2010 Final Report for the California Emerging Technology Fund

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Name of Project:	California Digital Inclusion Program
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I. Financial Summary

- Total Project Budget Spent: $455,000
- CETF Grant Amount: $455,000
- Additional Grant: (if applicable)   N/A
- Percentage of Match Funds Raised against Goal: N/A
- Cost Per Unit of Outcomes: (Total Outcomes/Total Budget) $6,319

II. Project Description, Goals and Objectives, and Outcomes

Project Description

As much information, commerce, and services have moved to the web, the internet has become the "virtual front door" for many companies and institutions. While improvements in physical accessibility for people with disabilities have come far since the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted, many website remain largely inaccessible to many people.

The California Digital Inclusion Program (CDIP) provided a way for organizations interested in improving the accessibility of their websites to get started with a realistic project to implement in under a year. The Center for Accessible Technology performed accessibility reviews of each participant's website, trained them on accessibility best practices, provided technical assistance with implementation, and helped establish internal web accessibility guidelines to assist organizations in institutionalizing web accessibility considerations into their work.

In addition, organizations completing particularly robust or innovative accessibility improvements were honored at an annual awards dinner. This dinner brought together key industry representatives, elected officials, leaders from the disability community, and web managers to highlight the work of the participants. Live demonstrations, "before and after" contrasts, and video stories showed both the impact of web accessibility barriers on real people, and the techniques for creating accessible content.

Goals and Objectives Summary

All goals and objectives have been completed. With one exception, CforAT met or exceeded targeted outcome levels for the objectives. CDIP participants represented corporate retailers, non-profit organizations, small businesses, transit agencies, university, and K-12 systems. Overall, the improvements made by participants in the program are reaching well over 5,000,000 website visitors each month, and that number is growing.

While implementation of web accessibility improvements was beyond expectation, raising awareness of these efforts proved to be difficult. Anchoring the improvements around an annual awards dinner was partially intended to provide material for news coverage of the event, and of web accessibility as an important issue. Several reporters expressed interest in the program and the event, but CDIP only received brief mentions in print.

Project Outcomes Summary

Outcome Description	Actual	Goal	Percent Completed
Number of institutions participating	72	60	120%
Attendees at three California Digital Inclusion Celebration awards dinners	273	300	91%

III.   Accomplishments and Challenges

Summary of Accomplishments and Impacts of Project

- The Center for Accessible Technology had 2 major outcomes and achieved 120% of one of the outcomes. CforAT reached 91% of the second outcome.

- CforAT did not achieve the outcome target of having 100 attendees at each of the three California Digital Inclusion Celebrations but this was primarily a function of space limitations. Each year the event was held at a different location, with each location reaching its maximum capacity of attendees.

Delineation of Deliverables and Outcomes Not Achieved and Explanation

The only deliverable not achieved was that we did not quite have 100 people at each of the three events. Despite this, we consider all three events to be successful. We had more than 100 people interested in attending each event, but could not always accommodate them due to space limitations.

Discussion of Other Positive Results from Project

A major accomplishment of this project has been the depth at which it engaged with each of the participants that received California Digital Inclusion Awards at the annual dinner. Each of these recipients went beyond what was required of the program, and all made significant improvements to their site's accessibility. Several recipients have development teams that have become web accessibility leaders in their own right.

All of the honorees were genuinely energized by the work of making their sites more accessible, from the challenge of problem solving how to fix barriers to the satisfaction of seeing their work's impact on their site's visitors. This process has reaffirmed the belief that any organization, regardless of size, resources, or reporting structures, can make meaningful web accessibility improvements given the proper training and motivation.

Additionally, the project had a positive impact by heightening awareness of website accessibility. The information on the CforAT website, the information provided to attendees, and the high profile of the events locally, all helped people understand why this issue is important. CforAT received follow up inquiries from many organizations and individuals who had heretofore never thought about website accessibility.

Overview of Major Challenges to Achieving Planned Results

By far the biggest challenge was getting organizations to agree to participate. CforAT had anticipated that by requiring modest staff commitments on the part of the participating organization and zero monetary cost, organizations would be eager to get no-cost assistance in improving their web accessibility. CforAT was particularly optimistic at the time the grant started as recent legal challenges had shown that companies would need to take web accessibility more seriously.

However, the experience was the opposite. Universally, organizations approached were hesitant to participate. Many were worried that by making some improvements and possibly being recognized as a leader in web accessibility, it would only make the less accessible parts of their website that much more noticeable. Many were worried that by participating in the program they might actually make themselves a target for legal action. Organizations were also anxious about the time commitment, CforAT assured them that it would work with them to identify a project that would work with their existing resources. Most saw it as a potential drain on staff time and possibly budgets.

This was particularly difficult in the first year, when CDIP did not have prior participants available to speak to prospective participants about their experiences in the program.

Discuss Efforts to Address Challenges and Resolve Problems

- Most of the initial participants were encouraged to join the California Digital Inclusion Program via personal contacts at the organizations. In subsequent years, testimonials and conversations with past participants proved to be immensely helpful.

- As discussed elsewhere, once initial information about web accessibility is presented in a clear, concise manner, buy-in becomes much easier. Toward the end of the program, CforAT began offering to come do a brief presentation, which worked very well and involved only a modest amount of staff time.

IV.   Lessons and Recommendations

Summary of Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Gaining participation is challenging especially without a track record.

Lesson #2: Experiencing is believing. User testing, live demonstrations, videos, and in-person presentations all proved immensely effective in getting buy-in from senior decision-makers that web accessibility is worth taking on.

Recommendations for Expanding the Project in Region or Scaling Up Statewide

Recommendation #1: Because organizations often get energized about web accessibility once they get a chance to see what it really means, CforAT could engage more organizations with the same, or possibly even less, funding by altering the process. An initial mini-site review and presentation of findings demonstrating the barriers on an organization's website will often trigger a real interest in making improvements. If CforAT secures funding to cover the time to do these presentations, participants would pay as a fee for service for additional consulting to complete a more thorough review and provide technical assistance.

Recommendation #2: If recommendation #1 were successful, the primary costs for the program aside from regular staff time would be the cost of putting on the awards dinner (catering, venue, A/V, and physical awards). CforAT believes it would be possible to solicit corporate donations to underwrite these costs.

Recommendations to CETF Regarding Grants Management

1. The frequency and complexity of the reporting requirements are burdensome for small non-profits, who are often reporting to several funders at once.
2. The amount of and length of required grantee meetings was also burdensome for a small non-profit, sometimes requiring two staff members to be present for a multi-day meeting.

V. Grant Agreement Requirements

Purchased Equipment

None purchased.

Unspent CETF Grant Funds

The budget covers the grant period only, but we tried to hold out some funding to cover the last part of the third year, which included some time working with the year three winners, and also some for the event itself. There were also unspent funds because CforAT also never billed CETF for the Focus Groups that happened in year one. Instead, CforAT used its general operating funds to cover those, as it was concerned that the grant wasn't going to be enough to pay for the entire project, and it wanted to reduce what was charged to hold some funding for later expenses as necessary.