Chapter XI

The Camfield Estates – MIT Creating Community Connections Project: High Technology in a Low-to-Moderate Income Community

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This chapter is a case study of a community-university partnership that is investigating strategies to bridge the “digital divide” by examining the role of community technology for the purpose of community building in a low- to moderate-income housing development. Since January 2000, the Camfield Estates-MIT Creating Community Connections Project, a partnership between the Camfield Tenants Association and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has taken place at Camfield Estates, a 102-unit, low- to moderate-income housing development in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and its surrounding environs. This chapter includes the history and background of the project, the theoretical frameworks guiding the initiative, the project methodology that has been employed to integrate community technology and community building, early results, and a set of recommendations and lessons learned for other initiatives.
INTRODUCTION

The digital divide (NTIA 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000), the gap between those who benefit from new technologies and those who do not, has received considerable attention in the new millennium as organizations from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors have partnered with communities to address this critical issue (Robinson, 2000). In urban and rural neighborhoods across the country, there are examples of successful initiatives to provide economical access and promote meaningful use of technology, as a means toward achieving tangible and sustainable outcomes in areas such as education, employment, health care, and more (Benton, 1998; Chow, Ellis, Mark, & Wise, 1998; Lazarus & Mora, 2000; Mark, Cornebise, & Wahl, 1997; Schon, Sanyal & Mitchel, 1999). Not surprisingly, universities have (Bishop et al., 1999; Chapman & Rhodes, 1997; Cohill & Kavanaugh, 1997; Hampton & Wellman, 1999; Resnick, Rusk, & Cooke, 1998; Turner & Pinkett, 2000) and will continue to play an important role in these initiatives, given the intellectual and technological resources they bring to bear on the problem.

Historically, one of the major challenges associated with community collaborations is the “inside-outside tension” resulting from the delineation between internal and external actors, which is perhaps best characterized as the distinction between “us” and “them” (Aspen Institute, 1999). This tension manifests itself in a variety of ways. From the “inside” perspective, neighborhood residents and governing boards, seeking to leverage the resources and expertise of researchers, funders, and technical assistance providers, must do so in a way that advances, and does not compromise their own goals and objectives. From the “outside” perspective, non-residents, seeking to support and learn from community members and organizations, must do so in a way that fosters ownership and empowerment, as opposed to reliance and dependence. As universities expand the scope of their work to include high technology in low-to moderate-income and underserved communities, the inside-outside tension will undoubtedly arise as it has in the past. However, the need for a greater awareness of and sensitivity to these issues is only heightened by the challenges associated with the ongoing use of technology, such as installing new systems, and maintaining and upgrading existing systems. Without careful attention to this dilemma, community-based organizations could easily be saddled with a prohibitively higher total cost of ownership than experienced before.

The ideal scenario for communities and universities to truly work together as partners is one where the needs of both parties are met and the community’s capacity is strengthened as a result of the partnership. These goals are most likely to be met, and the inside-outside tension is most likely to be
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