborations have increased our reach and our understanding of the social sector's emerging technology needs.
- **Development of successful online communities**  
Our active online communities provide a welcoming and engaging place to share and learn about technology and get support from technology experts. Community formats include the long-standing TechSoup community forums with 18 technology topics ranging from open source, hardware, and networking to technology planning and managing technology volunteers. Our other online communities reflect emerging technologies, including virtual world training at the Nonprofit Commons in Second Life and the bleeding-edge social media discussions found on the NetSquared community platform.
- **Leadership in the emerging field of deploying social media for social benefit**  
Through a complementary mix of events and resources, TechSoup Global's NetSquared Initiative helps social innovators use emerging web-based tools to extend their impact. At monthly NetTuesday mixers (held in 47 cities in the United States and internationally), individuals gather face-to-face to share social media information and best practices. At our annual NetSquared Conference, we organize and support the NetSquared Challenge Award. Over the last three years, NetSquared has solicited more than 680 social benefit projects, paired them with the technology and operational expertise they need, and awarded \$376,000 in direct financial support.

We are prepared to engage in a robust effort that draws on these assets to ensure that the organizations we serve are prepared for the opportunities possible through broadband access. Three potential avenues for support are outlined below:

### **1. Leverage our relationships with major corporations**

We already have relationships with 40 major corporations, such as Microsoft, Cisco, and Symantec, that can provide organizations with the enterprise-grade infrastructure necessary to truly take advantage of the opportunities that broadband access will bring.

### **2. Provide technical training and assistance**

It is not enough to help organizations access broadband product donations. We need to ensure that they access those donations in an overall environment of education so they can make smart technology decisions for themselves and the communities they serve. To do this, we will offer a series of trainings, webinars, articles, online events, and support forums dedicated to helping organizations select the appropriate technologies and use them in a way that maximizes their effectiveness.



In addition, we are in a position to help orchestrate human resources; mobilizing those who are ready, willing, and able to engage in this civic connectivity project. We are in the planning stage of creating a carefully vetted technical assistance provider network, allowing organizations that are providing broadband-related services to their communities access to expertise in:

- broadband technology deployment
- digital literacy
- workforce training
- media
- public policy

The goal of this database is NOT to list every provider, but to create a highly selective list of top tier nonprofit providers with deep experience, strong reputations, and available capacity. Where possible, we will develop MOUs with listed providers to facilitate and speed the connection between broadband projects needing services and the service providers. Our goal is to bring the necessary training and support to communities so they are genuinely connected, can support their new infrastructure, and can work together to promote their own sustainable growth.

### **3. Create an ongoing community of support**

Once we have provided the equipment, connectivity, and training to communities, the real work begins in weaving these communities together so they can offer support to each other. Imagine, for example, a trainer offering work force development in Olive Branch, Mississippi being able to share her training with a group gathered at a library in Flint, Michigan—not simply in a video-style presentation, but in a real back-and-forth conversation. These are the possibilities that broadband access can provide; real potential to share best practices, ideas, and experiences between civic organizations in the overall effort to enrich our communities. But it will take more than hardware and software to take advantage of this rich potential. It takes the creation of community.

TechSoup Global has a proven track record in community-building for civic and social service organizations. As part of a three-year initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to provide technical support for public access computing facilities in America's public libraries, we created a thriving community of librarians and library staff to not only access our own training materials, but to provide ongoing support to each other. Through the project website, [www.techsoupforlibraries.org](http://www.techsoupforlibraries.org), which is almost entirely comprised of user-generated content, they are able to connect with each other through forums, share photos, attend webinars, and exchange ideas and solutions to common technical problems. We discovered that peer-to-peer learning is incredibly effective for promoting sustainable best practices in technology use and service delivery for civic organizations. This kind of efficacy is what broadband connectivity should breed.

We also understand the power of face-to-face convenings to enhance virtual connections. Our NetTuesday meetings currently take place in 47 cities around the world and provide an opportunity for participants to share ideas, learn from each other, and even collaborate on projects at the intersection of technology and social change. We will leverage this experience to organize and facilitate additional meet-ups around the country, making sure that the organizations that are deploying broadband access in their communities are doing



so in concert, learning from each others' experiences and building upon each others' successes.

**For more information please contact**

Marnie Webb, Co-CEO of TechSoup Global  
stimulus@techsouglobal.org

**<http://www.techsoupglobal.org/economicstimulus>**



## About TechSoup Global

[www.techsoupglobal.org](http://www.techsoupglobal.org)

TechSoup Global has a long history of providing direct technical assistance to civic organizations in all 50 states. Over the past two decades, we have provided resources that run the gamut from volunteers who help connect computer systems, to robust information resources offered to over 300,000 website visitors per month, to our product donation program that helps put technology hardware and software into the hands of thousands of organizations every year. We are committed to ensuring that all organizations have the technology resources they need to achieve their missions. TechSoup Global's 2009-2010 budget of \$23 million is derived from earned revenues and contributed support from donors as diverse as Microsoft, Cisco, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID, and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Current key services and resources offerings include the following:

**The TechSoup.org** website is recognized throughout the world as a trusted nonprofit technology resource. Each month, approximately 300,000 unique visitors access the site to make more informed technology decisions by reading articles and downloading worksheets that cover a wide range of technology topics (from entry-level to more advanced), and to share their technology-related challenges and solutions with a community of peers.

**TechSoup Stock** is a unique, web-based service that distributes donated and discounted technology products to nonprofits at the lowest possible cost to the receiving nonprofit by partnering with leading technology companies. TechSoup Stock currently offers donated and discounted technology products from 40 major technology providers, including Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Symantec, Intuit, and Adobe. TechSoup Stock has distributed over \$1.5 billion in technology products to almost 107,000 nonprofits in 31 countries.

**TechSoup Global** works with capacity-building NGOs across the world to ensure that every nonprofit on the planet has access to the technology products and resources they need to operate at their full potential. As of October 2009, the TechSoup Global Network serves NGOs in 31 countries, including Macau, Spain, Russia, and South Africa.

**The NetSquared Initiative** helps nonprofits worldwide use new Internet-based tools such as blogging, podcasting, and other social Web applications to extend their reach and impact. Launched in 2005, NetSquared helps social benefit organizations around the world develop the strategic framework, knowledge, and skills to put these powerful new online tools to work for positive social change. Over the last three years, NetSquared has solicited more than 680 social benefit projects, paired them with the technology and operational expertise they need, and awarded \$376,000 in direct financial support.