Losing ground

Study finds affluence parallels Internet use

Poor families and their communities are missing out on new technology and the trend may continue without substantial funding, report says.

BY JOAN ALFORD

A new report published by the Benton Foundation in association with the National Urban League, explains why low-income communities are lagging in computer and Internet skills. The report reveals poorer communities lack the tools, training and interest in the Web.

"Losing Ground Bit by Bit: Low-Income Communities in the Information Age," defines the problem, discusses roadblocks the poor face in getting on the Information Superhighway, gives examples of those who are beating the odds and lists resources for assistance.

The report backs its findings with statistics from studies by universities, foundations and the federal government. The study team also interviewed experts who translate cold facts into plain talk.

The study tempers wide-spread excitement about the Internet with the bare fact that 28 percent of households with annual earnings of $13,000 or less can't afford basic telephone service, much less modems and computers to go online.

Internet access through public facilities such as schools and libraries also is limited in poor communities. These areas often are the last to receive training and to get computer hardware and software for Internet access.

Experts interviewed for the report predict the poor may only get poorer without Internet skills. They say that by the year 2000, 60 percent of all jobs will require Internet technology-related skills.

LINK

The study can be ordered for $10 plus shipping and handling by calling (877) 223-6866. It also can be found online at http://www.benton.org/Library.

ACCESSING THE INTERNET: RESOURCES

The Benton Foundation's "Losing Ground Bit by Bit: Low-Income Communities in the Information Age," includes links you might be interested in exploring. Here's a sampling:

Studies and Information

Getting America's Students Ready for the Twenty-First Century: Meeting the Technology Literacy Challenge

U.S. Dept. of Education http://www.ed.gov/Technology/Plan

High Technology and Low-Income Communities: Prospects for the Positive Us of Advanced Information Technology

Donald A. Schön, Bish Sanyal, and Willam J. Mitchell, editors; MIT University Press, draft chapters from forthcoming book. http://web.mit.edu/sap/www/high-low

States.org

Information, by state, on community connection to the Internet http://states.org and http://states.org/contents/about/info

Organizations:

Alliance for Community Media
Bunnie Riedel, Executive Director

666 11th Street NW, Suite 806
Washington, D.C. 20001-4542

Phone: (202) 393-2650
http://www.alliancecm.org

National Urban League
B. Keith Fulton, Director
Technology Programs and Policy Department
120 Wall Street
New York, NY 10005
Phone: (212) 558-5300
http://www.nul.org

Center for Media Education
Jeffrey Chester, Executive Director
1511 K Street NW, Suite 518
Washington, D.C. 20005
Phone: (202) 628-2620
http://www.cme.org

National Community Building Network
672 13th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 893-2404
http://www.ncbn.org

FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORTS

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
102 Reynolda Village
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27106-5123
(336) 748-9222
info@mrbf.org

Period covered: Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 1997
Finances (in millions):

	1996	1997
Assets	$67.8	$76.6
Grants paid	$3.6	$3.5

Three years after the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation recrafted its strategy, the foundation board spent last year and the first part of this year evaluating its course of action. It has recommitted to a mission of assisting people in the South to build communities that nurture, spur enterprise, bridge differences, foster fairness and promote civility.

The foundation plans to emphasize projects that promote the well-being of children, youth and families; bridge the differences created by race and class; and invest in the human and natural resources of communities.

Sixteen groups joined the foundation's Organizational Development Program, which funds initiatives as varied as early childhood partnerships, affordable housing, challenging injustice and helping people reclaim their cultural heritage. Three coalitions received Community Problem Solving Program grants in Raleigh, New Orleans and Chattanooga, and a new grant-making area — Grassroots Leadership Development — issued its first small grants. The foundation plans to award more grants in this third area this year.

IBM Corporation
New Orchard Road
Armonk, N.Y. 10504

Period covered: Jan. 1-31, 1997
Grants paid in 1997 $96.8 million

IBM International Foundation:
Fund balance (in millions):

	1996	1997
Income	$28.3	$30.2
Program expenses	$8.0	$6.5

Of the $96.8 million the IBM Corporation contributed worldwide in cash, technology and technical expertise, the majority went toward educational programs — 36 percent for K-12 education and 28 percent toward higher education programs. Seventeen percent went to programs in human services, followed by 8 percent to cultural programs, 6 percent to health-related programs, 1 percent for environmental issues and 4 percent miscellaneous.

Four years ago, IBM began its Reinventing Education initiative, designed to enhance K-12 education in the United States, with $25 million in grants awarded to eight school districts and two states. In 1997, the corporation added eight new districts and four states, bringing the grant total to $35 million. Global education projects brought technology and training to schools in South Africa, Brazil, Australia, Vietnam, Canada, Denmark and Mexico.

Besides education, other community-building projects funded by IBM include its Team Tech project, which helps not-for-profit agencies in 11 cities acquire information technology and training by providing staffing — largely recent college graduates, Peace Corps volunteers and retirees — as well as $500,000 in computer hardware, software and technical services. Each newly trained agency is required to donate 40 hours of volunteer training to another not-for-profit.

Patty Courtright

Durham schools getting help from foundation

The Durham Public Education Network raised more than $700,000 in the year ended June 30 to support the Durham public schools. That included more than $117,000 raised for the group's annual fund drive, exceeding its goal of $80,000.

The total raised in the past year also included $683,000 raised for the second phase of the group's $6 million capital campaign. The first phase of that campaign, which was completed in June 1997, raised $4 million. The second phase, which began last September and ends next June, has a goal of $2 million.

The Public Education Network also plans two initiatives. This summer, it will form a citizens committee to create a 12-page guide to the budget for the Durham public schools. The guide, which is expected to be completed in February, will boil down for citizens the thrust of the schools' 500-page budget.

In January, the organization will begin an assessment of public education in Durham and of the health needs of students.

BRIEFLY

Foundation funds biology program
An $800,000 grant from the W. M. Keck Foundation of Los Angeles will establish a new program in behavioral biology at N.C. State University. Behavioral biology is the integrated study of the principles of animal behavior.

Grants awarded increase by 34 percent
The value of grants awarded in 1997 by the Janirve Foundation of Asheville, N.C., increased by 34 percent from the previous year — $3.6 million versus $2.7 million in 1996. The grants went to 73 nonprofits, mostly in Western North Carolina.

NationsBank Foundation gives $1 million to college
The NationsBank Foundation has given $1 million to Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., to fund an endowed professorship in family medicine. The college, founded in 1876, emphasizes meeting the primary health care needs of minorities and the poor.

Proposed arts center receives funding
The Independence Foundation is giving $3 million for the proposed Regional Performing Arts Center in Philadelphia. The gift is the single largest donation ever made by the foundation. The center also was promised $13.1 million from the William Penn Foundation.

Gates Library Foundation funds Louisiana project
A $7.25 million gift from the Gates Library Foundation will help initiate the Louisiana Libraries Connect Project. The money will put public libraries in the state online with new computers, technical assistance and training for 1,300 librarians.

Fannie Mae Foundation to sponsor PBS Series
The Fannie Mae Foundation will sponsor a new Public Broadcasting Service series, "Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery," Oct. 19-22. Four 90-minute episodes will focus on international events that shaped the growth of slavery in America, from Colonial days through the Civil War.