

## Agenda

### Rural Telecommunications Initiative Advisory Committee Meeting

May 17, 1991

The Aspen Institute  
1333 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.  
Suite 1070  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
202/466-6410

- 10:00 Introductions - Maureen Kennedy
- 10:15 Overview of RTI Progress to Date - Julie Marx
  - Comments and Questions
- 10:30 Overview, continued - Jamie Rohe
  - RP&D Forum: demonstration; success stories; and, areas for improvement
  - Plans for RP&D: open forum; information providers
  - Questions
- 11:00 Presentation on Evaluation for Apple Computers, Inc. - Julie Marx
  - Results of Participant Survey
- 11:20 Questions and Discussion
- 12:15 Lunch
  - Discussion of Proposed CONNECT Price Increases - Sam Karp
- 1:15 Discussion of Second Round of Grants
  - Criteria
  - Recommendation for demonstration
- 2:00 Discussion of Priorities for Second Year of RTI
  - Advanced training
  - Marketing
- 2:45 Break
- 3:00 Discussion of Priorities, continued
  - Institutionalization of the RTI
  - Discussion and Suggestions
- 3:30 Evaluation and Wrap-up - Mary Coleman
- 4:00 Depart



Participant List

Rural Telecommunications Initiative  
Advisory Committee Meeting

May 17, 1991

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Suite 1070  
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## Memorandum

**TO:** The Rural Telecommunications Initiative Advisory Committee

**FROM:** Staff, The Aspen Institute

**DATE:** May 10, 1991

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation on 1991 RTI Demonstration

A key component of the 1990 RTI effort was a state-based demonstration in North Carolina. A coalition of groups working on rural poverty and development issues assembled financial resources, commitments from ten "lead organizations," and organizing capability to create a network of diverse grantees working on a range of issues across the state, all of which shared a common commitment to rural poverty alleviation. The RTI earmarked 25 percent of its computers to the effort. In addition, the organizers of the effort planned to bring an additional 150 nonprofits into the project, relying on equipment donated by other entities or already in the hands of North Carolina groups.

During the 1990 selection round, several other "networks" of applicants received computers: The RCAP network received a total of 12 computers spread among its 47 field offices, the sustainable agriculture network received a half dozen computers, and a small network of three groups in northern New Mexico received three computers. These commitments were distinguished from the demonstration in several ways. The RTI invested fewer computers in them; the networks were, at that time, less organized than the North Carolina coalition, and may not have had as clear a sense of purpose and use for the computers; and the networks committed (understandably) far fewer financial resources to the effort.

By and large, the North Carolina demonstration has been very successful. From that experience and others, we have learned quite a bit about what leads groups to take best advantage of the computer technology, to use the electronic network in a strategic manner, and to maximize the value of a "demonstration" in contrast to a "network" or a computer grant to a series of individual organizations.

Internally, we have used some semblance of these criteria to evaluate the proposals for the second round demonstration. They include:

- Does the project fit into a broader effort with wider goals and objectives, or does it simply bring a large group of computer users into the RTI fold?
- Does it bring financial resources to the table adequate to cover the added technical assistance, networking and marketing demands of any





demonstration? Does it reflect an upfront commitment of time and other resources by more than one organization?

- Does it meet clearly defined needs of an already-functioning network of groups, which may be working on similar issues or operating in a particular geographic area?
- Does it reflect the overarching goals and objectives of the RTI (increasing local capacity, bringing computer technology to groups that are in need, serving groups that focus on rural poverty and development issues, and/or address the needs of minority populations)? Or does it convincingly argue for changes in those goals and objectives?
- Does it broaden the scope of the RTI in some way?

After soliciting proposals several months ago, we received proposals from three entities: the Mid-South Foundation of Jackson, Mississippi; the National Family Farm Coalition, the Land Stewardship Project and PrairieFire Rural Action; and Portable Practical Educational Preparation (PPEP) of Tucson, Arizona. (Copies of the proposals are enclosed.) The RTI staff worked closely with Foundation and PPEP staff to identify key issues and difficulties in draft proposals (the sustainable agriculture group was also contacted, but did not ask for assistance). In each case, staff feel that while the projects have significant attributes, some aspect argues against the kind of commitment that would be required of a demonstration. On the other hand, in each case, there seems to be a strong justification for a commitment of a sizeable number of computers in the context of a network application.

Mid-South Foundation: The Foundation proposes to commit substantial staff resources to the project and would target the computers to groups, primarily in the Mississippi Delta area that would clearly meet the RTI eligibility standards. The Foundation is very committed to the notion of developing a strong network as part of its overall mission.

On the other hand, the Mid-South Foundation proposal seeks to, in part, create a strong network where there now is none, by linking groups together through the a computer network. Our experience and that of other Apple grantees is that using the electronic network to create working relationships, rather than strengthen those already in place, infrequently is successful. While the proposal targets groups in the Delta area, these are not now linked across state lines, according to Foundation staff. Aspen staff would feel more comfortable about the prospects for this demonstration if the targeted groups shared a narrow geographic or substantive focus; in this case, however, the computers would be spread across three states and three substantive areas, two of which are not significantly covered by current RTI's Rural Poverty and Development Forum.

Agricultural Demonstration Group: The Agricultural Demonstration Group proposes a well-conceived project serving, and clearly furthering, the needs and goals of an



already operating network, which includes quite a few groups in need of computer hardware. The fact that those RTI members with sustainable agriculture interests have so effectively organized on the network thus far (including their development of a sustainable agricultural folder) argues in favor of the project. Unfortunately, new financial or staffing resources are not provided to cover the extensive demands of a demonstration project. In addition, the proposal seems not to strongly enough indicate the relationship between a network focused on sustainable agriculture, and the RTI's concern about rural poverty.

PPEP: The PPEP proposal also includes a staffing commitment, although at this stage, a half-time slot is funded. Given the organization's overall mission and constituency, it is likely that grantees participating in a demonstration would meet the RTI criteria, and their selection would support the overall goals of the RTI, although the proposal indicates that economic development groups in Arizona are not now a cohesive network.

At this stage, however, key components of the project are yet to be decided. Would the demonstration focus on housing or microenterprise lending? Would PPEP's micro field offices be targeted for computers, or would those be covered by an OCS grant, and the RTI computers be distributed to other groups? How would the demonstration groups be tied together, and what broader goals would the demonstration hope to achieve?

For these reasons, staff recommend that the RTI not pursue a demonstration from among these proposals in the coming year.



# RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVE

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submitted to  
**Apple Computer, Inc.**  
by  
**The Rural Economic Policy Program**  
of  
**The Aspen Institute**

May 4, 1990

*In collaboration with The Ford Foundation and MDC, Inc.*

## **INITIATIVE SUMMARY**

The Aspen Institute's Rural Economic Policy Program, in collaboration with The Ford Foundation and a number of leaders in the fields of rural poverty, rural economic development, and natural resource use and protection, proposes to develop a multi-year Rural Telecommunications Initiative that will serve as a reliable and inexpensive method for exchange of information among rural communities, policymakers, researchers and others. We expect that benefits will accrue to both the organizations directly participating in the Initiative, and to rural communities in which these organizations are located or operate.

The Initiative will offer computer and information technology and training to many rural community-based organizations that currently do not have access. It will provide a variety of rural organizations and leaders with experience in using and planning for the use of new information technologies, and will increase the capacity of those organizations.

The prime goal of the Initiative is to enhance communication among rural constituencies and communities. As a result, the impacts of geographic isolation will be lessened. The Initiative will also offer opportunities to forge innovative relationships between participating organizations and public and private sector partners that can foster longer-term cooperative approaches to meeting the economic challenges facing rural communities.

Active rural community-based participation and involvement in the Information Revolution may be the Initiative's greatest benefit, as access to technology is necessary for rural communities and disadvantaged residents to participate in the rural development process and to further social justice goals. In addition, the Initiative will support the dissemination of the growing body of literature that exists concerning the manner in which telecommunications and information technologies can stimulate rural economic growth.

A key component of the Rural Telecommunications Initiative's success will be its participation in the Apple Computer, Inc. Partnerships Program. Without grant equipment, many rural nonprofit organizations to be targeted by the Initiative may have difficulty participating in the network.

The Aspen Institute requests a total of 200 computer systems from Apple Computer, Inc. over a two-to-three-year period, with 100 computer systems requested in the first year.

### **COMMON COMPUTER NEEDS**

Staff-members of the Rural Telecommunications Initiative's lead organizations have worked for years with organizations that are likely to apply for grants of Apple equipment. As a result, a loose network is already in place, and the team has a general understanding of computer needs common to the anticipated grantees. We expect that the organizations will have the greatest need for word processing capabilities, followed by the need for information sharing and electronic mail functions, database management programs, desktop publishing, and spreadsheet applications.

In addition, these rural organizations have traditionally had difficulty working jointly on projects, building professional relationships and coalitions at the national and regional levels, and bridging gaps that separate the informal networks that already exist. By using the computer applications described above, we anticipate that rural organizations will improve their capacity to meet these broader needs.

Initiative grantees are likely to be nonprofit organizations with small staffs and limited budgets. They tend to perform several tasks in common:

- Staff compose a range of written products, including issue reports, press releases, financial and policy analyses, formal testimony, proposals, and case studies;

- Staff of financial intermediaries are likely to conduct complex financial and sensitivity analyses, write business plans, and manage loan servicing information, in addition to more traditional tasks;
- Staff of organizations providing technical assistance in a decentralized manner typically collect management information data on their projects;
- Many of these organizations conduct research and convey the results to others to effect change. As a result, these organizations communicate with others regularly to collect data and disseminate conclusions and recommendations;
- Nearly all nonprofit organizations rely on membership income, volunteers, and/or outside funding sources for program support, necessitating detailed record-keeping;
- Because these organizations often depend on volunteers, they rely on easy-to-learn technology (such as MacIntosh computers) to maximize efficiency and minimize office disruptions, and supervision demands.

While staff of the lead organizations can hypothesize about the needs and common tasks of Initiative participants, we recognize that the participants themselves can best describe their requirements. As a result, we have contracted with HandsNet, Inc. to survey a representative sample of potential grantees concerning current computer use and needs, obstacles to effective use based on rural location, costs of current information management and transfer systems, involvement in professional networks, and ability to pay for full participation in a rural telecommunications network. Initial results should be available in mid-May, and a final report is expected in mid-June.<sup>1</sup>

Based in large part on information gained from the market survey, the lead organizations will develop a channel within the HandsNet network focusing on rural development and poverty issues. Services offered to subscribers would include:

- electronic mail;
- a query area;

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<sup>1</sup>A copy of the survey instrument is appended to this proposal.



- a rural-specific clippings service;
- a special alert area reserved for time-sensitive issues;
- a listing of Initiative participants, with background information, along with other pertinent mailing lists;
- an area devoted to rural development issues;
- an area devoted to rural infrastructure issues (including water, wastewater, solid waste and associated health impacts);
- an annotated bibliography of recent reports and articles;
- a calendar of events;
- an archives;
- an area devoted to future trends and breaking issues;
- a database repository; and,
- an area devoted to technical tips and general computer support.

Of these services, most will be provided in a collaborative manner by the subscribers themselves. Based on extensive discussions with potential participants, we anticipate that users will also develop databases for technical information on water and waste system construction and technology, utilization rate data for state and federal economic development monies, and program funding alternatives.

### **COMPUTER SKILLS SUPPORT**

In close consultation with HandsNet, Inc., a national nonprofit information and communication network, the Initiative's lead organizations have developed a training and general computer support plan.

The plan consists of three elements: initial training, ongoing support and technical assistance, and follow-up training. We assume most, if not all, of the grantees will be first time Macintosh computer users. Some grantees may have basic computer experience on IBM or compatible systems. The plan will help to ensure a successful Apple partnership and, more importantly, enable participants to realize the maximum benefits that personal

computing and telecommunications offer to improve the effectiveness of many areas of their work.

## INITIAL TRAINING OF GRANTEES

HandsNet, Inc. has found that a positive first training experience is critical to successful learning and long-term motivation to maximize use of computers. The initial training session will require three full days, consisting of: a half-day orientation to the Macintosh computer, a day and a half of training in Microsoft Works (with special emphasis given to applications identified in the market survey) and a day of telecommunications training including hands-on use of HandsNet's network. The lead organizations recognize that while some rural organizations are highly computer literate already, other rural organizations may have less experience with computers than the national norm. Separate training tracks may be developed for computer novices and those who have more computer experience.

HandsNet, Inc. will coordinate the initial training sessions. The organization facilitated two similar training sessions in 1987 and 1989 in conjunction with Apple equipment grants to approximately 100 of the organization's own members, and participated in the Center for Community Change training session last summer for 50 additional Apple grantees. From these experiences, HandsNet has identified several essential elements for successful training:

- a comfortable classroom-type facility with adequate lighting and acoustics;
- professional instructors with excellent training and motivational skills;
- individual computer stations with telephone lines for each station, and overhead projection systems for instruction;
- well-organized arrangements for meals, accommodations, and transportation; and,
- opportunities for team-building, and social interaction.

In order to minimize logistical effort and cost, and to maximize opportunities for grantees to strengthen personal networks, we propose to conduct two consecutive training sessions over a six-day period in September 1990. The first session would begin on

Thursday morning, September 20th and end on Saturday, September 22nd, while the second session would begin on Sunday, September 23rd and end on Wednesday, September 26th. The two groups would overlap over the weekend, both to take advantage of lower airfares and to allow all trainees to meet together at a dinner or social event on Saturday, and potentially at more substantive sessions on Sunday.

At this point we anticipate that the training sessions will take place at the new Apple Computer, Inc. corporate training facility.

#### ON-GOING COMPUTER SUPPORT

An important long-term goal of the Initiative is to assist and encourage each grantee to find local sources for computer support. While these resources may be less available in rural areas than in urban areas, interviews with rural computer specialists and non-profit staff alike indicate that user groups and other support mechanisms are uniformly spread throughout the country, and are located within traditional driving distance of most rural towns. Quite a few rural organizations already participate in the HandsNet network, and have had no difficulty securing needed support. Nevertheless, the lead organizations are committed to providing a certain level of on-going support and technical assistance to Apple grantees throughout the life of the project.

Responsibility for this task will lie with the facilitating organization, MDC, Inc., which will use Ford Foundation funds to hire a full-time staff-person to manage the network, including the provision of technical assistance. Typically, initial support will range from troubleshooting for simple technical problems, such as printing difficulties, to answering more complicated questions about application conversion or system errors. The facilitator will provide some assistance through individual electronic mail. A technical support area will be established on-line within HandsNet's Rural Forum, so that grantees and other users can share information on common problems and solutions, and find out about local Apple user groups. Moreover, the facilitator will be available by telephone to provide "walk-through" support.

HandsNet will provide Apple grantees with ongoing telecommunications support through personal interaction, on-line assistance, monthly efficiency tips bulletins, and a toll-free customer support line staffed by CONNECT, Inc. the network carrier. HandsNet has found that subscribers using Macintosh computers have few problems learning to use the telecommunications software.

In addition, HandsNet will help the facilitator use the software's network management functions, and organize and structure the on-line Rural Forum. HandsNet will also assist in training key information providers in established posting formats and protocols.

#### FOLLOW-UP TRAINING

Experience with Apple grantees associated with HandsNet and the Center for Community Change indicates that use of the telecommunications function has accelerated the learning curve for computer novices. Grantees see the immediate benefits of information exchange and communication, and quickly move to explore and refine other uses of their computer. Follow-up training is always useful to take full advantage of the power computing offers, however.

Variations in needs and interest, and sheer distance, make follow-up training among limited groups a difficult undertaking in rural areas. The lead organizations, in conjunction with the facilitator, will conduct an assessment of the skill levels of grantees after the initial training session. The assessment will determine the levels of expertise among the grantees, the interest they have in learning more advanced applications, and the geographic and substantive groupings that emerge. From this assessment, a longer-term training plan can be developed and carried out.

In North Carolina, the community college system is able to offer an applications course whenever ten individuals can agree on a syllabus. Such an arrangement seems perfectly suited for advanced applications training, and will be utilized. The lead organizations will explore other such arrangements throughout the country. In addition, the lead

organizations will capitalize on opportunities to conduct advanced training at special sessions organized around ongoing conferences attended by grantees. Finally, as grantees recognize the improvements in efficiency and quality available to them through advanced applications, they will be drawn to seek out training resources on their own. For instance, once grantees realize the costs savings and other benefits represented by desktop publishing applications, they will be motivated to organize and pay for appropriate training.

HandsNet, Inc. has access to several sources of free or reduced-price applications software, including donations by numerous companies and through the Gifts in Kind program. Participating companies include: Aldus and Quark for PageMaker and XPress (desktop publishing); and, Microsoft, for Word (word processing) and Excel (spreadsheet).

#### **SELECTION AND USE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

In addition to its involvement in training and technical support, MDC, Inc. will facilitate the organization, development and ongoing operation of the Rural Forum within the HandsNet network. Initially, three broad areas of information will be covered within the Rural Forum: Rural Policy and Research, Water and Wastewater, and Rural Economic Development. In the second year, we expect that additional areas of information will be added, based on feedback from network participants and demand demonstrated by area usage. Specifically, we anticipate that areas devoted to agricultural sustainability and natural resource protection are likely to be included.

The types of information that will be shared include: legislative updates on issues of importance to rural communities; news clippings on rural issues; model legislation and policy alternatives that can be adapted and implemented at the local level or advocated at the state level; rural development policy initiatives being undertaken at the state level; technical information and financing tools, particularly on business and infrastructure

development; examples of model programs, such as microenterprise development, with key contacts listed for those who want to follow-up; summaries of relevant reports distributed on the national and regional levels with information about how to acquire the full report; information about fundraising opportunities, such as requests for proposals, or federal program deadlines; summaries of research results; and statistical databases that rural groups can use to analyze their region, or buttress arguments to policymakers and funders. A separate folder will be created to contain items of particular interest to participants in the North Carolina demonstration.

After consulting extensively with the CCC, another Apple partner, on network organization and operation, MDC, Inc. is inclined to develop an on-line newsletter for Apple grantees. Such a newsletter would summarize important information flowing through the network, would encourage grantees to log on the network regularly, and could be passed among organization staff-members easily.

The information outlined above will be gathered and placed on the network by a group of information providers (described in detail in the concept paper) who have particular expertise in each of the issue areas. MDC, Inc. will work with four other initial information providers to place information in the three subject areas. The Rural Economic Policy Program of the Aspen Institute will provide information on research conducted by its grantees as well as summaries of rural-specific news clips from a number of major news publications. The Rural Community Assistance Program will have responsibility for the water and wastewater area. The Council of State Policy & Planning Agencies will provide information on state rural development policy and activities. Finally, the Corporation for Enterprise Development will provide information based on its research and work in many states on rural economic development. MDC, Inc. also has expertise and information to provide in the areas of state rural policy and economic development.

In addition, a series of "informal" information providers will be developed to provide regional information and to supplement the work of the "formal" information providers. MDC, Inc. and the other information providers will confer regularly with this network of informal providers to solicit information and encourage participation. These information providers might include organizations such as the Northwest Policy Institute in Seattle, Washington; the Southern Growth Policies Board in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska; the Council of State Community Action Agencies in Washington, D.C.; the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, Tennessee; and the National Association of Development Organizations in Washington, D.C.; along with individuals such as Robert Rapoza, a specialist in rural legislation who bridges the rural business, rural infrastructure and rural housing communities, and Priscilla Salant, an agricultural economist who is working with a network of community-based organizations to improve their research skills.

Finally, the network participants themselves will be important sources of information based on both their technical and practical experience with rural development activities. As is discussed later, participants will be required to post stories regularly and will be encouraged to use the fora to ask questions or share the benefits of their experience with others. In addition, during the first round of grantee selection, we hope to emphasize organizations which will regularly generate information rather than simply consume it.

Participation in the network will enable organizations to meet a variety of routine individual communication needs more efficiently. Through the electronic mail capability, participants can avoid the costly "telephone tag" game and efficiently send meeting notices or agendas to groups using the group message mechanism. File transfer and manipulation will allow individuals to work jointly on documents and projects in spite of great distances, thereby preventing extensive and expensive long-distance telephone calls, use of overnight mail services or travel that might otherwise be necessary. The inquiry function will allow groups to access an inexpensive form of technical assistance for substantive or computer-related questions, tap new sources of information and make



new contacts with organizations sharing similar goals. The information base will provide timely access to important new reports or model programs being tested in another state that might otherwise take months to filter out through newsletters and word of mouth. Finally, as individuals become more facile with their computer and its applications for word processing or even features such as desktop publishing, external communications from their organizations such as reports and proposals should begin to present a more professional image.

Particularly when the network is in its start-up phase, the facilitator will make concerted efforts to ensure that the network is integrated into participants' day-to-day activities. As participants learn through experience the manner in which the network can meet many needs cost-efficiently, as described above, use of the network should become as regular and familiar as the telephone or, more recently, the fax machine. The mechanisms that will be used to help integrate the network include:

- *Troubleshooting.* MDC, Inc. will monitor the number of times participants access the network and follow-up with those who do not appear to be using it, to determine why and how to make the network useful to them. Participants will be expected to access the network at least twice a week.
- *Posting requirements.* Computer recipients will be required to post stories at least twice a month. MDC, Inc. will work with grantees to help generate ideas for appropriate stories and encourage posting on a more frequent basis.
- *Regular new information.* Information providers will be encouraged to post information regularly. When the rural poverty area goes on-line, emphasis will be placed on including fresh and time-sensitive information. Other information will be posted every few days, so that participants will be attracted to this new, vital network, and will check regularly for new information.
- *Grantee profiles.* To help participants gain a greater sense of "family," the facilitator will post profiles of participating organizations at regular intervals.
- *Encouragement.* Positive reinforcement will be used to encourage organizations to use the network. For instance, when a staff-person posts an inquiry, MDC, Inc. will follow up to see if he or she received useful replies, and suggest that the recipient

send a note to respondents thanking them for their reply. Initially, mail will be sent to grantees on a regular basis so they will feel they are a part of the network and will want to check their mail more frequently.

In addition to development of the national network, MDC, Inc. will also work with the Center for Community Self-Help, Inc. to develop an intensive network of nonprofit users in rural North Carolina, on a demonstration basis. The Center has received commitments from nine nonprofit networks (several of which are already HandsNet affiliates) to build such a state-level concentration within the rural Initiative, and is exploring funding alternatives to help support the effort.

### **ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING**

The Aspen Institute will administer the Rural Telecommunications Initiative and the partnership with Apple, with support provided through a general support grant from The Ford Foundation. Maureen Kennedy will be responsible for coordinating this activity, and plans to devote 30 percent of her time to the Initiative. Additional administrative assistance will be provided by Aspen support staff as necessary. The effort will receive important assistance from the following organizations:

—MDC, Inc. will facilitate the development, organization and operation of the telecommunications network, and will provide on-going technical assistance on computer applications to Apple grantees. Mary Mountcastle will supervise the effort, spending approximately 15 percent of her time on the Initiative, and an additional full-time staff-person will be hired shortly. Funding for this work will be supplied by a grant from The Ford Foundation.

—HandsNet, Inc. has agreed to provide a full range of on-going technical assistance and support for the telecommunications portion of the network. Connect, Inc., the host system, will also provide toll-free technical assistance. In addition, HandsNet, Inc. will organize and conduct a three-day initial training program for each Apple grantee.

Various HandsNet, Inc. staff, will devote approximately 15-20 percent of their time to the Rural Telecommunications Initiative, with more emphasis expected in the first six months of the project.

—The Center for Community Self-Help (CCSH), located in Durham, North Carolina, will coordinate the Initiative's state-level demonstration project in that state, and will work with the organizations described above to facilitate training and technical assistance for the North Carolina Apple grantees. The lead organizations have earmarked 25 percent of the first year's equipment grants for North Carolina organizations to support the effort. The grantees will be nominated through a state-level process, with involvement from The Aspen Institute.

The North Carolina demonstration has two goals: To increase the capacity of community-based nonprofit organizations in the state, and to increase the clarity of policy debate at the state level. The project is built on the assumption that, particularly in the relatively dense areas of the rural Southeast, geographic proximity will help groups accelerate the rate at which they absorb computer technology, and increase the effectiveness of telecommunications networking activities. The state has a strong, geographically dispersed, racially representative nonprofit sector focusing on rural concerns, with many organizations supported by the Rural Poverty and Resources Program of The Ford Foundation. Several of these organizations, including CCSH, have already begun efforts to develop a computer-based capacity-building program with support from state-based corporations, quasi-public agencies, and foundations.

Over a three-year period, the group plans to incorporate approximately 200 organizations into the effort, with half of these needing computer equipment on a grant- or reduced-price basis. CCSH staff, including director Martin Eakes, will devote the equivalent of a half-time staff-person to this project, relying on internal resources. The organization will soon approach a range of funders to support additional staffing. In addition, CCSH plans to hire a full-time intern with both organizing and computer experience to help organize the North Carolina demonstration during the summer of 1990.

Three additional organizations, the Corporation for Enterprise Development, the Council of State Policy & Planning Agencies, and the Rural Community Assistance Program, will act as information providers. The groups will rely on internal resources to finance their participation in the effort.

During the first grant year, the lead organizations will develop an application process based on selection criteria already identified, choose nominees for Apple grants, distribute the equipment, provide training, and set up the information network with three information "areas." The facilitating organization, MDC, Inc., will support the creation of additional informational areas that will be of use to rural organizations and communities as demand emerges.

The lead organizations developed the following timeline for the remainder of 1990:

- Mid-May: Applications mailed to an inclusive group of at least 350 rural organizations; parallel selection process underway in North Carolina.
- May, June and July: Training program developed; network organized; information providers begin to collect information to be put on-line.
- Mid-June: First meeting of the Rural Telecommunications Initiative Advisory Committee.
- End of June: Application deadline.
- Mid-July: Representatives of the lead organizations select nominees for Apple grants.
- End of August: Hardware delivered to grantees; Rural Forum goes on-line.
- End of September: Two training sessions implemented.

An element essential to the success of the Rural Telecommunications Initiative is the grantee nomination process. We believe that a broad-based application process is appropriate, in conjunction with strategic selection of a limited portion of nominees. As a result, we anticipate that approximately 20 percent of the nominees will be selected based on strategic considerations, 55 percent based on an application process, and 25 percent based on a combination of the two methods, restricted to organizations based in North Carolina.

The Aspen Institute will coordinate the selection process with participation from The Ford Foundation, and MDC, Inc. Institute staff has extensive experience in coordinating similar selection processes and competitions.

During the remainder of the project, the Initiative plans to expand the national network and the North Carolina demonstration, paying particular attention to incorporating smaller and more isolated organizations. New substantive areas, such as agricultural sustainability and natural resources protection, will be added to the Rural Forum's information base. Depending on the outcome of the North Carolina demonstration, new state-based networks may also be developed. Over a one and a half year period, we anticipate that an additional 100 systems will be requested, in two phases of 75 and 25 systems respectively.

### **EXPANDING THE MODEL**

Although The Aspen Institute requests approximately 200 computer systems, we anticipate that another 200 community-based organizations, academics, and national interest groups will find that the networking function of the Initiative adds value to their work, and will participate. In addition, the lead organizations recognize that an important responsibility of the overall Initiative is to identify and approach new sources of funding for additional hardware, software and operational support. Several sources have been identified,

particularly in the southeast United States, and will be approached for support in the next six months.

The Aspen Institute, MDC, Inc. and HandsNet, Inc. will publicize the existence of the Initiative, the network, and the Apple Computer, Inc. Partnership Program through presentations at conferences, through newsletters and by word of mouth. Staff involved in the Initiative highly valued the support and insight offered by previous Apple Partners, particularly HandsNet, Inc. and the Center for Community Change. We stand ready to offer comparable assistance to any prospective partner.

### **EQUIPMENT NEEDS**

Most grantees will require an equipment package that includes a Macintosh SE computer, configured with 2 megabytes of RAM and a 40 megabyte hard drive; an Apple 1200 baud personal modem; an Imagewriter II printer; appropriate cables; and Microsoft Works and Claris MacPaint software.

The facilitator and several of the key information providers may require more powerful systems (either SE/30 or Macintosh II family computers), extended keyboards, laserwriters, Claris FileMaker II software and several peripheral devices because of their frequency of use and type of applications. Peripherals will probably include several scanners, display monitors, PC 5.25 drives and/or LocalTalk PC Cards. Discussions are currently underway with the lead information providers to evaluate their system needs and compatibility with other in-house equipment, and results of the market survey will shed additional light on grantee needs.

Once a list of recommended grantees is determined, a specific equipment request will be submitted for both lead organizations and Initiative participants.