

Title of Nomination: VISION 2010-Building Healthy Sustainable Communities for the Knowledge Based Economy

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VISION 2010: Building Healthy, Sustainable Communities for the Knowledge-based Economy

Executive Summary

A grassroots effort can truly make eGovernment more successful and the efficiencies possible through technology more easily achieved. Leading a horse to water is much easier and faster than trying to coax it there. Vision 2010 is a project intended to lead communities and local, county and state leaders to the sweet taste of technological success.

VISION 2010 is a statewide, public-private partnership of agencies, organizations, and companies formed in 1997 for the purpose of building healthy, sustainable communities for the knowledge-based economy. VISION 2010 was formed on the premises that the effects of the knowledge-based economy on Arkansas and its communities will be profound and long-lasting and that understanding Arkansas' progress in moving toward that knowledge-based economy would be helpful to community and state leaders. It is believed that a partnership initiative can most effectively help communities understand and take advantage of these changes, and that this initiative can also impact the partner organizations at the state level to become more effective.

Major initiatives of VISION 2010 have included a comprehensive Statewide Technology Assessment, which measured the usage of the Internet by K-12 schools, businesses and other organizations, local government, and households; a Strategic Training, Planning, and Action Program that involved 21 Arkansas communities in learning about the knowledge-based economy, about strategic visioning, and in developing and implementing a strategic action plan for their community; and development of an electronic and hardcopy newsletter to share information with a much wider audience, as well as holding an annual conference and other events.

As the Statewide Technology Assessment was the first comprehensive benchmark study of internet usage in the state, the results have been helpful in understanding information technology usage and the barriers to its utilization. The results have been shared with the public, community leaders, and state leaders in a variety of venues. A reaction panel of prominent state leaders has begun to assess the implications from a policy perspective, to share these results with a wider audience.

The Strategic Training, Planning, and Action Program has challenged state agencies and institutions to understand and respond to communities from a knowledge-based perspective. It has also created a cadre of community leaders who readily embrace IT-related initiatives from state government. Insights from the VISION 2010 communities, partners, and other resources are shared with a wider audience of community and state leaders.

The VISION 2010 Program has a strong track record with concrete results, an independent evaluation, and international recognition. The program has effectively leveraged resources from other organizations, has tapped a wide variety of resources, and is respected by other programs in the state. It also has created a cadre of community leaders supportive of IT initiatives in the state.

VISION 2010's measurable impact on communities is more than 10:1 and includes local funds invested, grants, and local tax supported through education of \$15 million. Resources invested in VISION 2010 include a special legislative appropriation and contributions from Partners of \$1,400,000.

Description of Project

VISION 2010 is a statewide, public-private partnership of agencies, organizations, and companies formed in 1997 for the purpose of building healthy, sustainable communities for the knowledge-based economy. VISION 2010 was formed on the premises that:

- The effects of the knowledge-based economy on Arkansas and its communities will be profound and long-lasting;
- Understanding Arkansas's progress in moving toward the knowledge based economy would be helpful to community and state leaders;
- A partnership initiative can most effectively help communities understand and take advantage of these changes; and
- This initiative can also impact the partner organizations at the state level to become more effective in this new economy.

The design of VISION 2010 emerged out of discussions with over 300 community leaders in the state through a series of 7 focus groups and in-depth surveys of leadership program alumni. These leaders clearly recognized the importance of receiving up-to-date information about information technology and the opportunities that come with this new era.

Major initiatives of VISION 2010 include:

- a comprehensive state-wide technology assessment, which measured the usage of the Internet and other information technologies by K-12 schools, businesses and other organizations, local government, and households. This technology assessment, the first comprehensive benchmark study of information technology utilization in Arkansas, has been shared with policy makers in state agencies, non-profit agencies, and private companies, and found useful in understanding the state of IT usage in the state, as well as barriers to its being more fully employed.
- A strategic training, planning, and action program that involved 21 Arkansas communities in learning about the knowledge-based economy, about strategic visioning, and in developing and implementing a strategic action plan for their community.
- Development of an electronic and hard copy newsletter to share what we learned with a much wider audience, as well as holding an annual conference and other events.

VISION 2010 Partners include the following organizations:

Arkansas Office of the Executive CIO	Arkansas Association of LeadAR Alumni
Arkansas Community Foundation	Arkansas Department of Economic Development
Arkansas Department of Education	Arkansas Department of Information Systems
Arkansas Department of Rural Services	Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation
Arkansas Human Development Corporation	Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce/
Arkansas State University	Associated Industries of Arkansas
CenturyTel	Cooperative Extension Service, U of Arkansas
Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas	Entergy Corporation, Inc.
Garland County Community College	Hubbell and Associates
McKindra Development Institute, Inc.	Non-Profit Resources
Pulaski Technical College	Southern Rural Development Center
Southwestern Bell	
U. of Arkansas - Fayetteville Center for Advanced Spatial Technology	
U. of Arkansas - Fayetteville Global Marketing Support Services	
U. of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute for Economic Advancement	
U. of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute of Government	

U. of Arkansas at Little Rock Small Business Development Center

U. of Arkansas - Medical Sciences Biomedical Biotechnology Center/AR Biotechnology Association

Statewide Technology Assessment

“Toward a Digital Arkansas – An Assessment of Internet Use in Arkansas” was funded by the Arkansas State Legislature and conducted by the Institute for Economic Advancement at the University of Arkansas – Little Rock, a VISION 2010 Partner. The purpose of the study was to provide benchmark data for the use of information technology in Arkansas. During the period from fall 2000 through spring 2001, four segments of Arkansas society were surveyed for the study:

- business and non-profit organizations,
- households,
- local governments, and
- K-12 public educational institutions.
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Because of the Internet’s versatility and universality, use of the Internet was used as a benchmark indicator for use of modern information technology. Key findings include the following:

- In Arkansas, connectivity to the Internet ranged from a high of an amazing 98.5% of schools to a low of 46% of households responding to the surveys.
- Nearly 80% of Arkansas businesses and nonprofit organizations and two-thirds of local governments stated that they were connected.
- Respondents stated many reasons for not fully utilizing the Internet in Arkansas:
 - 31% cited a lack of usefulness of the Internet,
 - 21% cited a lack of expertise,
 - 18% cited infrastructure barriers such as hardware, software, or connection limitations,
 - 12% cited cost of connection, and
 - 18% cited attitudinal and other issues.
- Overall, the survey results indicate that respondents are primarily using the Internet for relatively simple and general tasks. The major use of the Internet, according to respondents, is to collect and/or transmit information that is specific to the needs of the individual user.
- An additional 23% of uses cited consisted of communication in one form or another, including e-mail and chat usage.
- Uses that require more advanced skill, such as making telephone calls, or involve some risk taking, such as online banking or purchasing, were limited to less than fifteen percent of the total usage reported.

Strategic Training, Planning, and Action Program

The VISION 2010 Strategic Training, Planning, and Action Program was conceived as a state-wide initiative that would enable VISION 2010 Partners - state agencies, organizations, and companies to develop or use the best available information on what it takes for communities to be successful in the knowledge-based economy in the arenas of economic development, education, workforce preparation, information technologies, telecommunications infrastructure, downtown development, strategic visioning, and share these with communities.

Operating Principles of VISION 2010 are:

- Collaborate by building working relationships across the community,
- Involve your community in describing a healthy, sustained future and taking action,
- Understand major forces and trends and the impact on your community, and

- Build on local assets while utilizing outside resources.

Applicant communities for the VISION 2010 Program were required to form a broad-based steering committee of at least 15 community leaders, demonstrate strong community support, and identify a leadership team of 5 individuals who would participate in five 2½ day seminars on the topics above, all from a knowledge-based economy perspective.

These communities would then develop and implement strategic action plans for their community, seeking to build healthy, sustainable communities in this new era. This not only impacted the VISION 2010 communities, but it also impacted the VISION 2010 Partner organizations:

- they were challenged to develop information, knowledge, and practical tools about what successful economic development, government, education, workforce preparation, infrastructure, and other issues would look like in the knowledge-based economy,
- they learned from each other and from the communities throughout the process, and
- this impacted their own programs as they realized the challenges and opportunities that come with information technologies, the Internet, and broadband connectivity.

Dissemination through Newsletter and Other Means

To share what we have learned through VISION 2010, and to demonstrate the technology, an electronic newsletter called e-VISION was developed. The newsletter currently is distributed to community and state leaders in Arkansas, several other states, and a few other countries. The newsletter is also produced in hard copy for a much smaller group of community leaders that do not currently have e-mail. The newsletter features lessons learned from the communities, substantive articles relating to strategic leadership and information technologies, new resources and opportunities, and upcoming events.

An annual VISION 2010 Conference is held to highlight new technologies, new opportunities, and progress in the VISION 2010 communities.

b) Significance to the Improvement of the Operation of Government

The Statewide Technology Assessment has been very revealing to those who seek to move our state into the knowledge-based economy. As the first comprehensive benchmark study of internet usage in the state, the results have been helpful in understanding the status of information technology usage in the state and the barriers to its full utilization. The results have been shared with the public, community leaders, and state leaders in a variety of venues. An assessment reaction panel of prominent state leaders has begun to assess the implications from a policy perspective, to share these results with a wider audience.

For example, the fact that 40% of the respondents cite the greatest barriers as its perceived usefulness or other attitudes vs. 6% who cite availability of adequate connections and 12% who cite cost of connection as a barrier sends a huge message that it is not a lack of broadband connectivity, but a lack of understanding of the potentials with the Internet and broadband connectivity that is the greatest barrier in the state. This has real implications for state government, as well as for service providers currently serving the state.

The survey has also been helpful in interacting with community leaders and acquainting them with the potential applications of information technology and the Internet.

The Strategic Training, Planning, and Action Program has challenged state agencies and institutions to understand and respond to communities from a knowledge-based perspective. It has also created a cadre of community leaders who readily embrace IT related initiatives from state government.

For example, the Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST) Program is an innovative program that brings state-of-the-art information technologies to high schools in the state. While in its pilot phase, the 7 pilot VISION 2010 communities were given 3 days notice to get their school leaders to a day-long workshop and commit \$100,000 toward this program. In return they would receive a \$400,000 computer lab and training on how to implement the program. Four of the 7 pilot communities responded with that commitment in that short time frame, which is a reflection of their understanding of the era in which we live.

Our e-VISION newsletter has been an effective tool to share insights from the technology assessment, the VISION 2010 communities, and IT related opportunities in state and federal government. Currently, the newsletter features a series of articles on strategic leadership and innovation, which describes ten principles and tools that are useful for state and community leaders. In contrast to strategic plans, which begin to become obsolete as soon as they are printed, the need for leaders who can think and act strategically never changes.

c) **Benefits Realized by Service Recipients, Taxpayers, Agency or State**

VISION 2010 is an established program with these impacts:

❖ **Strong track record with concrete results:**

- over \$1.5 million of local funds invested,
- over \$4.5 million of grants and appropriations, and
- \$9 million in new local tax revenues from public issues
- VISION 2010 was instrumental in a data management firm locating in
- Brinkley, bringing a payroll of 40 jobs to Monroe County, which lost over
- 47% of its population since 1950.
- Conway County, a VISION 2010 community, involved over 2,000 citizens in developing a strategic vision and action plan. When they lost 900 jobs in 1999, (2/3 of their manufacturing employment), they were able to replace 80 percent of those jobs within 1 ½ years.
- Van Buren, AR was about to hire a consultant for \$55,000 to assist with the development of their downtown when they learned about VISION 2010. They welcomed the opportunity to develop their whole community (at an out of pocket of \$3,000), and have since attracted \$1.1 million in grants for riverfront development and an intermodal feasibility study.
- The combined population in VISION 2010 communities is over 325,000.

❖ **Proven program with an independent evaluation** - "very, very positive results"

(Mary Dillard, Dillard and Associates), 97.5 percent of the participants now have a shared vision of their community's future, 291 community leaders and over 1,445 citizens were involved in strategic visioning processes, and 75 percent of the communities developing and implementing strategic plans (and this is only the Round II communities).

Total Citizen Involvement in the 21 VISION 2010 Communities:

656 Community Leaders

8,240 Citizens

8,896 Community Leaders and Citizens involved in shaping the future of their communities.

❖ **International recognition:**

- Received the 2001 Innovative Program Award from the international Community

- Development Society,
 - Selected for the National Community Resource and Economic Development Conference in Orlando in 2002,
 - Selected by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development to be included in a forthcoming book "Passion and Practice of Community Development", funded by the Kellogg Foundation.
 - Selected to present a one-day workshop at the 2003 Community Development Society / International Association for Community Developers Joint Conference in July, 2003 at Ithaca, New York
- ❖ **Leverages resources of other organizations**
 - VISION 2010 connects community leaders with a wide array of resources and
 - partner organizations that they otherwise would not have access to.
 - VISION 2010 Partners contributed over \$250,000 in cash and in-kind resources over a 2-year period, and an estimated \$1.1 million over the life of the program.
 - Decisions are reached through consensus, resulting in a win-win program.
 - The Cooperative Extension Service provides a coordination and leadership role, with strong involvement of the Partners.
 - ❖ **Taps a wide variety of resources and is respected by other programs in the state.**
 - Because VISION 2010 complements and adds value to other programs in the state, these organizations are most willing to partner with and support VISION 2010. For example, the Arkansas Department of Economic Development's Arkansas Communities of Excellence (ACE) Program provides assistance to communities that want to develop a strategic plan. ADED uses the strategic planning process developed by Extension for their ACE Program.
 - Although the ACE Program has 5 regional development consultants and over 80 communities participating, the ACE Team Leader Becky Rheinhardt stated that "VISION 2010 is the Cadillac of community development programs and ACE is a Chevrolet. "
 - ADED Community Development Consultant Denise Smith stated: "VISION 2010 is an enhancement to our strategic planning work because VISION 2010 communities know what they are doing. It makes our work a whole lot easier."
 - ❖ **Creates a cadre of community leaders supportive of IT initiatives in the state**
 - VISION 2010 communities have demonstrated an ability to tap a wide array of resources and to embrace IT related initiatives in the state.

d) Return on Investment, Short-Term/Long-Term Payback

VISION 2010 has had a measurable impact on communities of more than 10:1 and includes:

Local Funds Invested	over \$1.5 million
Grants	over \$4.5 million
<u>Local Tax Supported through Education</u>	<u>\$9.0 million</u>
Total:	\$15 million

Investment:

Special Appropriation from the Arkansas Legislature	\$300,000
<u>Contributions from VISION 2010 Partners</u>	<u>\$1,100,000</u>
Total:	\$1,400,000