

**MANAGEMENT RESPONSE**  
**Evaluation Study of the Community Access Program (CAP)**

**January 16, 2004**

**Background:**

This evaluation study was undertaken by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of the Audit and Evaluation Branch of Industry Canada. The objectives of the evaluation framework/evaluation study/ review were as follows:

- to provide input to guide decision-making on the upcoming renewal and extension of funding for CAP and,
- more broadly, on the development of the next generation of the *Connecting Canadians* Initiative.

The mandate of CAP is to provide affordable public Internet access to Canadians, as well as the skills necessary to use the Internet effectively. This is accomplished through the use of public locations or “CAP sites” across Canada (e.g., schools, libraries, community organizations), which are also sources of computer support and training. The program is particularly focused on closing the “digital divide” — the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICT) and to their use of the Internet.

The evaluation study demonstrates a strong commitment by the organization to working in a more coherent and integrated manner in future. Although CAP sunsets on March 31, 2004, should the program continue, this evaluation study will have been very helpful in making recommendations to guide decisions for the future of the program.

Program management is committed to addressing each of the recommendations in the evaluation study within the time frames set out in the detailed Management Response below, as applicable now and if the program continues. The management of the Community Access Program accepts and embraces the "areas for follow up" that are set out in the evaluation study.

## **Management Response to the Recommended Areas for Follow-up**

**Recommendation #1: Refine and refocus the program's strategic priorities (e.g., through a strategic planning exercise).**

- **Place the most emphasis on digital divide sites, serving communities most in need and addressing remaining gaps in Internet access in Canada. In these areas, continue to raise public awareness, provide affordable public access to the Internet, and coach community members in the use of information and communications technology (ICT).**
- **At digital divide sites where users have sufficient capability, focus on higher-level applications such as supporting e-learning and online delivery of government programs and services, facilitating e-commerce, and applying higher-end technology.**

### **Management Response:**

Agreed. The Community Access Program sunsets on March 31, 2004. Should a decision be made to continue the program, there may be an opportunity to refine and refocus the program's strategic priorities. As the evaluation has demonstrated, however, the program is already addressing the digital divide in Canada, and in most cases reaching those most in need. Where resources are available, CAP sites are currently supporting higher-level applications such as e-learning, delivery of government programs and services, facilitating e-commerce and applying higher-end technology.

The evaluation has also demonstrated that CAP partners are focusing their own strategic priorities, and leveraging other resources to address the inequities created by the digital divide.

**Recommendation # 2: Improve the marketing of the program and its benefits/potential applications.**

- **Promote CAP to other government departments (e.g., to facilitate on-line delivery of government services at more CAP sites).**
- **Promote CAP to "hard to reach" and "have not" target groups, such as First Nations and northern communities, the homeless and underprivileged, persons with disabilities, seniors and new immigrants. Focus promotional efforts on people/communities who may not yet fully understand the benefits of ICT (e.g., underprivileged people who tend to be preoccupied with very basic needs such as food and shelter).**

**Management Response:**

Agreed. Should a decision be made to continue CAP beyond March 31, 2004, new capacity will be built into the program to improve marketing and promote its benefits/potential applications. A planned reorganization of CAP staff (as part of an overall reorganization of the Information Highway Applications Branch) will provide for greater capacity for program development, including promoting CAP to other government departments.

If a new policy direction is not provided with funding for the continuation of CAP, the program will continue to be constrained by the inability to develop new CAP sites in areas most in need. We will, however, continue to work to promote existing CAP services to “hard to reach” and “have not” target groups within our current mandate of sustaining existing CAP sites.

**Recommendation #3: Continue to improve the accessibility of sites for persons with disabilities. For example:**

- **Conduct a proper assessment of these users’ needs to ensure that all features of sites are accessible (e.g., provide not only a ramp for wheelchairs, but also desks that are a suitable height for wheelchairs).**
- **Offer equipment/technology suitable for these users, e.g., the option of a track ball rather than a mouse.**

**Management Response:**

Agreed. A national pilot project is currently underway to evaluate the success of tools which assist CAP sites in determining their accessibility to the disabled, and to specifically to examine the needs of disabled users at 20 CAP sites across the country and purchase and install needed software and hardware at those sites. Should the program continue beyond March 31, 2004, the results of this pilot will be analyzed to determine ways to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities at all sites, within available resources.

The Web-4-All program has distributed 834 packages to CAP sites. These packages combine hardware and software to quickly configure a public access computer to accommodate the special needs of a user and then back to a standard setting for the next user.

**Recommendation #4: Continue to utilize CAP partnerships and networks, and provide opportunities for network coordinators to share lessons learned and best practices (e.g., through mentoring activities, websites or workshops).**

**Management Response:**

Agreed. CAP partnerships and networks are essential to the success of the program. In November 2003, a national conference of networks was held in Pictou, Nova Scotia. Approximately 85 people representing 60 sites and networks attended. As a result of the conference, CAP networks have reinstated a national chat room that allows sharing of lessons learned and best practices. CAP networks are also investigating how teleconferencing technologies might be used to facilitate these same activities.

A second national conference for 2003/2004 is currently being planned for March 19 and 20, 2004 in Vancouver, B.C. Networks will be represented on the planning committee for the conference, which is expected to focus on best practices with respect to sustainability of sites.

**Recommendation #5: If feasible, provide multi-year funding for a renewed CAP and for CAP sites.**

**Management Response:**

The program currently sunsets on March 31, 2004. No decision on the future of the program has yet been made.

**Recommendation #6: Assess the feasibility of increasing the funding amount to selected CAP sites (e.g., to strengthen/expand particularly busy or innovative sites; to assist sites with special needs and fewer opportunities to raise funds). This may involve the re-allocation of funds from sites that are more self-reliant to those with more need for IC funding. More funding would enable sites to:**

- **Purchase new computers.**
- **Upgrade existing computers and provide high speed Internet (broadband) connection.**
- **Improve the accessibility of the site, if needed.**
- **Pay for qualified staff – which would also help to overcome the problem of volunteer burnout/lack of volunteers.**
- **Remain fully operational with a range of needed services.**

**Management Response:**

Should a decision be made to continue CAP, the financial support per site will have to be determined within the level of resources provided. Under the current program structure, support to individual sites can vary from under \$1,000 up to \$10,000. Industry Canada would continue to work with our partners to ensure that resources are efficiently and effectively allocated to meet the objectives of the program.

**Recommendation #7: Establish (or review existing) service standards for CAP sites (e.g., minimum number of qualified staff, services offered, hours of operation) to ensure that levels of service are reasonably consistent across the country and compatible with evolving program priorities, while allowing some flexibility for sites to adapt to the needs of their users and community.**

- **In order to incorporate this flexibility and responsiveness to individual community needs, assess the feasibility of utilizing a tiered system of CAP sites offering different levels/types of service along a continuum, depending on the needs and capabilities of users. For instance: (1) basic Internet access, training and services for communities with little or no exposure to ICT; (2) intermediate services; through to (3) high-level services and application of advanced technology at sites with good Internet connectivity and more experienced users. If applicable for a given community, offer different levels of service at the same site.**

**Management Response:**

Basic requirements for service levels at sites are currently included in all contribution agreements (e.g. hours of service for the site). In Atlantic Canada, all four provincial government partners have developed a range of service standards, such as the example provided in the recommendation, and fund CAP sites according to level of service.

Program management agrees with the recommendation. Should CAP continue beyond March 31, 2004, the issue of service standards will be examined more fully, and the feasibility of more rigorous national standards for all or some sites will be analyzed.

**Recommendation #8: Keep the database of CAP sites up-to-date and accurate so that the data can support program management, performance measurement and periodic evaluations.**

**Management Response:**

Agreed. The CAP database was originally designed with very different program management information objectives than those needed today (e.g., emphasis on classification of site by establishment vs. sustaining, or Tier I, II or III sites - all of which are no longer key distinctions for current program management). A consultant was hired by CAP last spring to research current needs, the extent of workarounds and convenience databases in regional offices and at headquarters, and the viability of the national database. As a result of her findings, CAP is developing a new database which will meet the current needs of all headquarters and regional staff. It will also incorporate enough flexibility to adapt to changing future needs. This will require considerable consultation with regions, but is planned for completion by March 31, 2004. If the program's mandate is not extended beyond that time, the database will be used for orderly archiving of information only.