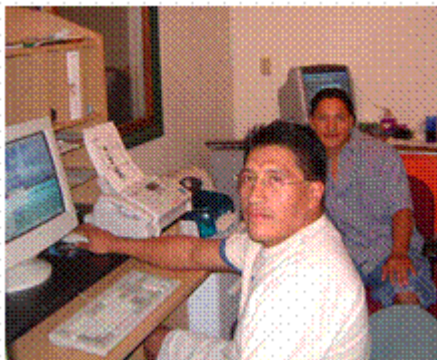


PROJECT NEXO FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

FOR THE
CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR UNITED SPANISH ACTION (CAUSA), INC.
JUNE 2003



Marco and Luis Mizhirumbay, originally from Ecuador, began taking classes at the Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury through Project Nexo last fall. "With our new knowledge and skills, my brother and I were able to computerized our own construction company," said Marco

DRAFT "N"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Connecticut Association for United Spanish Action, Inc. (CAUSA) launched Project Nexo to increase access to technology to improve education and economic opportunities for Latinos in Connecticut by establishing community Computer Learning Centers at five (5) Latino-run agencies (“core sites”)¹ and provide high-bandwidth Internet access and new computers at seven (7) additional Latino-run agencies (“connected sites”)² across the state.

Project Nexo was begun in the spring of 2000 with the aid of a grant of \$438,000 from the Technology Opportunities Program, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. The project had three goals:

1. Increase Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos (primary goal);
2. Use technology to enhance Project Nexo agency capacity (secondary goal); and
3. Enhance CAUSA capacity to serve member agencies (secondary goal).

This grant was 1 of 35 awarded out of 662 applicants. The original award period for this grant was October 1, 2000 – September 30, 2002. CAUSA requested and received a six-month, no-cost extension to the award period to March 31, 2003. Project Nexo was administered centrally out of the CAUSA office in Hartford where the Project Director was based. CAUSA handled all financial management and payroll for the staff hired at each Center. The five member agencies sponsoring Centers signed Memoranda of Agreement delineating the responsibilities of participating agencies and of CAUSA.

All twelve agencies are members of CAUSA, Inc., a coalition of twelve (12) Hispanic community-based organizations that provides technical assistance and capacity-building agency supporting the development of Latino agency members. Member agencies provide educational and “lifeline” services to low income and working class communities in Connecticut where over 200,000 Hispanics reside. CAUSA organizations represent Connecticut’s best vehicle to reach the growing number of low-income (and undocumented) Hispanics. Before Project Nexo CAUSA agencies, however, had extremely limited computer capabilities and no existing networks. Only eight (of twelve) had Internet connectivity, all at low-bandwidth.

Before Project Nexo, CAUSA agencies worked face-to-face with clients providing job counseling and educational services, using traditional methods. They were not preparing consumers with technology-based skill sets that are required to succeed in educational and employment environments. Research demonstrates the existence of strong correlation between the high unemployment and poverty rates and the low rate of educational attainment and access to computers and the Internet. Education is key to a person’s lifetime economic prospects as well as to making the most of one’s talent and interests in a world that is rapidly changing.³ Information tools (e.g., personal computer, Internet) are increasingly critical to economic success and personal advancement.⁴

¹ Public Access Centers are equipped with Windows 2000 server-based Ethernet networks and nine (9) Pentium II desktops with ADSL Internet connections and are located in Danbury, Meriden, New Britain, New Haven, and New London.

² Connected Sites are equipped with two (2) Pentium II desktops with ADSL connections and peer-to-peer networking and are located in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, South Norwalk, Wallingford, Waterbury, and Willimantic.

³ “Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs,” RAND Organization, 1999.

⁴ “Falling through the Net: The Digital Divide,” National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1999.

Project Nexo responded to the fact that the community-based agencies positioned to most effectively reach the Hispanic population were not equipped with the technological resources necessary to produce a major impact. At the same time, the traditional service providers (e.g., welfare programs, public education) are struggling to engage Hispanic clients. The Project builds on services that the CBO's agencies are already providing, and uses proven advanced technologies to bring additional providers and classes to their agencies.

Methodology. In the summer of 2001, CAUSA retained Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP (HWF) to design and implement an evaluation of Project Nexo as related to specified process and outcome goals. HWF worked with CAUSA's Executive Director and the Project Nexo Director to design an evaluation plan and that would assess the success of Project Nexo as related to its three goals. The main focus of this evaluation is on assessing how well Project Nexo has met (and can meet in the future) the primary goal of increasing Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos.

Project Implementation. The first and largest challenge facing Project Nexo was the creation of a project infrastructure, detailed work plan and the five staffed, community-based Computer Centers in small non-profit agencies with tremendous commitment but little experience with technology. Given the base from which the agencies began CAUSA's progress in implementing Project Nexo was impressive. In less than nine months from a "cold start", three of the five Community Learning Centers were fully operational, staffed, and serving clients. The remaining two sites, which experienced significant unanticipated issues with their electrical services, were operational within four additional months. In a period of eight months, these five agencies worked together with central CAUSA staff to establish a project work plan, engage community partners in the planning, and retain contractors to facilitate the planning and to purchase and install all the equipment at the five full Centers and the seven Connected Sites.

Programs Offered. The five core sites developed a wide range of course offerings, open lab hours, and individualized services as proposed in the original grant application. Core sites agreed to offer several core programs as a minimum commitment including:

- Training in basic computer skills;
- Training in Internet/Email;
- Open access for Internet/Email;
- Training in Microsoft Office Tools such as Word, Excel and Access;
- Facilitation of access to adult education offerings such as GED and ESOL instruction (either directly or through a partnership with a local adult education program);
- Facilitation of access to higher education opportunities online and;
- Self service career development functions such as job search and resume building.

The bi-lingual capacity of CAUSA agencies represents a major advantage in the provision of effective services to the community in all these areas. Across all Core Sites, 1,528 classes were given, 82% of which provided either ESOL, Basic Computer Skills or Microsoft Office instruction. Facilitation of access to Online College Course offerings was one area in which local demand did not materialize. Building on the nature of the CAUSA agencies as community centers and sites for information and referral for a wide range of needs, a substantial amount of individual support and coaching of participants was offered across literally hundreds of participants. Center Directors and other agency

staff connected students with Community College and Adult Education offerings, provided individual support for employment applications, and assisted participants in many other ways which do not end up being captured by the database of project statistics.

As individual success stories illustrate, Center Directors became a valuable technology resource in their communities, often going beyond the call to provide individualized service and tailor curricula to particular needs.

Project Nexo served the core constituency of the community-based agencies involved in the project—low income and working poor Hispanic residents. Of 575 unduplicated end users logged in the project database (likely an undercount given early database design issues, changes in the database, and staff turnover), 65% were women, 35% married, 62% were between the ages of 20 and 40, 95% were Hispanic, 8% were unemployed, and 35% lacked a high school diploma.

Individual Outcomes. Project Nexo agencies substantially met the grant outcome targets with over 9,300 duplicated end users (94% of goal), 562 obtaining basic computer skills (56% of goal), 158 participated in adult education programming and 39 took post-secondary training. (79% of goal), supported at least 140 community college students in pursuing their degrees, and helped many people pursue their employment goals (although only 60 were documented as entering employment, many more were enabled to get or retain jobs than this number suggests).

Project Nexo Centers were also tapped to add technology components to ongoing training programs (e.g. Certified Nurse Assistant training in Meriden). A number of Hispanic small business owners enhance their technology skills to market their services and establish an online presence (creation of print brochure, business cards and web page for personal catering business in Meriden) and computerize their bookkeeping and ordering systems. The Centers also became informal technology resources to which residents brought ailing machines and new software and peripherals to install.

Project Nexo improved the capacity of CAUSA member agencies to fulfill their missions within their communities by enhancing their technological capacity and raising their profile in the community. It is not an exaggeration to say that Project Nexo catapulted these small, community-based non-profits into the front tier of non-profits in terms of their technological capabilities. Access to the Internet improved agencies' ability to participate in the community and pursue collaborations while it also improves agency operations, financial management, and communications dramatically and the email capability facilitated collaboration across many agencies in the community.

With their new skills, staffs of these sites were able to provide more services more productively and efficiently. Danbury and Meriden found that clients located social services on their own over the Internet, building their research, self-advocacy and English skills through the process. Agency staff can focus on reaching more clients as a result.

Partnerships. Beginning with the planning for the application, CAUSA reached out to engage major education, workforce and related entities in the state. The Connecticut Department of Social Services is one of the main funders of CAUSA agency services and provided \$20,000 in a grant to support the initial implementation of Project Nexo. SBC-SNET provided additional project funding for two years. At the local level, agencies reached out to deepen preexisting partnerships with education agencies, businesses, and others.

Project Continuation. CAUSA leadership and the leadership at the five core site agencies are committed to the continuation of Project Nexo as an important component of CAUSA agency services. All five Centers remain open and provide services, although at a reduced level due to funding constraints. CAUSA and the agencies are aggressively seeking additional funding at this time.

Several agencies have managed to integrate Center staff funding into their ongoing education and workforce development programming.

Challenges and Lessons Learned. Project Nexo has provided CAUSA and its member agencies with tremendous challenges which have born many lessons. Both are detailed in the report. Among the lessons are: more focus is needed on issues of resource development and sustaining funding, partnerships are difficult and the best ones are those that build on preexisting relationships, good technology support built into the project budget was an essential ingredient of success, and experience helped the Centers continually refine the program offerings and times of their programs through careful listening to consumer feedback.

Recommendations. Based on these findings, the evaluator recommends:

- Focus on fund development to support continued staffing and expansion as the most urgent priority for Project Nexo at this juncture. Several avenues are suggested.
- Develop Board and Advisory Committee structures which were revived toward the end of the grant period to provide expertise and links to potential funding sources.
- Carefully track data on classes and client activities and outcomes as essential to program improvement and fund development.
- Monitor community needs and offer curriculum to meet emerging needs.
- Expand efforts to connect end users with higher education opportunities.
- Expand outreach efforts with a focus on youth.

Conclusion. Project Nexo took five agencies from the technological backwaters to the front ranks of community-based non-profits in their deployment of the latest network technology to serve their communities. Almost 10,000 low-income, predominantly Hispanic end users accessed state-of-the-art computers and software and high bandwidth Internet connections in Centers operated by Hispanic agencies and bi-lingual staff in their own neighborhoods. As the success stories featured here demonstrate, the powerful story of Project Nexo is in the lives it touched and the people it helped to empower with new skills to serve them in an ever more technology-driven world.

Although these pioneering agencies faced many challenges, they managed to create a program that had significant impact in the lives of hundreds of end users and has tremendous potential as a model for addressing the critical need in the Latino community for increased access to technology and skill building opportunities. The solid accomplishments achieved against significant odds should lay the foundation for sustaining and continuing to refine and grow the programs and services launched through Project Nexo.

I. INTRODUCTION

This is the final evaluation report for Project Nexo, a community networking project of the Connecticut Association for United Spanish Action, Inc. (CAUSA) funded in the spring of 2000 through a grant of \$438,000 from the Technology Opportunities Program, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. CAUSA is a technical assistance and capacity-building agency supporting the development of Latino agency members.

Project Nexo was designed to increase access to technology to improve education and economic opportunities for Latinos in Connecticut by establishing community Computer Learning Centers at five (5) Latino-run agencies (“core sites”)⁵ and provide high-bandwidth Internet access and new computers at seven (7) additional Latino-run agencies (“connected sites”)⁶ across the state. All twelve agencies are members of CAUSA. This grant was 1 of 35 awarded out of 662 applicants. The original award period for this grant was October 1, 2000 – September 30, 2002. CAUSA requested and received a six-month, no-cost extension to the award period to March 31, 2003.

Project Nexo was administered centrally out of the CAUSA office in Hartford where the Project Director was based. CAUSA handled all financial management and payroll for the staff hired at each Center. The five participating Agencies signed Memoranda of Agreement delineating the responsibilities of participating agencies and of CAUSA.

Setting

CAUSA, Inc. is a coalition of twelve (12) Hispanic community-based organizations that provide educational and “lifeline” services to low income and working class communities in Connecticut where over 200,000 Hispanics reside. CAUSA organizations represent Connecticut’s best chance to access low-income (and undocumented) Hispanics. CAUSA agencies, however, had extremely limited computer capabilities and no existing networks. Only eight (of twelve) have Internet connectivity, all at low-bandwidth.

Before Project Nexo, CAUSA agencies worked face-to-face with clients providing job counseling and educational services, using traditional methods. They were not preparing consumers with technology-based skill sets that are required to succeed in educational and employment environments. Research demonstrates the existence of strong correlation between the high unemployment and poverty rates and the low rate of educational attainment and access to computers and the Internet. Education is key to a person’s lifetime economic prospects as well as to making the most of one’s talent and interests in a world that is rapidly changing.⁷ Information tools (e.g., personal computer, Internet) are increasingly critical to economic success and personal advancement.⁸

Project Nexo responded to the fact that the community-based agencies positioned to most effectively reach the Hispanic population were not equipped with the technological resources necessary to produce a major impact. At the same time, the traditional service providers (e.g., welfare programs, public education) are struggling to engage Hispanic clients. The Project builds on services that the

⁵ Public Access Centers are equipped with Windows 2000 server-based Ethernet networks and nine (9) Pentium II desktops with ADSL Internet connections and are located in Danbury, Meriden, New Britain, New Haven, and New London.

⁶ Connected Sites are equipped with two (2) Pentium II desktops with ADSL connections and peer-to-peer networking and are located in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, South Norwalk, Wallingford, Waterbury, and Willimantic.

⁷ “Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs,” RAND Organization, 1999.

⁸ “Falling through the Net: The Digital Divide,” National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1999.

CBO's agencies are already providing, and uses proven advanced technologies to bring additional providers and classes to their agencies.

Methodology

In the summer of 2001, CAUSA retained Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP (HWF) to design and implement an evaluation of Project Nexo as related to specified process and outcome goals. HWF worked with CAUSA's Executive Director and the Project Nexo Director to design an evaluation plan and that would assess the success of Project Nexo as related to three (3) goals:

4. Increase Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos (primary goal);
5. Use technology to enhance Project Nexo agency capacity (secondary goal); and
6. Enhance CAUSA capacity to serve member agencies (secondary goal).

The plan, detailed in the following table, includes a delineation of the project activity objectives and proposed outcomes, specific measures for each, methods of collecting data, and responsibility for collecting data.

The main focus of this evaluation is on assessing how well Project Nexo has met (and can meet in the future) the primary goal of increasing Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos. Secondary goals are addressed as well.

Section II reviews Project Implementation, Section III and IV review the program and population served, Section IV and V review individual and agency outcomes, Section VI reviews partnerships, Section VII analyzes challenges and lessons learned, and Sections VIII and IX review prospects for project continuation and recommendations for future success.

PROJECT NEXO EVALUATION PLAN

Activity/Output	Data collection method/s	Measure/data to be collected	Data Source	Responsibility for and Frequency of Collection ⁹
Goal 1: Increase Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos				
1.1 Establish five (5) core sites at CAUSA member agencies	Document review and Interviews.	Resources procured (source & amount); Equipment and software purchased; Staff hired & public access computers installed; Volunteers recruited, trained and scheduled; Partnerships with education & training agencies developed; Networks activated; and Timeliness.	Interviews with the Project Nexo Director (PND) and document review (contracts, invoices.)	Evaluator (E) to interview PND / One time.
1.2 Establish seven (7) connected sites at CAUSA member agencies	Document review and Interviews.	Resources procured (source & amount); Equipment and software purchased; computers installed; Networks activated; and Timeliness.	Interviews with PND and document review (contracts, invoices).	E to interview PND / One time.
1.3 Serve 10,000 end users	Data E-mailed by Nexo Center Directors (NCDs) to PND and E.	Numbers of users (duplicated).	Agency user data on Access Database.	NCDs submit data electronically to PND and E / Monthly.
1.4 Provide basic computer skills training to 1,000 users	Data E-mailed by NCDs to PND and E.	Number of users enrolled in and completing basic computer skills training.	Agency user data on Access Database.	NCDs submit data electronically to PND and E / Monthly.
1.5 Deliver an adult education curriculum to 250 users	1) Data E-mailed by Nexo Center Directors (NCDs) to PND and E; and 2) Interviews.	1) Number of users enrolled in and completing adult education curriculum; and 2) Specific partnerships with education & training agencies cultivated according to support letters as documented in grant narrative [CTDLC, Charter Oak College].	1) Agency user data on Access Database; and 2) Interviews with PND.	1) NCDs submit data electronically to PND and E; and 2) E to interview PND / Monthly.
1.6 Enroll 50 users in online college-level courses	1) Data E-mailed by Nexo Center Directors (NCDs) to PND and E; and 2) Interviews.	1) Number of users enrolled in online college-level courses; and 2) Specific partnerships with education & training agencies cultivated according to support letters as documented in grant narrative [CTDLC, Charter Oak College].	1) Agency user data on Access Database; and 2) Interviews with PND.	1) NCDs submit data electronically to PND and E; and 2) E to interview PND / Monthly.
1.7 Assist 150 users to enter employment	1) Data E-mailed by Nexo Center Directors (NCDs) to PND and E; and 2) Interviews.	1) Number of users employed as a result of Project Nexo activities; and 2) Specific partnerships with education & training agencies cultivated according to support letters as documented in grant narrative [CWDC, One-Stops, RWDBs]	1) Agency user data on Access Database; and 2) Interviews with PND.	1) NCDs submit data electronically to PND and E; and 2) E to interview PND / Monthly.

⁹ PND: Project Nexo Director / NCDs: Nexo Center Directors / AEDs: Agency Executive Directors / E: Evaluator (HWF).

PROJECT NEXO EVALUATION PLAN

Activity/Output	Data collection method/s	Measure/data to be collected	Data Source	Responsibility for and Frequency of Collection ⁹
Goal 2: Use technology to enhance Project Nexo agency capacity				
2.1 Administrative and managerial functions automated	1) Interviews; and 2) Document review.	1) Number, nature and purpose of administrative and managerial functions that are automated; and 2) Timeline for automation.	Interviews with PND.	E interviews PND and reviews documents / Monthly.
2.2 Agency computers networked to facilitate communication	1) Interviews; and 2) Document review.	Number of agency computers networked vs. stand-alone	Interviews with PND.	E interviews PND and reviews documents / Monthly.
2.3 Agencies develop partnerships with local education, job training/employment agencies	1) Interviews; and 2) Document review.	1) Partners engaged as specified in grant narrative; and 2) Services added to reflect partnerships	1) Project Nexo Advisory Board Minutes; and 2) Interviews with PND.	E interviews PND and reviews documents / Monthly.
2.4 Staff trained in use of technology	Interviews.	1) Initial staff training needs; 2) Staff training completed; and 3) Remaining staff training needs	Interviews with PND.	E interviews PND / Monthly.
Goal 3. Enhance CAUSA capacity to serve member agencies				
3.1 Project Nexo infrastructure developed in a timely manner, advised as needed and well maintained.	1) Interviews; and 2) Document review.	1) Project Nexo Advisory Board is staffed and meets frequently; 2) Project Nexo Director hired; 3) Nexo Center Directors hired; and 4) Networks activated	1) Project Nexo Advisory Board minutes; and 2) Project Nexo Advisory Board members	E interviews PND and reviews documents / Monthly.
3.2 Provide timely cross-site support for Project Nexo agencies	1) Interviews; and 2) Document review.	Technical assistance provided.	1) CAUSA member agency Executive Directors; and 2) CAUSA Board minutes.	E interviews PND and reviews documents / Monthly.
3.3 Agencies comply with MOA terms and conditions	1) Interviews; and 2) Document review.	Compliance with terms of MOA.	1) Signed MOA; and 2) interviews with PND.	E interviews PND and reviews documents / Monthly.

II. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The first and largest challenge facing Project Nexo was the creation of a project infrastructure, detailed work plan and the five staffed, community-based Computer Centers in small non-profit agencies with tremendous commitment but little experience with technology. This section reviews the degree to which CAUSA and its member agencies fulfilled their responsibilities under the grant to create the Centers and Connected Sites (Objectives 1.1 and 1.2), established an infrastructure to support effective implementation by the participating agencies (Objectives 3.1 and 3.2), and worked to ensure that participating agencies comply with the grant obligations (Objective 3.3). Given the base from which the agencies began CAUSA's progress in implementing Project Nexo was impressive. In less than nine months from a "cold start", three of the five Community Learning Centers were fully operational, staffed, and serving clients. The remaining two sites were operational within four additional months.

The partner agencies had never attempted a project of this scope and complexity and were relative novices in the technology field. While the agencies had some computers that were used in administration of their programs, none had computer networks and none had high-bandwidth Internet connections. All used dial-up connections to the Internet for limited access to e-mail and the Web.

In a period of eight months, these five agencies worked together with central CAUSA staff to establish a project work plan, engage community partners in the planning, and retain contractors to facilitate the planning and to purchase and install all the equipment at the five full Centers and the seven Connected Sites. This section presents findings related to implementation of the project by objective under the project goal of increasing Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos.

Given the base from which the agencies began, CAUSA's progress in implementing Project Nexo was impressive. In less than nine months from a cold start, three of the five Community Learning Centers were fully operational, staffed, and serving clients. The remaining two sites were operational within four additional months.

The first objectives related to establishing the five Computer Learning Centers and connected sites were:

1.1 Establish five (5) core sites at CAUSA member agencies

1.2 Establish seven (7) connected sites at CAUSA member agencies

Staff hires, staff turnover, network activation, and the start of program delivery are measures that are used to assess the timeliness and success of establishing public access computer centers at the five (5) core sites. Table II-1, covering the original grant award period, summarizes the project's success in staffing to implement the project.

Staff Hires: Data on staff hires was collected across the three levels of management. Timeliness of staff hires was measured by taking the total number of days that a position was filled (start date less any interval of vacancy) divided by the total number of days Project Nexo received funding through March 31, 2003 (911 days).

CAUSA Executive Director: Carmen Sierra assumed the CAUSA Executive Director position on January 2, 2001, representing 90% of the grant award period.

Project Nexo Director: A Project Nexo Director was in place for 67% of the grant award period and continued to serve through January 2003.

New Haven, 72% in Danbury, 66% in Meriden, and 65% in New London. All remained operational through the no-cost extension and are still operational at this time (See Table II-1 above.)

Start of Program Delivery. Core sites began delivering programs, offering instruction in classes or open lab hours, beginning in the summer of 2001. New Britain and Danbury lead other sites, opening in June 2001 and remained open for 72% of the grant period. Programs have been running at Meriden since September 2001 (63% of grant), New London since November 2001 (56% of grant period) and New Haven since December 2001 (51% of grant period).

Center Directors were in place before network activation in two of the five sites. Programs commenced within 30 days of network activation in these three sites while some delay occurred in New London and New Haven.

Connected sites were activated between June 7 and October 16 of 2001. It is important to note that these locations are not supported by grant-funded staff nor are they designed to offer direct programming.

Kick-Off Events: Raising the visibility of the Centers was important both to recruit participants and to attract new partners, funding, and other forms of support. CAUSA retained the public relations firm of Baldwin and Alverio to coordinate, communicate and host a series of media events to mark the grand opening of the five (5) core sites. These kick-off events took place on October 29, 2001 in New London and New Haven, October 30, 2001 in New Britain and Meriden and November 1, 2001 in Danbury. Press releases were developed and distributed for each location, which in turn prompted radio Interviews (WPRX New Britain, WRYM Newington, WLAT Hartford-Springfield), newspaper articles (El Tiempo, La Voz Latina), and one (1) television interview (Channel 30, NBC).

Aligned with the series of kick-off events was a multi-week statewide radio campaign that advertised Project Nexo and directed interested callers to a central information and registration number. This intensive radio coverage generated a strong demand for participation in Project Nexo, filling class rolls and resulting in waiting lists at the Centers.

CAUSA Capacity and Role

An essential element of Project Nexo was building CAUSA's capacity to serve member agencies in implementing Project Nexo. Original objectives in this area included:

3.1 Project Nexo infrastructure developed in a timely manner

See Project Implementation.

3.2 Provide timely cross-site support for Project Nexo agencies

CAUSA's role The Project Nexo Director responded on a continual basis to time-sensitive vendor-related questions regarding equipment and connectivity and to problems as they arose throughout her tenure. In interviews, Agency Executive directors were very satisfied with the level of support they received from the central CAUSA office over the course of the grant.

Core site Center Directors met with the Project Nexo Director every two (2) weeks, during which cross-site support was provided and collective responses developed as appropriate to the challenges centers face.

The Project Nexo Director responded well to core site personnel shortages, ensuring the continued availability of programs at Latino Youth, Inc. in New Haven by staffing the center temporarily.

Agency staff commended and computer center end users benefited from her ability to change roles and step up to the front line of service delivery.

Several core site Executive Directors reported their satisfaction with the time-saving and cost-effective approach utilized by CAUSA in terms of the centralized administrative, reporting, financial management, payroll and troubleshooting functions they offered in support of their member agencies across the state...”

Participating Agency Roles

All core sites signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with CAUSA, Inc., that governed core site participation in the areas of ownership of equipment, staffing,¹⁰ center operation,¹¹ reporting,¹² engaging partners, sustainability, budgetary procedures, and agency match.

3.3 Agencies comply with MOA terms and conditions

The five core site agencies substantially met the spirit of the MOA. While funding constraints prevented them from hiring the anticipated level of paid staff in support the Center Directors, several sites overcame this challenge through unpaid support (existing staff, volunteers and end users with advanced skills).

Staffing: Core sites agreed to accommodate or provide sufficient staff to operate the program including but not limited to: 1) a Center Director employed for 25 hours per week with 25% of the total pay provided by each core site in accordance with the cash match requirement of the original grant submission; 2) Center Monitors representing part-time paid (by the core site agency) positions and responsible for managing core site operations during assigned shifts, and assisting users in accessing the computers, software and the Internet through the Center; and 3) Neighborhood Aides representing part-time positions and responsible for assisting end users in their use of the computer centers.

Each core site did hire a Center Director using grant funds to operate their Center and provide classes. However, due to severe state budget cuts and pressure of other programmatic priorities, the core site agencies met their obligations to keep the Centers open through coverage from existing staff and volunteers rather than hiring Center Monitors or Neighborhood Aides as called for in the original plan. Core Sites have met their obligations to provide in-kind support but have not devoted any of their cash match toward staffing their centers. Core sites used high school students and other interns to supplement their staff and relied on participants in many cases to coach and mentor each other as part of the learning model.

Reporting/Site Level Data Collection: Center Directors were responsible for collecting information on end users and forwarding this data to the Project Nexa Director and evaluation consultants weekly.

The Executive Director, Project Director, and evaluation consultants all repeatedly stressed the importance of maintaining accurate and complete records of services delivered and client outcomes as critical to sustaining the Centers after the federal funds expire. The evaluation consultants worked with the Project Director to create a client and class database to track all aspects of the program. This database was refined several times in the course of the project based on field experience. The Centers did record extensive information in this database. Several sections of the

¹⁰ Center directors, center monitors, and neighborhood aides.

¹¹ Hours, acceptable use, equitable access and participation, fees and program income, core site programmatic offerings, core site outcomes, physical condition, promotion, acknowledgement of funding source.

¹² Site level data collection and grant level federal reporting obligations.

database had a high rate of missing data, however. For example, 58% of the class records did not record “Class Type.” These issues were resolved through meetings with the Center Directors to clarify terms and expectations. The design of the database and the number of times the design of the database was changed by the evaluation contractors was viewed by project staff as a significant factor contributing to the level of missing data in certain fields. Data entry tailed off toward the end of the grant period as staff resources became more limited and has not been maintained after the federal funds ended for the same reason. Thorough data collection presents a continuing challenge and remains essential to the project’s success.

III. PROGRAMS OFFERED

The five core sites developed a wide range of course offerings, open lab hours, and individualized services as proposed in the original grant application.

Core sites agreed to offer the several core programs as a minimum commitment including:

- Training in basic computer skills;
- Training in Internet/Email;
- Open access for Internet/Email;
- Training in Microsoft Office Tools such as Word, Excel and Access;
- Facilitation of access to adult education offerings such as GED and ESOL instruction (either directly or through a partnership with a local adult education program);
- Facilitation of access to higher education opportunities online and;
- Self service career development functions such as job search and resume building.

The bi-lingual capacity of CAUSA agencies represents a major advantage in the provision of effective services to the community in all these areas. As the Executive director in Meriden put it: “We are not the only ones in the community with a computer lab – the public library has one too. But we are the only bilingual agency around here. And that is a huge asset in this community. Many of our clients ask questions in Spanish but learn in English. It is a huge advantage. Also, unlike the library, you are not left on your own to learn to use the computer!”

Open Computer Lab Hours

The MOA goal was for Centers to be open a minimum of 30 hours per week, including a minimum of three (3) hours on at least one (1) weekday evening and one (1) weekend day or evening. Staffing constraints made this challenging. Most of the Centers were available the required 30+ hours per week for open use by participants seeking time to access the Internet or practice their computer skills. Participation rates were very high as the word of this resource got out in the communities.

Class Instruction

The Project Director and Center Directors worked together to develop and share curricula that were offered through the Centers. Each Center developed its course offerings and customized its curricula and approach in accordance with the needs of its community and the skills and interests of the staff.

Class offerings were tracked through an ACCESS database developed by the evaluators as a management tool for the Center Directors.

Examining classes logged on the Project Nexa Database across all centers, 82% of classes provide either ESOL, Basic Computer Skills or Microsoft Office instruction. 15% of classes focus on navigating the Internet/using Email.

By offering computer courses with a Spanish-speaking, culturally attuned instructor, these classes became especially accessible for this community. In many cases, these sites were able to provide people with their first experience in computer technology. The Meriden site trained some students from Puerto Rico who were somewhat familiar with computers, but for whom the language barrier was a challenge. Offering bilingual instruction strengthened impact at the community level. Requiring work products and tools to be done in and set to English ensured transferable impact at the individual level.

New Britain offered computer literacy training for young children on their own (37 children total) and with their parents to promote individual skill building and intergenerational learning opportunities in a welcoming environment. When they cannot find child care, parents in New Britain, especially teen mothers, are welcome to bring their children to class.

Classes Offered: Across all Core Sites, 1,528 classes were given. By center, New Britain constituted 30% of the total while classes offered at Danbury comprised 27% of the total. New London, New Haven and Meriden contributed 20%, 16% and 7% respectively.

Center	#	%
New Britain	456	30%
Danbury	419	27%
New London	302	20%
New Haven	241	16%
Meriden	110	7%
Total	1528	

Examining classes logged on the Project Nexa Database across all centers, 82% of classes provided either ESOL, Basic Computer Skills or Microsoft Office instruction. 15% of classes focused on navigating the Internet/using Email. 3% offered Career Development Assistance (Online employment searches, resume workshops, etc.) exclusively (see Table below).

Type	#	%
ESOL	489	32%
Microsoft Office	413	27%
Basic Computer Skills	351	23%
Internet/Email	229	15%
Job Search	46	3%
Total	1528	

Facilitation of access to Online College Course offerings through the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium was one area in which local demand did not materialize. Center Directors focused most of their limited time on offering the core services tailored to the needs of the majority of participants who sought basic computer instruction or access. Traditionally, core site agencies have served populations that seek assistance for basic needs and are not ready for distance education at the college level. Only 18% of end users reported their educational attainment level at “some college, no degree,” a circumstance more suited for pursuing online education opportunities. Perhaps in the future Project Nexa will see it’s cohorts of basic computer skill graduates return to the centers for online education.

The other area that was not developed to the degree anticipated was GED instruction. Other than in New London, where a strong partnership predated Project Nexo, local Adult Education programs were not as open to partnering with the Centers on programming as hoped, which limited adult education programming in the Centers (see section on Partnerships). Under their own budget constraints, Adult Education program directors kept their resources in house and did not make teachers available through the CAUA agencies.

Fees and Program Income: Core Sites were allowed to charge a reasonable fee for services for advanced courses (e.g., training in specific Microsoft Office applications) while ensuring the provision of open computer access and basic computer skills instruction free of charge or for a nominal fee. Danbury is the only core site that has charged for services. The average fee for service is \$200 for several weeks of instruction. The Center Director from Danbury reported that there is sufficient demand for fee for service instruction, and this practice supplements scarce operating funds to keep the Center open.

Individual Support and Coaching

Building on the nature of the CAUSA agencies as community centers and sites for information and referral for a wide range of needs, a substantial amount of individual support and coaching of participants was offered across literally hundreds of participants. Center Directors and other agency staff connected students with Community College and Adult Education offerings, provided individual support for employment applications, and assisted participants in many other ways which do not end up being captured by the database of project statistics.

As the individual success stories detailed below in Section V.B. illustrate, Center Directors became a valuable technology resource in their communities, often going beyond the call to provide individualized service and tailor curricula to particular needs.

IV. POPULATION SERVED

Project Nexo served the core constituency of the community-based agencies involved in the project—low income and working poor Hispanic residents. Many residents of these communities were already using the CAUSA agencies for a variety of purposes (training, services, enrollment in entitlements), and many new participants came in because they heard about the Project Nexo Centers

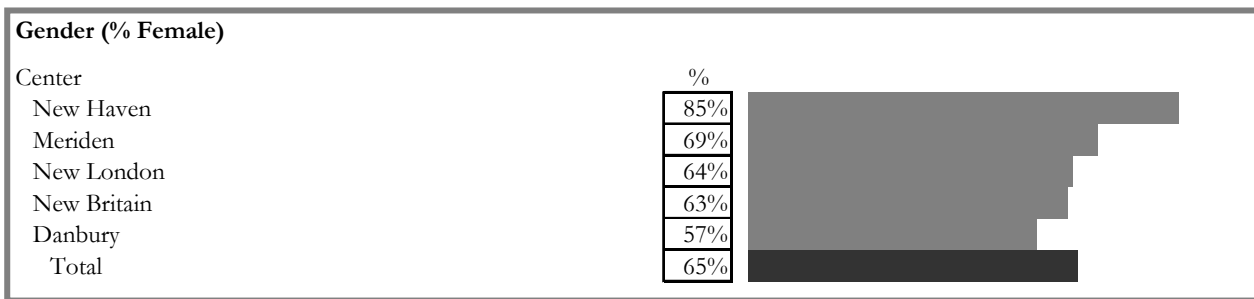
The data presented here is on unduplicated users logged into the Center databases through the end of December 2002, three months into the grant extension period. Based on discussions with project personnel, we assume that the actual number of unduplicated users of the Centers (not including participant use of Project Nexo computers at the Connected Sites which was not tracked) probably far exceeded this total as many users during open lab hours and even in some classes were not logged into the database.

Unduplicated Users		
Center	#	%
New Britain	236	41%
New London	108	19%
Meriden	100	17%
Danbury	78	14%
New Haven	53	9%
Total	575	

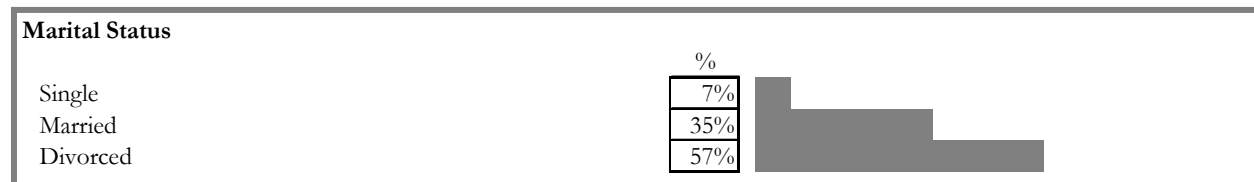
When viewed as a sample of end users, this data does provide us with a good picture of the demographics of those used the Centers during the grant period in terms of demographics. This data was shared with Project Nexa staff as the project proceeded to assist them in program planning and outreach efforts.

The Project Nexa Database recorded 575 unduplicated end-users. By center, end users at New Britain represented 41% of the total while New London contributed 19% and Meriden 17% to the cumulative figure. Danbury (14%) and New Haven (9%) served the remainder (see Table below).

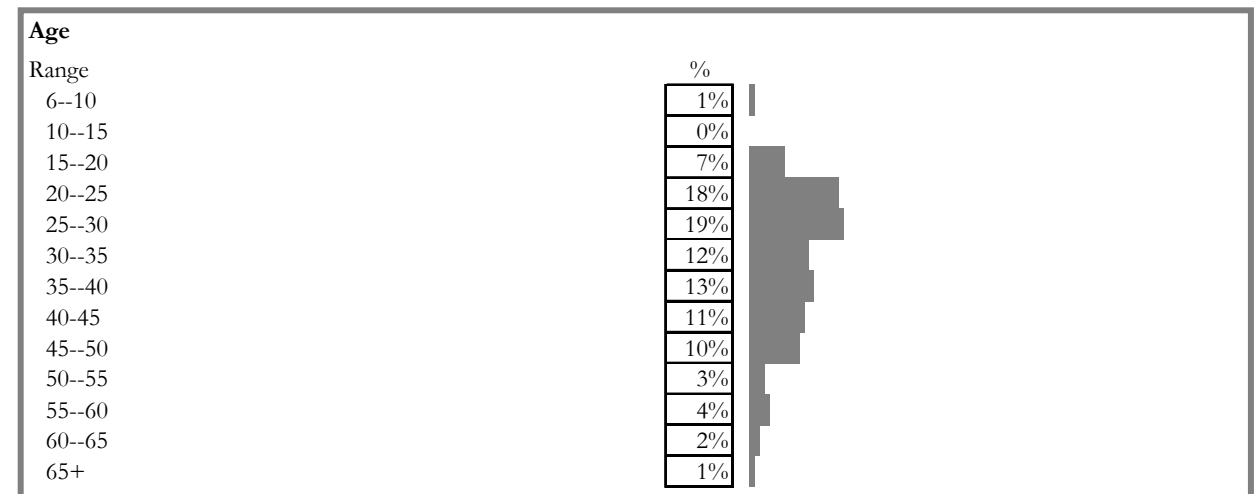
Gender: Across all centers, a majority (65%) of end users was female. New Haven and Meriden rose above the average, with 85% and 69% of female end users respectively. New London and New Britain hovered close to the average. Danbury served 9% fewer females than the cross-site average but a majority of its end users was still female (57%) (See Table below).



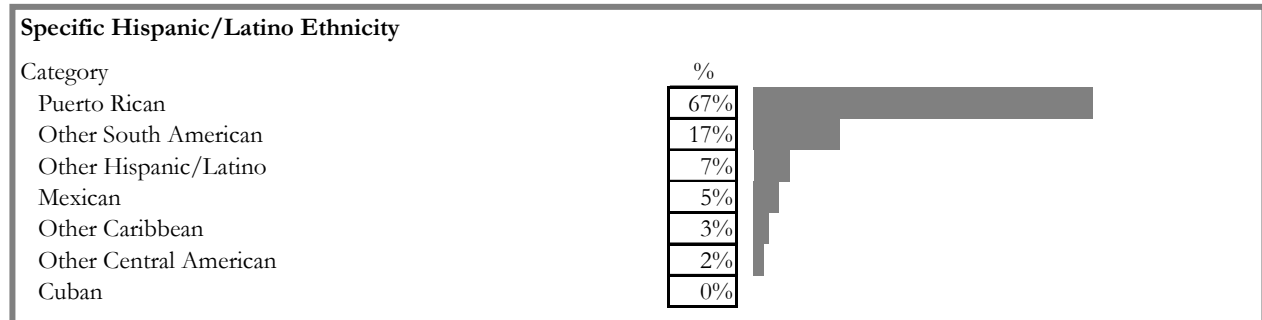
Marital Status: A majority (65%) of end users reported not being married. The remaining 35% of end users were married (see Table below).



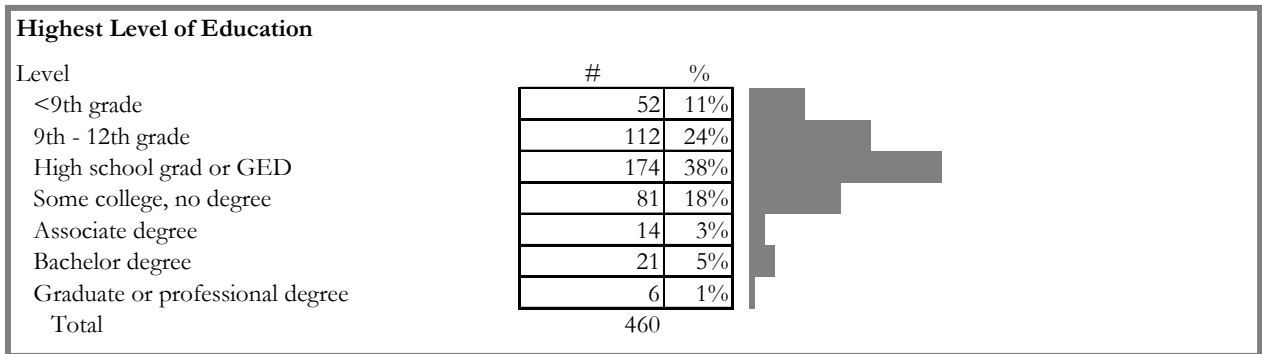
Age: By age, the largest percentages of end users fell within the ranges of 20-25 (18%) and 25-30 (19%). Relatively similar proportions were spread evenly across the ranges of 30-35 (12%), 35-40 (13%), 40-45 (11%), and 45-50 (10%). The remaining 18% were either younger than 20 (8%) or older than 50 (10%) (see Table below).



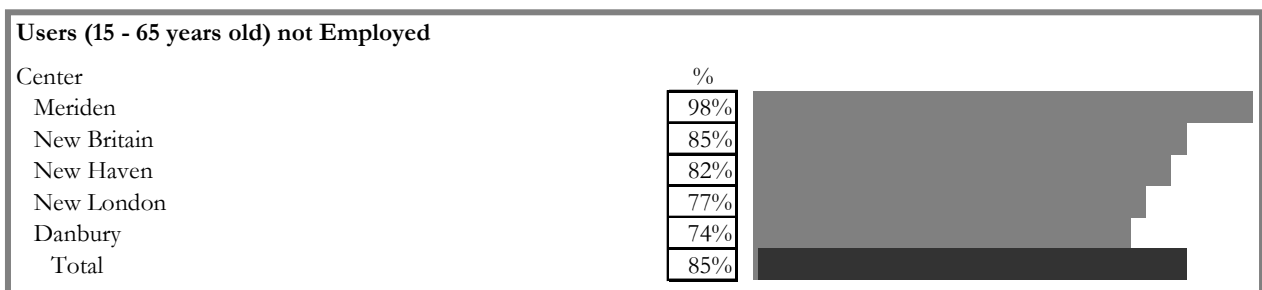
Specific Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity: Over 90% of end users identified as “Hispanic/Latino.” They were also asked to sub-categorize their identify according to established U.S. Census ethnicity sub-groupings within the broader Hispanic/Latino category. The majority was Puerto Rican (67%), with Other South Americans (17%) comprising a large minority. Mexicans, Other Central American, Other Caribbean, and Other Hispanic/Latino end users together constituted the remaining 17%. (see Table below).



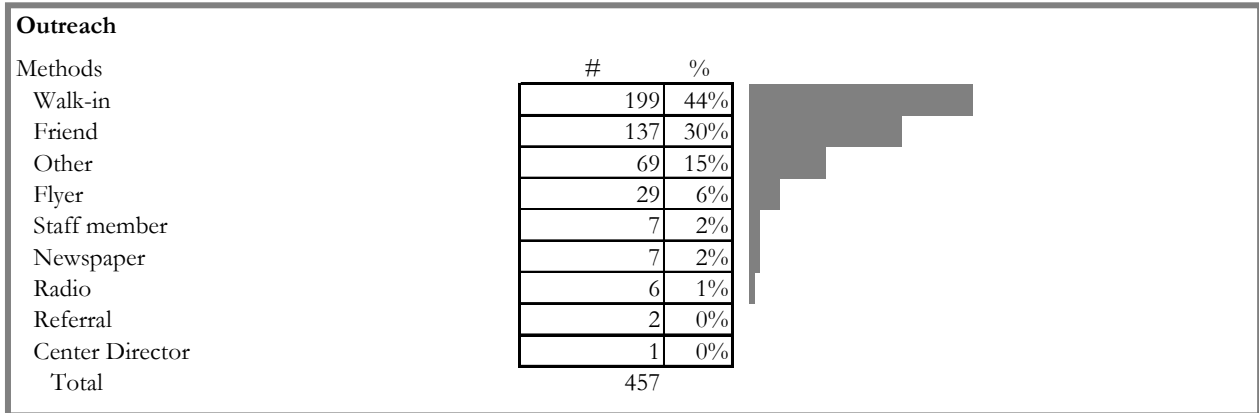
Educational Attainment: 35% of end users reported not graduating from High School or attaining the equivalent of a GED. 91% had attained a High School diploma or less. (see Table below).



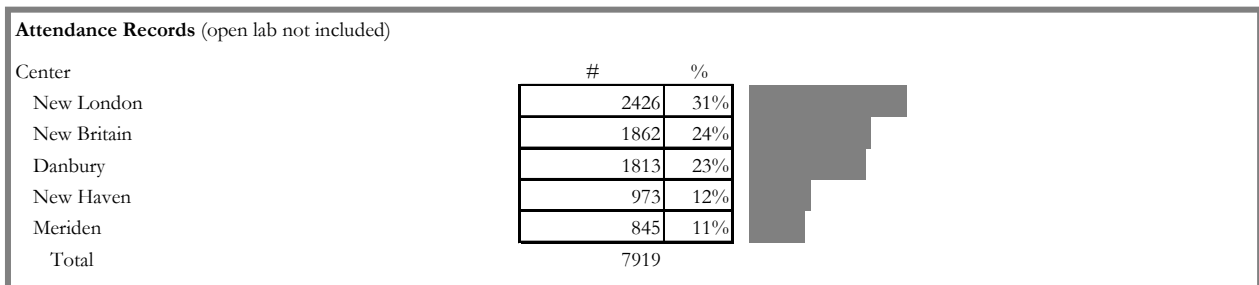
Employment Status (working age population): Eighty-five percent of unduplicated end users between the ages of 15 and 65 (working-age population) reported not having jobs, indicating that the Centers reached the target group of unemployed persons (see Table below).



Outreach Efforts: When asked “How They Heard About Project Nexo,” a majority (74%) of end users was informed about the initiative as a result of informal outreach efforts: Walk-In (44%) or Friend (30%). Only 11% of end users heard about Project Nexo through coordinated outreach efforts: Flyer (6%), Radio (1%), Staff Member (2%), Newspaper (2%), Referral (<1%), or Center Director (<1%). The remaining 15% of successful outreach was classified as Other. This data suggests that social marketing efforts based on “word-of-mouth” are the most effective means to attract participants (see Table below).



Attendance: Across all Core Sites, 7,919 attendance records were logged for classes given. This figure does not include open lab visits. By center, New London’s contribution was 31% of the total while classes at New Britain and Danbury were 24% and 23% respectively. New Haven and Meriden comprised 12% and 11% of the total.



V. COMMUNITY IMPACT

Project Nexo has had a substantial impact on the communities served. This section discusses these in terms of impacts on individual end users of the Centers (as illustrated by the individual success stories) and on agency capacity and operations. The five core site agencies have long-standing and deep connections to their communities, which were enhanced by Project Nexo. At the same time,

Table V-I Project Nexo Grant Outcomes

	Goal		Degree Met		
	#		#	%	
All Centers					
End Users	10,000		9,369	94%	
Basic Computer Skills Training	1,000		562	56%	
Adult Education	250		158	63%	
Online College Courses	50		6	12%	
Entering Employment	150		60	40%	
Danbury					
End Users	2,000		1,951	98%	
Basic Computer Skills Training	200		86	43%	
Adult Education	50		10	20%	
Online College Courses	10		2	20%	
Entering Employment	30		10	33%	
Meriden					
End Users	2,000		1,531	77%	
Basic Computer Skills Training	200		89	45%	
Adult Education	50		-	0%	
Online College Courses	10		-	0%	
Entering Employment	30		12	40%	
New Britain					
End Users	2,000		2,007	100%	
Basic Computer Skills Training	200		240	120%	
Adult Education	50		84	168%	
Online College Courses	10		4	40%	
Entering Employment	30		13	43%	
New Haven					
End Users	2,000		1,193	60%	
Basic Computer Skills Training	200		59	30%	
Adult Education	50		-	0%	
Online College Courses	10		-	0%	
Entering Employment	30		7	23%	
New London					
End Users	2,000		2,687	134%	
Basic Computer Skills Training	200		88	44%	
Adult Education	50		64	128%	
Online College Courses	10		-	0%	
Entering Employment	30		18	60%	
Unduplicated Users					
Center	#		%		
New Britain	236		41%		
New London	108		19%		
Meriden	100		17%		
Danbury	78		14%		
New Haven	53		9%		
Total	575				

these relationships positioned them to produce outcomes that less connected and trusted providers could not. For example, the New Britain site has existed for 40 years and is well-positioned for significant impact among a community that is largely low-income and limited English proficiency. At several sites, Project Nexo became the agency's "flagship" program in the eyes of the community.

A. INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES

Project Nexo's foremost goal of "Increasing Internet access, network-driven learning and career development opportunities for Latinos" was measured by looking at grant outcomes. Five (5) primary outcomes were proposed in the grant narrative, including serving 10,000 Latino end users, providing basic computer skills training to 250 individuals, enrolling 50 participants in online college-level courses, and assisting 150 job seekers to enter employment or secure a promotion at their current job. Table V-1 summarizes the data on the degree to which these outcomes have been met and then each one is discussed. The project substantially met its primary outcomes of bringing technology access and skill development to a large number of residents in Connecticut's Latino communities. Areas where goals were not fully met were ones in which CAUSA encountered unexpected obstacles or where data efforts were not adequate to track the full impact of the project.

A number of additional individual outcomes not anticipated or spelled out in the original application were identified in discussions with Center staff and are documented after the grant outcomes are reviewed.

1.1 Serve 10,000 end users

- **94% of Goal**

Core sites collectively served 9,369 duplicated end users, representing 94% of the goal. Individual contributions of end users served vary by center. In the view of project personnel, if users who were not logged into the database are included, the project easily exceeded its goal. New London exceeded its goal by 34% with 2,687 end users. New Britain and Danbury met 100% and 98% of their goals respectively. Meriden and New Haven met 77% and 60% of their respective goals. Staff attributed the lower final numbers in Meriden and New Haven to initial delays in opening the centers, staff turnover, and changes in the data collection database over time which resulted in some confusion and data loss. The actual final participation of end users in these centers may have been closer to the other three if full and accurate data collection was possible.

1.2 Provide basic computer skills training to 1,000 users

- **56% of Goal**

Over 1,000 individuals have participated in basic computer skills training which resulted in their acquiring basic computer skills. With 562 individuals reported as achieving significant skills increases and 496 of these individuals recorded as completing multi-week training programs in basic computer skills, core sites met 56% of their goal. Project personnel reported that many end users left the free 6-8 week training courses early after they had met their individual educational outcomes (e.g., learning how to navigate Windows, the Internet and E-Mail systems during a course that went on to provide comprehensive Microsoft Office application training). Many additional users likely acquired significant skills that were not recorded and/or acquired basic computer skills either outside the class setting or through classes that did not end up getting logged into the database. As with the figures for total users, the limitations and repeated changes in the tracking database and staff turnover may have resulted in a number of users who gained skills not being recorded.

All sites reported computer training utilization by groups with low, if any computer skill levels on average and little accessibility to computers and the Internet. All of the sites reported high demand for computer training that exceeded the services they were able to provide for a community that is largely low-income, limited-English proficiency. In Meriden, a waiting list of 100 people formed and people were referred to other institutions providing similar services. Danbury had realized the need for computer courses within the community, but lacked quality equipment and dedicated staff to provide these services until Nexo.

Looking ahead, Project Nexo and initiatives replicating the model would benefit from 1) using a more accurate definition of basic computer skill training which captures several levels and types of skill acquisition (e.g. tracking competent users in Windows/Internet/Email as separate from Microsoft Office applications); and 2) tracking informal learning and skill building outcomes during open lab hours through simple paper sign-in sheets with a check-box for new skills learned that day.

1.3 Deliver an adult education curriculum to 250 users

- ***79% of Goal***

With a total of 158 individuals, core sites met 63% of their adult education curriculum goal. An additional 39 individuals used centers to link with or complete education and training programs beyond the high school level (Certified Nursing Assistant training, A+ certification). Using the broader definition of adult education and considering that certain core sites (Meriden) would be duplicating established local adult education programs, being at 79% of this goal is a realistic and positive outcome. Part of the reason for this shortfall in this outcome was the difficulty most sites had in establishing partnerships with their local adult education programs. The original goal was established on the assumption that these partners would be providing resources in the form of teachers and curriculum to the Centers (particularly in New Haven), but due to other priorities and, in some cases, competitive considerations, these resources did not materialize. The Centers were still able to substantially meet this goal through their own efforts (e.g. in New Britain) and through the very productive partnership with the local adult education provider in New London

Centers worked with local Adult Education programs to serve as a recruitment and referral resource, extending the impact in this area.

1.4 Enroll 50 users in online college-level courses

- ***12% of Goal (for Online enrollment only)***
- ***280% of Goal (for college students using Nexo equipment and staff as resources)***

Although only six (6) end users have reported enrolling in strictly online college-level courses during the grant period, over 140 college-level students report using Nexo centers to support their in-class studies. New Britain established a strong relationship with Tunxis Community College to support Hispanic students. Meriden reported 50 students receiving Pell grants through their efforts. These numbers demonstrate the use of Core Sites by advanced users and not just individuals seeking basic computer instruction.

Project staff felt strongly that the original goal was simply unrealistic given the educational level and needs of most of the agency clients. The focus of the Center Directors was on more basic skill acquisition and, when college was involved, supporting success in the local community college.

Also, the partnership with Charter Oak State College which was intended to provide extra counseling and support for women on welfare taking on-line degree-track college courses fell through due to funding constraints, removing a major source of participants that were anticipated in this activity. Project staff felt that in time this activity could pick up as on-line courses become more popular and supports for them in the form of counseling and scholarships are more plentiful. They felt that the low level of participation in on-line courses did not diminish the success of the Centers.

1.5 Assist 150 users to enter employment

- ***40% of Goal (documented)***

Sixty (60) end users were recorded in the database as having entered new jobs or received raises since the inception of Project Nexo. Considering the recent economic downturn, limited English skills of the vast majority of end users, and that only 15 percent of un- and under- employed end users come to Project Nexo seeking employment assistance, 40% of goal on this measure is encouraging.

Executive Directors see the employment impact of Project Nexo as far greater than the number suggests, however. It was difficult to track employment outcomes for many of the center users. In New Britain, 20 college students obtained work-study jobs because of computer training that they received through the grant. The computer lab also allows New Britain's staff to help clients with online job applications.

The class is helped me a lot. I learned Excel, PowerPoint and even how to search the web in a smarter way. I decided to take this class to get a better position at my office and I did it (Rosario from Danbury)

The New London site works to get recent immigrants into the workforce, illustrating the value added by a culturally-attuned agency. For example, a woman from Puerto Rico who took computer classes twice a week was able to find a job working at Electric Boat in New London because of her improved computer and English skills. Another student from the Dominican Republic with less advanced skills in both English and computers completed courses in both in order to obtain more marketable skills. She received resume assistance from the agency in addition to training.

Agency staff cited a wide range of other outcomes and benefits that resulted from Project Nexo but which were not specified or tracked formally through the grant. These "additional" outcomes are listed by category as follows: These extremely positive but unanticipated activities are to be expected when dedicated agency leaders and staff acquire a tool like the Computer Learning Centers. More can be expected as the project continues.

Additional Outcome 1: Enhance traditional training programs

In Meriden, 80 individuals became Certified Nursing Aides, relying heavily on technology resources during the training and certification process.

Additional Outcome 2: Small Business Support

Small business owners used centers to enhance their technology skills to market their services and establish an online presence (creation of print brochure, business cards and web page for personal catering business in Meriden) and computerize their bookkeeping and ordering systems (spreadsheets and database for construction company in Danbury) and correspond with clients (access to free email provided by SNET).

Additional Outcome 3: Personal Empowerment and Strengthening Family Unit

Evidence of personal empowerment outcomes follows below as personal testimonials:

- *Estas clases de computación han hecho un cambio en mi vida / These computer classes have changed my life (Jorge).*
- *Siempre tuve una inquietud de aprender estos programas que eran nuevos para mi. Ahora los programas me facilitan crecer profesionalmente y como madre en poder colaborarle a mis hijos en sus trabajos de escuela / I was always worried about learning those [computer] programs that were new to me. Now, the programs help be grow professionally and as a mother in being able to work with my children on their schoolwork (Edith).*
- *Para mi la clase de computadora ha sido algo muy importante. He aprendido ayudar a mis hijos para que ellos sigan en adelante académicamente hoy, mañana y siempre / For me the computer class has been something very important. I learned how to help my children so they can keep moving forward academically today, tomorrow and always (Silvia).*

Additional Outcome 4: Troubleshooting and Equipment Use Resource

The Meriden Center became an informal technical resource for participants to trouble shoot their own equipment issues. Many clients purchased or rented their own computers upon completing the course. People there have started bringing in their computers from home if they are broken leading the agency to start servicing personal computers. Center staff found a real desire for information on new devices and programs. For example, people would bring in newly purchased scanners and digital cameras from home. The Center arranged to get equipment and software so they were able to teach people how to use these, adding PhotoEditor and Microsoft Publisher to the curriculum.

Additional Outcome 5: Bridging Geography and Eliminating Isolation

Nexo helped to strengthen extended family units by connecting them to the Internet. Meriden end users get with free email accounts and instruction on how to use them the first week. Many seniors enroll in New Britain because they are isolated at home, and being connected to the Internet allows them to connect with distant family and friends. This site also donates its older computers to seniors, allowing them to reach people at home and contact someone in case of an emergency.

B. INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS STORIES

A detailed look at the lives of end users shows how Project Nexo has contributed to the personal success of individuals who are members of traditionally underserved populations. The following is a representative sample of success stories that speak to the profound impact of Project Nexo on the lives of Hispanic small business owners, budding entrepreneurs, currently employed individuals seeking skill upgrades for promotions, as well as other professionals and community members:

Supporting Small Business Success

Daniel, a 40-year-old former factory worker was given the opportunity to purchase a bodega from his relative at a reduced price. When operations began, Daniel identified new skills he needed (financial management) and ways to save money (eliminate bookkeeper). He also hoped to hire his 23 year-old daughter as the new bookkeeper.

Daniel soon realized that he needed help with the brand new (and risky) endeavor of owning a small business. Fortunately, Project Nexo met Daniel's needs in several ways. He heard about Project Nexo over the radio in the fall of 2001. It was the first time that he had utilized any of the center's services.

Although Daniel had lived in New York for several years, his English was shaky. He and his daughter began by taking ESL and computer courses twice each week over the next several months.

Focusing on Microsoft Excel, the Center Director taught Daniel and his daughter bookkeeping applications. They also learned Microsoft Word so they could create advertisements and flyers for the bodega. Soon, they incorporated content-specific information on small businesses and skill-building web research, with the Center Director translating any text that Daniel could not understand. Daniel started to surf the web with ease and was able to get a good idea of small business resources available to him.

Now, Daniel's business and clientele are growing, and he has the financial reports to prove it. The first store in Meriden opened in 2000 and a second store opened in New Haven in 2002. Recently, Daniel bought a laptop that allows him to work from either location.

Helping Develop Skills Needed to Pursue New Opportunities

Miguel, a single father in his late 30's was working part-time at a conference center in a minimum-wage position when he heard about Nexo Center offerings. He and his son were living off of social security and he wanted to be in a position to earn enough to support himself and his son without public assistance.

The conference center where Miguel worked often held banquets, weddings, and other formal events. Seeing the need for on-site photography services, Miguel hoped to become a photographer for his current employer. However, he spoke little to no English, so he began by taking both ESL and computer classes. While studying, Miguel continued to work in his current position part-time.

Upon hearing of Miguel's career aspirations, the Center Director created and taught Daniel a specialized program of study to support his goals. As a result, Daniel learned Printshop, Acrobat Reader, and Adobe Photoshop. The Center Director also helped Miguel purchase a used personal computer, which he then upgraded from Windows 98 to Windows 2000. Piece by piece, Miguel purchased other necessary equipment – a camera and photo printer, to attain his career goals.

Now, Miguel continues to work for the conference center as a photographer and does freelance work for weddings, church events, and calendars on the side. His clients hear about him through word-of-mouth and the business cards Miguel learned to make on Publisher.

Supporting Growth of a Home Based Business

Marisol, a woman in her late 50's decided to start a catering business from home to support herself and her husband, who was unemployed and receiving social security. She quickly realized that she needed help in order to be successful. She and her husband had come to the country 10 years ago, but Marisol had limited English skills and no experience with computers; she had familiarity with typewriters from her previous experience as a secretary years ago.

Marisol started taking a computer course in September 2001 at the Nexo Center. It was her first time hearing about the center and utilizing any of its services. Upon enrolling, she explained to the instructor that she needed to learn how to make business cards and flyers in order to get the word out about her business. The instructor began by teaching her Microsoft Word, Excel (for the purposes of budgeting and bookkeeping) and finally, Publisher. Because she had no previous experience with computers and did not learn as quickly as the younger students, the instructor took care to make sure that she received additional tutoring from him as she needed it.

In the course of her studies, Marisol purchased a used computer with Windows 95 to use at home. Realizing that the computer wasn't equipped for her needs, the instructor upgraded the computer for her with more memory and installed Office 2000. Concurrent with her computer training, Marisol also took ESL classes to improve her English skills. She took both courses over the next several months.

Now, Marisol owns a licensed business that is based in her home. Recently, she bought a newer computer to replace her older model. Her business is flourishing with a client base across Connecticut, thanks to her advertising efforts, made possible through her knowledge of Publisher. She uses her newfound Internet skills to better connect with clients through email.

Expanding Capacity of a Community-based Professional

Peter, a lawyer in his late 50's moved to Connecticut to practice law. He had the good fortune to open up his own practice in the office next door to the Nexo Center. One day, he ventured next door to borrow their fax machine, and learned about its many services, including free computer courses.

Knowing that he needed to improve his limited computer skills, Peter signed up for the center's classes. He already knew how to use a few Word functions, but he had a lot of questions for the instructor; for example, he did not know how to cut and paste, save files on his hard drive (he had been using floppy disks), or manipulate margins.

Over the next month, Peter took classes in Word to solidify his skills. He also connected his office computer to the Internet, but continues to visit the center frequently to use their computers, which are better equipped than his obsolete model. Peter's frequent visits to the center can also be attributed to the work that he does for them. As a result of his connection with the Nexo Center, Peter got involved in doing pro bono work for the center's clients in need of legal representation. Because he is fluent in both Spanish and English, he is able to connect with people in the community who may be facing issues like eviction. Peter's work, made possible in part through the center, has effectively increased community capacity to meet legal needs.

New Technology Skills Lead to a Promotion

Anita, a woman in her early 30's needed to learn computer skills in order to be promoted within her current job as an assistant at the United Way. Because of her working hours, she was unable to attend class when they normally were held at the Nexo Center.

In response to Anita's work schedule, the Nexo Center Director tutored her individually in her home over the next two months without overtime, which the Center could not afford to support. In this period, he tutored Anita in multiple several-hour sessions. She learned Word, Excel, and Power Point. At the same time, Anita took ESL classes.

Upon completion of these tutoring sessions, Anita's boss at the United Way called the computer instructor to discuss Anita's progress. She was impressed by her new skills and gave Anita a promotion. Anita is now working for United Way as a trainer, and utilizes her Power Point skills to create and deliver presentations.

Bringing Technology to the Faith Community

Two nuns between the ages of 25 and 35, Maria and Sarah, walked into the Nexo Center because they wanted to learn Word and Power Point in order to better serve the convent's needs. Both nuns, who were Hispanic, were familiar with the Nexo Site, and had a good pre-existing relationship with the center. Additionally, they were the youngest nuns and fastest learners within the convent. For these reasons, they were the logical choice amongst the nuns to enroll in computer classes. Maria and Sarah had no previous experience with the computer and limited English proficiency, so concurrent with these computer classes, they continued to take ESL.

Over the next three months, Maria and Sarah learned word processing skills, which they then used to write letters and create booklets for elderly retreats hosted by the convent. Recently, the convent has replaced an obsolete computer with no programs installed with a newer model that allows them to work more efficiently. The convent and the Nexo Site continue to have a good working relationship. Once a month, nuns from this convent teach and interact with seniors at the center.

C. AGENCY OUTCOMES

An important objective of Project Nexo was to improve the capacity of CAUSA member agencies to fulfill their missions within their communities by enhancing their technological capacity and raising their profile in the community. It is not an exaggeration to say that Project Nexo catapulted these small, community-based non-profits into the front tier of non-profits in terms of their technological capabilities.

Project objectives related to this area included:

2.1 Administrative and managerial functions automated

2.2 Agency computers networked to facilitate communication

2.4 Staff trained in use of technology

All three objectives were achieved early in the project. All functioning computers at core sites were networked for the first time, not just those purchased through Project Nexo.

CAUSA Capacity

Project Nexo has been a major contributing factor to the revival of CAUSA itself. Since receiving this grant and in part through the momentum that it provided, CAUSA has gone through a strategic planning process, increased its visibility across the state, and begun an effort to recruit new members beyond its core of 15 agencies.

Project Nexo brought CAUSA into the middle of a very hot issue – bridging the digital divide—at a time when the Hispanic population has been growing rapidly in Connecticut. This has led to increased receptivity to CAUSA on the part of many funders and increased credibility for CAUSA and its agencies in seeking state workforce development funding.

Project Nexo has helped CAUSA to attract participants in an Advisory Board of leaders and technicians from industry and academia to provide guidance in Project Nexo as well as overall organizational development and strategy.

Operating the project out of Hartford enabled CAUSA to manage the project efficiently. One funding partner, SBC SNET, commented that CAUSA was one of the best grantees they have worked with in terms of timeliness of financial reports and general follow-up.

Local Agency Capacity

The Project Nexo Director identified basic training in computer literacy as the priority need for the majority of Executive Directors at CAUSA member agencies. Eight (8) Executive Directors, along with three (3) CAUSA office staff, received basic computer skills training (e.g., windows and Internet navigation, using email, etc.) provided at no charge by partner SBC SNET at their training facility in New Haven on August 7, 2001. Another 15 individuals (Center Directors, CAUSA office staff and Agency Executive Directors and additional Agency managerial staff) were trained in Microsoft Outlook, Windows XP and Internet Explorer on

“We have a very small paid staff – there are volunteers, but only 3 actual staff, which limits our capacity. Before NEXO, we had no Internet access, just a few computers, and no one was trained in Internet use or how to use the new computers.”

– Mary Sanders, Executive Director, New Britain Spanish Speaking Center

“Before this project, our staff was afraid of computers and I was the only one who knew how to use them. Now, they’re zipping in and zipping out information. They’re excited that they got to learn this. 100% of the staff went to the class at some point. We had tried to send them to computer classes before but they were intimidated and fearful of the unfamiliar. Now, they can create reports faster, email between agencies.”

– Magali Kupfer, Executive Director of Casa Boriqua in Meriden

May 10, 2002. In New Britain, Meriden, New London, and Danbury, staff were trained both formally and informally to utilize computers with Internet capabilities. Staff learned to use programs that improved data management, internal/external communication and research.

Project Nexo thus provided the means for each agency in both the core sites and the connected sites to improve their operations and extend their impact through technology and internet access. Basic administrative and managerial functions (i.e., communication within and between agencies through email) have been automated at core sites. Financial management functions have been automated in most cases. Data bases have been established to support program management.

At the New Britain Spanish Speaking Center, with a staff of three and many volunteers, the new computers improved their data management and management of general correspondence. Everyone in the office learned to use Excel spreadsheets.

Examples of the positive impacts on agency operation cited include:

- Training for computer-illiterate and technology-averse staff. Targeted staff computer training outside of the Project Nexo curriculum provided by SNET-SBC at their corporate training facility raised staff skill levels across all agencies.
- The Nexo Center Directors became a valuable as-needed computer training resource for staff.
- Improved internal communications.
- New skills (e.g., creating flyers using MS Office) lifted burden of production from computer-literate staff.
 - Danbury: “Communication improved because of this project. We were able to create our own fliers (before we had to rely on our secretary to do everything). It made working easier.”
- Improved productivity through acquisition of new computer skills.
 - Meriden: “The secretary learned to use Excel spreadsheets for the first time because of this class. When we asked our secretary a question that involved the database, she was able to spit out data like that.”
- The Centers have enabled improved external communication and information gathering through Internet access.
 - New London: “Before the project, we didn’t have Internet access. After we had Internet access, staff was able to use computers in the lab in order to go online. They were also more attuned to things going on. The computer lab has become a resource for the staff as well as the clients.”
- Access to the Internet improved agencies’ ability to participate in the community and pursue collaborations. One Executive Director cited the benefits of the five Executive Directors collaborating on Project Nexo (which was greatly facilitated by e-mail): “We were on the same track as the other directors and the relationships developed quickly.”

- New Britain: “Before Internet access, as a director, I was out of the loop, but now with Internet, I am able to collaborate with other agencies better. I used to miss meetings because snail mail (letters) got to me after they had happened!”
- The Centers increased the visibility of the agencies within their communities and brought in new clients. For example, of 200 people registered for the computer courses in Meriden, 150 were new to the center and did not know about its other services.

With their new skills, staffs of these sites were able to provide **more services more productively and efficiently**. In Danbury, this lifted the burden of production from the few staff members that were computer-literate before Project Nexo. Having the computer center and the access to the internet has helped CAUSA agencies improve their program services. For example:

Danbury and Meriden found that clients located social services on their own over the Internet, building their research, self-advocacy and English skills through the process. Agency staff can focus on reaching more clients as a result.

Danbury: “For example, our clients don’t need to utilize the center for information as much as they did before. It makes our job easier. Before, people would have called for help – now they go online and help themselves. Carlos has taught them to look for information themselves by searching online.”

Meriden: “Clients used to ask us about how to locate services, but now we can sit them down on the computer and have them look it up themselves online. For example, when someone comes in to complain about their driver’s license, we make them look it up themselves, in English, on the computer. It has freed us up a lot more to do other things.”

In conclusion, Project Nexo has had a major positive impact on both CAUSA and on CAUSA member agency capacity despite severe budget pressure accompanying state and federal cutbacks and policy changes, such as the Workforce Investment Act shift towards Individual Training Accounts and reductions in TANF funding.

VI. PARTNERSHIPS

CAUSA leadership recognized the importance of strong partnerships in accomplishing the goals of Project Nexo. Beginning with the planning for the application, CAUSA reached out to engage major education, workforce and related entities in the state. The original partners involved in the project are listed in the text box at right. CAUSA reached out to these entities because they were also seeking to address the acknowledged disparities in technology access and education affecting the Hispanic community.

All the partners provided valuable input in the planning of the project and in the initial implementation planning. SBC SNET representative in particular, Thomas Buckley, provided extensive guidance and support to the project leadership as well as arranged training for agency staff. He provided a sounding board for project strategy deliberations as well.

The network provider, NESS, proved to be a strong partner, going beyond the letter of their contract to ensure timely installation of all the centers and continuing support for their success.

The Connecticut Department of Labor worked with the agencies to connect their clients to the Connecticut Works Centers (the One-Stop Career Centers established pursuant to the Workforce Investment Act) and the set of Internet-based job and career search tools developed to serve individuals and businesses in the state. CTDOL staff also provided guidance on Center procedures based on their experience in CT Works Centers and software and training to the agencies to establish card-swipe systems to track their participants.

The United Way of Connecticut completed their commitment to translate their social service referral web site and database into Spanish and orient CAUSA agencies in its use.

The Connecticut Department of Social Services is one of the main funders of CAUSA agency services and provided \$20,000 in a grant to support the initial implementation of Project Nexo. Project Nexo has enabled CAUSA and its agencies to communicate electronically with DSS on all financial and grant management matters.

The anticipated relationship with the Regional Workforce Development Boards of the Connecticut Workforce Development Council did not materialize as planned except in the case of New London which was able to use the Center to strengthen its preexisting relationship.

In operation, a number of the partnership projects and relationships anticipated did not materialize for a variety of reasons. The connection to Charter Oak College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium is still there, but the agencies have not taken advantage of it because they have been more focused on more basic components of individual training and skill-building. They found that most of the participants are not in a position to take advantage of on-line courses. The connection remains and can be picked up as individuals are.

An important partnership behind the scenes was the CAUSA relationship with Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP (HWF), the New Haven-based consulting firm that helped CAUSA plan and write the TOP proposal and then facilitated start up planning and implementation. The SBC SNET representative cited the participation of a skilled consultant during these phases as a critical success factor and a major reason for their confidence in the project.

Local Partnerships

Several of the agencies operating Centers formed or enhanced strong local partnerships as well. These were most successful where the new technological capacity was used to build on preexisting relationships. In New London, for instance, the agency had existing relationships with the Regional Workforce Board and Adult Education that were further enhanced with involvement in Nexo. The Center recently received an award recognizing these efforts. When the agency needed an ESL teacher, the Department of Adult Education provided one, but with recent funding cuts, their

Project Nexo Partners

Technology Partners

SBC SNET

New England Systems Solutions (NESS)
(network vendor)

Workforce/Career Development Partners

Connecticut Workforce Development Council (CWDC)

Department of Labor (DOL)

Educational Partners:

Charter Oak State College (COSC)

Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC)

State Department of Education

State Vocational Technical Schools

Social Services/Information Partners

United Way/Infoline

Connecticut Department of Social Services

resources have become more limited. Additionally, the agency in New London has written grants in previous years in collaboration with the Department of Adult Education

New London: “We had a good, existing relationship with the Regional Workforce Board before project NEXO, as we are partners with them in providing training. Our relationship with them was enhanced with NEXO. We also have a good relationship with Adult Education that’s been developing for decades. Partnerships don’t happen overnight; they have to be cultivated.”

In Danbury, two partners, United Way of Southeast Connecticut and Dental Learning Institute utilized the computer lab in order to enrich the curriculum of their ESL classes and Dental Assistant programs, respectively.

Meriden was able to offer computer training to certified nursing aide students through their partnership with Wilcox Technical School.

However, Meriden and New Britain did not have strong existing relationships with Adult Education and Regional Workforce Board, and were not successful in developing a productive partnership through participation in Nexo. This was in part due to an element of competition. When Meriden started up, they saw other agencies start teaching computer classes, including Adult Education, who called Casa Boricua for help. Casa Boricua referred people from its waiting list, which has over 100 people, but they prefer to take classes at Casa Boricua because Adult Education charges for those classes and Casa does not. In New Britain, the agency met with the Director of Adult Education and sat in on their Advisory Board meetings, but Adult Education didn’t have any funding, they had centers of their own, and had no staff to provide services at the Center, so no partnership materialized.

Danbury works with the Department of Education and several different schools and agencies. When their center is closed, students are referred to the library to work on the computers there. However, the library has limited hours.

In New Britain, Tunxis Community college has proven to be an excellent partner. They provided at least 20 used computers for the lab as well as some college-level books for students. Tunxis has facilitated over 50 Center students in receiving Pell grants and also had a grant for students who didn’t qualify for the Pell grant to take short-term summer courses to help the students get jobs.

New Britain works with 25 kids involved with Big Brothers, Big Sisters through an after school program.

In Meriden, partners from community colleges have been especially supportive, but no official partnerships took off. Staff refer students to both Gateway (in North Haven) and Middlesex (in Meriden and Middletown), but the language barrier has made it difficult for them to attend. At one point, Tunxis Community College had a free program for students with a GED. As a result, about 20-25 clients who wanted to take classes for a degree were enrolled. Meriden’s computer instructor received his A+ certification this way.

In Danbury, the Center has a referral relationship with TVICO, an agency that helps retrain and place people who are fighting trauma (brain damage) people.

In conclusion, the strongest partnerships were those built on preexisting relationships. Partnership is a long term commitment and, while Project Nexo positions the CAUSA agencies well for partnerships, it will take time to develop them.

VII. PROJECT CONTINUATION

All five Core sites remain open and operational.

- In Meriden, the Center remains open. The computer instructor is working the same hours. He teaches classes at night and Saturday mornings to accommodate work schedules.
- Danbury is open four days instead of five now and report that demand for the services is growing.
- New Britain staffs the Center with volunteers and work-study students while they work to secure funding to bring back their highly effective Center Director. People are still using the computers extensively and teaching is also happening amongst students (students teaching other students).
- In New London, the agency has had to limit the number of hours offered.
- In New Haven, the agency is going through a major reorganization. The computers are used in youth programs and by walk-ins but no formal program is currently offered.

CAUSA leadership and the leadership at the five core site agencies are committed to the continuation of Project Nexo as an important component of CAUSA agency services. They are aggressively seeking additional funding at this time. CAUSA has helped the sites continue their broadband DSL service and secure additional workforce development funding that has been used to continue staff support for the program. CAUSA continues to incorporate support for the Centers into programmatic funding requests in the areas of workforce development and health.

CAUSA staff has reached out to foundations and corporate funders as well as to the State and the Connecticut Legislature to seek sustaining funding. An individual donor has provided \$5,000 to support continued DSL service.

Danbury, for example, has hired a consultant to help with fund raising. She will help write proposals and apply for funding sources that apply to computer programs. They have also aggressively pursued workforce development funding.

Some of the funds raised during the grant were used to create a sixth, expansion Computer Learning Center at the Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW) in Wallingford, responding to strong local interest.

VIII. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Project Nexo has provided CAUSA and its member agencies with tremendous challenges, which have born many lessons that they are eager to pass on to others considering going down this road. Among the challenges and lessons emerging from discussions with Project Nexo leaders are:

Funding Issues

Challenge: With a relatively short grant period, CAUSA had the challenge of jump starting a complex project and quickly moving to raise the funds to sustain it before much data on outcomes was available.

Attempting to sustain Project Nexo as a new program at a time when core agency programmatic funding was undergoing major cuts was a major challenge.

Lesson Learned: CAUSA waited until later in the project when some data was available to take the Project Nexø story out to funders, but they did seek and obtain funding for expansion of the concept to an additional core site (Wallingford).

CAUSA worked with core site agencies to integrate the technology focus into ongoing training and client service efforts, which provided additional leverage to sustain those programs while yielding some resources to sustain Project Nexø.

Staffing

Challenge: For a project of this scope and complexity, you need a competitive salary to attract a candidate for Project Director with the requisite managerial, leadership, and technical skills. As with many non-profit efforts, the grant budget did not provide for this level, which limited the pool of applicants.

Lesson Learned: Take the steps necessary to fund the key leadership position at a high enough level to recruit the person with the right skills, even if it means diverting resources from other areas.

Resource Development

Challenge: The area of planning, fund development, communications, and public relations is crucial to the long-term success of an innovative project of this type. Project staff focused on implementation so it was a challenge to document and describe all the positive impacts of the work. Although CAUSA was able to generate considerable press coverage and has now had some ability to turn to fund development, resources at the earlier stages to purchase these services would have accelerated the process greatly.

Lesson Learned: Try to build funding into your project budget for planning, communications and fund development as a crucial early task. CAUSA found tremendous interest in the project but was not in a position to follow up on all potential partnerships and opportunities for exposure.

Partnerships

Challenge: Following up on initial partner commitments and securing new partnerships has proven to be a significant challenge for Project Nexø. While a few partners have gone beyond the call, others just have not delivered even with repeated requests and reminders. Some partners ended up not being a very good fit with the project while others changed their priorities.

Lesson Learned: Effective partnerships require time and the realization of mutual benefit to develop organically. Partnerships documented in the accelerated pace of the grant application process are often not successful in practice without extensive, time-consuming cultivation.

During the project planning process, more effort should be devoted to carefully choosing project partners and cultivating their commitments based on mutual self-interest in order to focus later efforts on productive relationships. Also, when lower level staff fails to follow through with commitments their organization made, efforts need to be made to engage higher level officials within the committed organizations to achieve fulfillment of the commitments.

Efforts to attract volunteer support from high levels and technical levels within business should begin earlier in the project and be pursued more aggressively. These individuals have made valuable contributions now that they are involved.

A project of this type should get firmer, clearer written commitments for concrete services and roles from partners initially.

Technology Issues

Challenge: Computers and networks are prone to problems which can frustrate staff and students. Day-to-day maintenance of the computers and networks across multiple sites presents a significant challenge.

Lesson Learned: Technology support is essential. It's a critical that you have someone there to help make sure everything is up and ready, take care of upgrades, and perform maintenance on the computers. CAUSA managed to arrange high quality technical support throughout the project. Considerable effort went into choosing a network vendor with a track record of responsiveness, the flexibility to work in challenging facilities and with tight budgets, and the capacity to deliver.

On a related point, programs should make sure that the computers can be updated, as everything changes so quickly with technology.

Challenge: Center staffs were worried about inappropriate use of the computers -- people getting in and out of inappropriate sites (i.e. pornography). When they placed administrative controls on the computers to prevent people from opening up certain sites, they found that they prevented them from accessing too many other websites.

Lesson Learned: The Centers tried to make sure that staff was always present to make sure there were no inappropriate uses of the computer.

Facilities Issues

Challenge: Installing modern computer centers in old agency facilities posed a major challenge in two agencies (Meriden and New London) that had to plan, design, and finance major upgrades to their electrical service before the centers could be installed. CAUSA and the agencies had to raise over \$11,000 to finance these improvements which delayed the opening of these centers several months.

Lesson Learned: Spend more time early on to investigate facility limitations to facilitate more accurate budgeting and more realistic timelines.

Programmatic Issues

Challenge: Meriden found that not being able to find child care kept people from attending classes

Lesson Learned: Work with family child care providers and others to facilitate child care arrangements.

Challenge: Several Centers felt that the size of the initial centers (9 computers) was too small and limited their reach. For others the number was right.

Lesson Learned: Size the Centers to the projected demands of the local community. Build in expansion potential. Try to pick facilities with room to grow.

Challenge: The part time nature of the Center Directors limited the number of classes they could teach.

Lesson Learned: There is a huge demand for technology training in the Latino community. Agencies should try to secure funding for full time staff to offer the array of courses desired.

Challenge: Many people took parts of basic skills courses but dropped out before completion.

Lesson Learned: Design a flexible program of modules on different topics that can provide a sense of completion for each individual part, level or software package. This will also provide more schedule flexibility for students.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

In pursuing the Project Nexo grant opportunity, CAUSA and its participating agencies undertook a major challenge to bring community-based agencies into the networked, Internet-connected age in one major push. Simply getting the sites staffed, equipped, connected, promoted, and operating reliably is a major achievement for which core site agencies and the CAUSA staff should be proud. The scope and diversity of programming at the Centers, the positive reception of the work of the centers by neighborhood residents, and the improved capacity of CAUSA agencies to manage their affairs and meet the needs of residents as documented in this report have validated the original concept.

These efforts have laid an important foundation for Project Nexo's future community impact and the replication of Project Nexo as a model in similar historically underserved communities. The following recommendations based on the findings of the evaluation report are presented in support of the continued success of Project Nexo and the implementation of the Nexo model in comparable settings.

Fund Development to Support Continued Staffing and Expansion: Fund development is the most urgent priority for Project Nexo at this juncture. The CAUSA Executive Director has recently focused substantial effort on fund development for both CAUSA and its member agencies. Program funds have been secured to continue Project Nexo services for the time being at most sites, but CAUSA agencies operating the Centers are struggling to maintain staffing in the face of major State and federal cuts in their traditional funding sources. The excitement of the Centers should be used to reach out to new statewide and local sources of support and sources of donations, volunteers and student interns.

Examples of local sources of support include businesses, voc-tech schools, community colleges, faith-based organizations, civic associations (Kiwanis, etc.), and other clubs. CAUSA should consider providing additional training and technical assistance to member agencies in this work. Generating this support and local resources will be critical to sustaining the effort now that the federal funds have ended.

CAUSA needs to present a strong data-based case for sustaining funds to approach national foundations,¹³ regional community foundations,¹⁴ as well as local banks and businesses.

CAUSA should also begin to think creatively about how Project Nexo can play a role in meeting both 1) the changing needs of ends users who have completed computer training and adult education courses, 2) market demand for a workforce with specific skills and motivation, and 3) the demand for technical assistance to small businesses, building on the successes during the grant period. The latter could be pursued by exploring collaboration with the Spanish American Merchants' Association (SAMA) which has focused on technology for Hispanic businesses.

Center support can then be built into program budgets as the technology becomes an integral part of agency strategy, not a stand-alone program. For example, according to a recent NYT article, the number of qualified teachers for bilingual or ESOL classes at the primary and secondary level is in chronic short supply by the tens of thousands. The Office of English Language Acquisition

¹³ For example, UPS, Bill and Melinda Gates, and Milagro foundations.

¹⁴ For example, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Community Foundation for Southeastern Connecticut, New Britain Foundation for Public Giving.

provided close to \$400 million in 2000 to help districts put candidates through college or night classes to receive ESOL or bilingual licenses. This year, the office plans to hand out \$665 million in grants.¹⁵ Using the Project Nexa infrastructure as an access point for qualified end users to seek ESOL or bilingual teaching certifications online might be an attractive funding option for federal sources and an entrepreneurial move for Project Nexa and CAUSA.

Develop Board and Advisory Committee Structures: Recently the CAUSA Executive Director has assembled a core group of advisors from the technology and business communities to provide strategic advice and connections to CAUSA. This effort should be formalized and expanded as a critical piece of the fund development effort. Although this report did not look at governance issues within CAUSA, the CAUSA Board remains at the center of fund development efforts and should be developed strategically to add representatives that can advance those efforts. The same goes for the local CAUSA agency boards which need to reach beyond community-based leaders to involve high profile leaders within their communities.

Carefully Track Data on Classes and Client Activities and Outcomes: Accurate data on Center activities, clients and outcomes is the foundation of efforts to sustain and expand the reach of Project Nexa. While strides were made during the relatively short grant period, CAUSA agencies need to focus more attention on this critical task.

Demonstrating employment outcomes in particular is critical to attracting continued support for Project Nexa. Center Directors are encouraged to contact end users who sought employment assistance and/or came to increase their employability as well as those who have completed either basic computer training or adult education courses. Performing a brief phone interview is a reasonable expectation- a job that student interns and volunteers could perform. Center staff should work to fill in missing data on existing individual records and add new rows in the case of new jobs or raises attained.

A basic client database is in place at the Centers. The challenge is to make sure that all activities and outcomes are captured in that database. There is evidence that many more users gained access to the Internet and pursued their individual goals at the Centers than were logged into the database used for this report. But unless they are accurately accounted for, their participation is not captured. More complete data on class purpose and participation will also help in both program planning and in presentations to potential funders.

Monitor Community Needs and Offer Curriculum to Meet Needs: CAUSA agencies should work together and with partners to assess community technology and training needs on an on-going basis to ensure that the Project Nexa offerings remain timely and relevant to those needs and current data is available to support funding requests. Online surveys through the Centers and paper surveys are tools that can be used in this effort.

The core of the Center programs is computer skills training either by itself or as a component of another training program. Assuming data on class type is representative of center activity, core sites should be encouraged to broaden programmatic offerings with a shift towards Career Development Assistance and GED preparation.

Expand Efforts to Connect End Users with Higher Education Opportunities: With the increasing skill demands in the labor market as technology and knowledge drive productivity, post-secondary education is assuming greater importance. This increases the pressure on low income Hispanic residents to seek advanced training to secure reasonable wages to support their families.

¹⁵ "Wave of Pupils Lacking English Strains Schools," August 5, 2002.

Project Nexo is well-positioned to play an important role in connecting end users to both traditional and online higher education opportunities—there is a strong story to tell in this area based on the experience in New Britain and Meriden. New Britain in particular has developed strategies for partnering with their local community college to support enrollment, financial assistance and academic success. These strategies could be shared and replicated at the other sites.

In support of students, Centers, with assistance from CAUSA and volunteers, should be encouraged to research thoroughly all upcoming grant and tuition assistance opportunities for eligible students who want to enroll in online college-level courses and make sure that they are aware of all application deadlines. This could be assisted by a joint effort across the centers to compile this information and make it available through the CAUSA web site and written materials.

As Project Nexo develops, the partnerships with Charter Oak College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium should be revived and activated. The time was not right for this work during the start-up period, but may be in the future. CAUSA could still pursue new course development through the CTDLIC as planned, with a possible content focus on Adult Education and ESOL courses and certification. This could be a source of revenue of others seek to use the course materials or if funders interested in this area can be convinced. The Charter Oak Hispanic Scholars Program model, in which low income students receive extra counseling and support to pursue on-line degree programs, holds promise and should be pursued if the Centers see the interest from residents.

Expand Outreach Efforts with a Focus on Youth: As funding is secured to sustain the Centers, they should increase outreach efforts within their communities. With a majority of successful outreach resulting from informal efforts, core site agencies might consider free or low-cost advertising on a continual basis (e.g., Public Service Announcements on radio or print media targeting Hispanics/Latinos, flyers at local businesses and Latino churches, etc.) and develop tactics that rely on word of mouth and informal referrals (e.g. coupons or premiums for referral of a friend or family member who takes a class, social marketing through street outreach by agency staff and tapping neighborhood opinion leaders to speak on behalf of the centers).

Surprisingly, only 7% of end users were between the ages of 15 and 20. Outreach to this sub-section of the population is important as these individuals need to be prepared for their initial entry into the workforce. CAUSA should seek to understand why this is happening—perhaps youth have sufficient access to the Internet and computers at home or school. With the intense interest of policymakers in youth issues (which unfortunately has not translated into funding), Project Nexo has the capacity and facilities to play a more significant role in the youth employment arena.

Build Partnerships. Across all these areas, CAUSA needs to strengthen its existing partnerships and build new ones with the entities affecting the lives and well-being of the Hispanic community in the areas of workforce development, education, social services, business, and health care.

Conclusion

This report has documented the process CAUSA, its member agencies and its partners followed in creating Project Nexo and the results they have achieved.

Project Nexo took five agencies from the technological backwaters to the front ranks of community-based non-profits in their deployment of the latest network technology to serve their communities. Almost 10,000 low-income, predominantly Hispanic end users accessed state-of-the-art computers and software and high bandwidth Internet connections, operated by Hispanic agencies and bi-lingual staff in their own neighborhoods. Over 560 participants gained basic

computer skills, 140 were supported in higher education, 158 participated in adult education programs through the Centers, numerous small business owners learned or sharpened their computer skills to support their business success, and many more used the Centers for a range of purposes from entertainment to searching for jobs to communicate with loved ones far away. As the success stories featured here demonstrate, the powerful story of Project Nexo is in the lives it touched and the people it helped to empower with new skills to serve them in an ever more technology-driven world.

Although these pioneering agencies faced many challenges, they managed to create a program that had significant impact in the lives of hundreds of end users and has tremendous potential as a model for addressing the critical need in the Latino community for increased access to technology and skill building opportunities. The solid accomplishments achieved against significant odds should lay the foundation for sustaining and continuing to refine and grow the programs and services launched through Project Nexo.

APPENDICES

A. PARTICIPANT DATABASE SPECIFICATIONS

B. LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

C. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DATABASE SPECIFICATIONS

Demographic Information

- Social Security Number
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Birth Date:
- Race:
- Specific Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity:
- Parent?
- Number of Children:
- Highest Level of Education:

Contact Information:

- Street Address, City, State, Zip, Phone, Fax and E-Mail

Nexo Engagement and Accomplishments

- How did you hear about Project Nexo?
- What is your primary reason for coming?
- How would you rate your computer skills?
- Services Planned on Using / Services Used (checkboxes for computer skills training, adult education course, online college course, employment assistance, and other)

Employment

- Was the client employed at first Nexo engagement?
- If so, please document the following (job start date, job end date, employer, hours per week, hourly wage, annual wage) for each job.

Course information

- Course Name
- Course Description
- Course schedule (days of week, start time, duration)

Class Information

- Date of class
- Number of volunteers
- Skills learned
- Class highlights/successes
- Concerns / problems encountered
- Solution and effectiveness of solution
- Class attendance by name

APPENDIX B:**PERSONS INTERVIEWED**

- **CAUSA, Inc.**
Hartford
(860) 424-0077

Carmen Sierra, Executive Director
- **Casa Boricua**
Meriden
(203) 235-1082

Magali Kupfer, Executive Director
(203) 237-0741
Jesus Pedraza, NEXO Director
j.pedraza@snet.net
- **Centro de la Comunidad**
New London

Victor Melendez, Former Executive Director
(860) 334-5765
Katrina Bercaw, Coordinator of Educational and Employability Programs
(860) 442-4463
- **Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury**
Danbury

Maria Cinta Lowe, Executive Director
(203) 798-2855
Carlos Quichiz, NEXO Director
- **Spanish Speaking Center**
New Britain

Mary Sanders, Executive Director
(860) 224-2651
- **Latino Youth Development**
New Haven

Millie Torres, Acting Executive Director
(203) 776-3649
Manuel Rivera, Former Executive Director
(860) 224-2651
- **SBC/SNET**

Thomas Buckley, Director of Educational Programs

APPENDIX C: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviews were conducted between June 18-26, 2003 by Holt, Wexler & Farnam. (See Appendix for list of interviewees.) Both Executive Directors and Nexo Center Directors of each agency were contacted and where possible, interviewed. In cases of staff turnover, both existing and former staff were contacted and interviewed where possible. Below is the format used for each interview?

Project Accomplishments

- What was the project's most significant accomplishment or achievement?
- How did the project change the way in which agency staff perform their jobs or carry out their activities?
 - [Solicit anecdotes and examples of how the agency benefited from the project]
- In what ways has having the computer center and the access to the internet helped your agency improve its programs or administrative capabilities?
- What impact did the project have on the community at large? For example, how did the project make a difference in people's lives? What impact did the project have on traditionally disadvantaged or underserved populations?
- Please describe any unanticipated problems that resulted from the project.

Lessons Learned

- What was the most significant barrier or obstacle that the project had to overcome?
- How did the management structure, having the project run out of the central CAUSA office, work for you? What were some of the ways this has worked that should be reexamined as you move forward?
- Please describe any lessons that your project has learned that would be of use to future TOP projects.
- Would you recommend that future projects replicate/adapt the TOP-related approach used by your project?
 - If yes, please describe any lessons or advice that you would pass on to projects that are replicating/adapting this approach.
 - If no, please describe why you would recommend that future projects not replicate/adapt this approach.

Future Plans

- What is the current status of your Center?
 - Options
 - In full operation.
 - In partial operation providing the full range of services but impacting fewer end users than intended.
 - In partial operation serving the full scope of end users but providing a limited range of services.
 - No longer in operation

- In operation, but serving a function that has changed/grown/expanded considerably from that outlined in the original proposal.
- If project activity reduced, what factors are responsible for the project no longer operating at full capacity?
 - Options
 - Mechanical obsolescence (equipment became inoperable, unreliable, worn out).
 - Technical obsolescence (faster, more accurate, better alternatives became available).
 - Personnel changes (project staff who were most interested are no longer involved).
 - Insufficient funding available for maintenance of project-related activities.
 - Loss of partners or failure of partnerships.
 - Lack of community support.
 - Too costly to maintain/sustain.
 - Policy barriers. (Specify):
 - Other. (Specify):
- What future plans are envisioned for your project?
 - Do you have any plans to sustain the project or expand it to serve additional end users or provide new services?
 - What are your anticipated source of funds for any future plans?

Spin-Off Activities

- Has the TOP project generated any spin-off activities at your site?
- Please describe any spin-off activities and the additional services being provided.

Partnerships

- Describe how your project partnerships worked at the site level.
- What partnerships were you able to establish with the original partners in the project such as Adult Education and the Regional Workforce Boards?
- What new partnerships did you make (for example with local businesses or agencies?)

Any other comments

- Is there anything else about Project NEXO that you think we should look at as part of the evaluation report?
- Any other thoughts or comments?