

**MANAGEMENT RESPONSE – Update May 31, 2005**  
**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.

## Updated Management Response to the Recommendations

**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.

### Update

**Treasury Board approved new funding and an extension to CAP for an additional two years. Funding for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 was set at \$25 million per year. While this did enable continued programming, the funding levels received represented a reduction of approximately 44%.**

**CAP has undertaken to refocus the network of CAP sites on those most affected by the digital divide, and rationalize the program by no longer providing funding to multiple sites in close proximity to each other, and those with low levels of usage or not serving those most in need." Funding for 2004-05 and 2005-06 has since been allocated based on revised criteria of maximizing public access, reaching those most affected by the digital divide (low income, low education, those living in remote and**

rural areas, seniors, Aboriginal, francophones, persons with disabilities and new immigrants), and having the ability to support other federal service delivery objectives.

Where resources are available, CAP sites continue to support higher-level applications such as e-learning, delivery of government programs and services, facilitating e-commerce and applying higher-end technology.

**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.

**Update**

**CAP is working with other government departments such as HRSDC to facilitate on-line delivery of government services at more CAP sites.**

**Under the new strategic direction of CAP, funding is provided to those most affected by the digital divide. These include persons with low income, low education,**

**Aboriginals, francophones, those living in remote and rural areas, persons with disabilities and new immigrants.**

**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.

**Update**

**In 2004-2005 CAP conducted a pilot project to evaluate the success of tools that assist CAP sites in determining their accessibility to the disabled and examine the needs of disabled users at 20 CAP sites. The program worked with such organizations as the Neil Squire Foundation to produced an on-line "CAP Universal Access Toolkit" which provides information and assessment tools to make CAP sites more accessible in an easy fashion (ie self-survey, intro to adaptive technologies, alternatives to using a mouse, etc.). As well a new criteria for CAP funding has been added to the 2005- 2006 Recipient's Guide to fund sites who provide accessibility.**

**CAP is currently undertaking a nation-wide questionnaire which will provide information on what is being offered across the country in the area of accessibility at**

**our sites. From this questionnaire, analysis, which will be completed by August 31, 2005, will be undertaken to address accessibility issues across the country.**

**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.

**Update**

**The national conference took place in Vancouver in March of 2004. One of the key results of this conference was the identification of a group of champions who agreed to come together to collect and share best practices. Work is underway to collect 20 best practices and document these for future use. This collection of best practices is due for completion by March 31, 2006.**

**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.

**Update**

**CAP is due to sunset on March 31, 2006. IHAB is currently reviewing programming options for the branch to include long-term funding.**

**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.

**Update**

**Although CAP was extended two years beyond its original sunset date, funding was reduced by 44% and therefore, the number of funded CAP sites was reduced accordingly. Funding for 2004-05 and 2005-06 has since been allocated based on revised criteria of maximizing public access, reaching those most affected by the digital divide, and having the ability to support other federal service delivery objectives.**

**Should the program operate beyond 2006, the new structure and funding levels will be determined through consultation with partners to ensure that resources are efficiently and effectively allocated to meet program objectives.**

**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.

### **Update**

**CAP is currently undertaking a nation-wide questionnaire which will provide information on current service levels (e.g., number of staff, training provided to staff, services offered, hours of operation) offered by CAP sites across the country. From this review, analysis will be undertaken to identify current service standards across the country, gaps and opportunities. This will assist the program in examining the feasibility of utilizing a potential tiered system in any future programming design. Analysis of the questionnaire is due for completion by August 31, 2005.**

**Under the new proposed strategic direction of IHAB issues such as those outlined in the recommendation #7 are being addressed. Should CAP continue beyond March 31, 2006, 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.

**Update**

**CAP has designed and developed a new database application. This new application, which is due to be released in June of 2005, will track key data such as recipient information, levels of funding, details on each site across the country, level and types of services, languages of offered services, clients served. Once the CAP questionnaire for CAP recipients and CAP sites has been completed (scheduled June 30, 2005), analysis will be undertaken and where applicable, additional fields will be added to the CAP database application in the Fall of 2005. Industry Canada Regional offices and CAP provincial partners will be responsible for maintaining the data for sites within their region. The ease with which one will be able to access key data and generate reports from this new application will indeed facilitate program management and performance measurement activities, especially over this last year of the program's current mandate**