

Section V: Key Conclusions from the TIFB Needs Assessment Data Gathering

1. Introduction

In developing the study conclusions and recommendations, the Needs Study Team has attended to the priorities defined by the TIF Board in the analysis of data and formation of recommendations.¹ The Needs Study Team feels the following discussion is in line with the TIFB Board priorities and suggests practical methods of extending the reach and impact of these established priorities.

2. TIFB Funds as An Agent of Change

The data gathered in the course of this study leave no doubt that the grant programs designed and adopted by the TIF Board, in cooperation with the working groups and the TIFB staff, have promoted rapid, in many cases, comprehensive change in libraries throughout the state. Participants in the focus groups and the TIFB Forum attested to this fact unambiguously and in detail, and survey results support the same conclusion. The centerpiece of innovation has been the implementation of the TIF-supported TexShare/TLC online resources to Texas libraries. These online resources and the other technology resources provided through the TIFB grant program have had the effect of promoting significant innovation in grantee libraries and their organizations.

¹ TIFB Board Governing Principles and Priorities (February 2002)

*TIFB serves disadvantaged, diverse populations that the private sector does not serve;

*TIFB programs focus on connecting people, and on providing people with the technological tools – and training necessary to use tools—needed for the 21st century;

*The TIFB Board facilitates the implementation of technology by providing vision and leadership, as well as by encouraging leadership among its constituents;

*TIFB programs enable low-cost equal access, while encouraging local solutions to local problems;

*TIFB encourages programs that are replicable and have wide application;

*TIFB Board gives priority to rural and underserved urban areas;

*TIFB promotes collaborative efforts;

*TIFB funded programs supplement but do not supplant other efforts or programs;

*TIFB programs are problem-solving oriented, and encourage the use of technology to develop new solutions to old problems;

*TIFB functions, not as entitlement, but as a catalyst for the deployment of technology and to facilitate the development of strategies of sustainability.

Based on these principles, the Board priorities for both funding and allocation of time for FY 2001-02 are (listed in order of priority):

1. Ensure access to technology in under-served areas.
2. Develop and promote strategies to address sustainability.
3. Provide professional development for all constituents.
4. Identify policy issues, including broadband, “last mile,” and distance learning, and develop strategies to collaborate with other agencies to propose solutions.
5. Support appropriate technology applications, which address the demonstrated needs of underserved populations.
6. Fund third party programmatic evaluation.
7. Leverage funds through public/private/philanthropic partnerships.
8. Educate the policy sector on effective technology investments.
9. Reinvest in the most promising strategies.
10. Set technical standards to promote efficiency, reliability and interoperability.
11. Compile and promote a clearinghouse of evaluated best practices.
12. Incorporate outreach opportunities into agency activities.

Source: <http://www.tifb.state.tx.us/board/Governing%20Principles.htm>

TIFB funds have brought resources, (notably TexShare/TLC online resources) to institutions and environments where these resources have not existed before and have increased cost effective access to resources where libraries had already invested in networked information. School librarians, public librarians, and academic librarians consistently pointed out that TIFB funds brought their library service “out of the dark ages.”

The collaborative purchase and availability of TexShare/TLC online resources along with enhanced Internet connectivity and network expansion is, however, just the first major step in the innovation/adoption process to significantly increase technological access to information for all Texans. It is not the conclusion of this process.

In order to sustain and equitably build out the statewide library network infrastructure that TIFB has successfully funded to date, the Needs Study Team concludes that TIFB should seek to extend its mandate beyond the initial ten-year legislative term. *Without continuing support from TIFB (or another similar state body) local libraries will not be able to maintain the significant, demonstrable improvements in public access to the Internet and access to a wide array of both state and locally funded electronic library resources that have gone online as a result of TIFB.*

The basic networked services now enjoyed by residents almost universally across the state through public, school, academic, and health science libraries would degrade rapidly, especially in areas or localities where TIFB was the catalyst for initial electronic library development.² Focus group and survey data show libraries will be unable to sustain their current technology resources without additional funding from state sources. Local funds alone will not be capable of sustaining technological innovation in most communities and institutions. Likewise, libraries that have used TIFB funds to leverage and protect prior local investment would revert to a limited service model. TIFB grant recipients also share a responsibility to sustain and build on the innovation achieved to date. Sustainability will be, by necessity, a partnership of libraries, their funding agencies, external funding agencies, state and federal funding agencies, and the TIF Board.

Therefore, a key issue for the next few years will be developing the next generation of TIFB grants so that they focus more on sustaining the innovation already achieved within grantee organizations and more deeply integrating networked services into everyday library operations, rather than solely on promoting more innovation. These preliminary recommendations and the suggestions for grant programs focus on this central theme of ongoing sustainability.

3. Broaden Adoption and Utilization

A second key conclusion derived from the study data is the need for the TIFB program to focus on ways to deepen and broaden the utilization by all Texans of the technology innovations provided through the TIFB grant funding. There must also be a concerted effort to ensure that users in all types of libraries learn about the availability and capability of the new technologies and online resources made available via TIFB. Until the public becomes much more aware of these resources, the innovation cycle remains incomplete.

The recently released TexShare Communication Plan and the TexShare databases have the potential to reach massive audiences through libraries: 478 public library libraries with 17,900,000 users; 52 community colleges with 647,000 users; and 94 four-year institutions with 438,000 users.

The *Communication Plan* study surveyed libraries, and similar to the Needs Assessment study, found that . . . “over 70% of the public librarians . . . in the telephone survey and all of the academic librarians

² The recent ZLOT Survey confirms that smaller libraries, generally are the later adopters of technology, and are significantly more likely to lack a replacement equipment strategy. (Source: Murray and Moen. *Project Deliverable B: Technology Inventory and Assessment*. August 2002.) Many libraries who received TIFB funding to automate are in this category and therefore at greater risk of obsolescence.

rated access to the databases from “important” to “critical” for their patrons. Similarly, nearly 60% of the public libraries and all of the academic libraries reported they actually use the databases either “frequently” or “all the time.”

The *Communication Plan* study goes on to note:

“In the first year of the expanded database program, July 1, 2001, to June 30, 2002, estimates reveal that the 634 libraries participating in the program would have paid \$602,022,000 to purchase the database subscriptions and e-book collection that were purchased by TSLAC (through a grant from TIFB) for under \$11,000,000.

The database subscriptions, if purchased individually, would have cost participating libraries over \$129 million. The e-book collection would have cost these libraries more than \$473 million.”³

At the center of this issue is the importance of providing accessible, ongoing training for users and for library staff. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. Sustained, effective, and comprehensive training for staff and users in all types of libraries will unlock the full benefit of the TIFB funded resources. Hand-in-hand with training, the Needs Study Team believes that a program to build citizen awareness is critical to sustaining TIFB’s innovations. The Needs Study Team believes that educating users and library staff is paramount if full benefits from TIFB’s investment are going to be realized. Training is interpreted in a broad manner here, including making quality documentation readily available and designing excellent online presentation of electronic resources. Shifting rapidly toward desktop training delivery, with appropriate support and documentation, will be the next step for TIFB in helping grantees take full advantage of TIFB resources.⁴

4. The Need for Equity

A third conclusion involves the need for TIFB to address the equity issue by reckoning with a significant but diminishing number of libraries, principally smaller school libraries and public libraries, that are not yet benefiting from the resources available from TIFB grants. A special effort should be mounted to ensure access equity by finding innovative strategies to connect all eligible libraries. The Needs Study Team believes that a successful effort to connect the remaining libraries will be most likely to succeed if it is mounted in close collaboration with larger libraries and/or community networks that have several years of experience with the TIFB grant process.

5. Security Needs

A fourth conclusion is that libraries need special support and assistance in the near term to better manage the security of resources purchased or licensed with TIFB funds. Needs related to security have begun to emerge as more equipment has gone online in libraries and more resources are available via the web. TIFB has a role to play in helping libraries effectively secure the state’s investment in equipment, software, databases, and related assets by leading a program to educate and inform TIFB grantees about their security responsibilities and to help identify practical strategies for guarding hard assets as well as personal patron data.

³ Source: TSLAC

⁴ Needs Assessment Survey data confirm that training issues were among the top concerns for all the libraries.