

ARE YOU READY FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS?

TELECOMMUNICATIONS READINESS INVENTORY

<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/lciii/>

What is the Telecommunications Readiness Inventory (TRI)

For any community, technology must be valued not for only the information it carries, but for the quality of the relationships that it helps to build. The quality of life in rural communities has been and will be the main reason people choose to live there. Telecommunications can enhance economic development without changing the rural *quality of life*. Telecommunications has the potential to change the dynamics of communication on many levels. In the past, barriers related to bandwidth, cost, and distance have limited the use of communications technologies. Only the most commercially viable applications exploited these technologies. As these barriers become less significant, more and more users will share in these resources, changing the way people communicate and pursue their goals. Users will structure networks within this new paradigm in a variety of ways.

Communities making investments in telecommunications technology need to make decisions within an environment where information is abundant and their decision-making incorporates the value added of timely and accurate information. To understand the dynamic nature of telecommunications infrastructure investment, the Laboratory for Community and Economic Development at the University of Illinois has created the Telecommunications Readiness Inventory (TRI). The TRI is a diagnostic and evaluation tool designed to provide policy makers with greater insight on how to best allocate investments for technology adoption and for community and economic development in general.

The TRI is designed to evaluate different aspects of the telecommunications infrastructure in your community. These worksheets are designed for small towns usually in a rural setting. It can also be used by neighborhoods. Larger communities would not have sufficient space on the worksheet to inventory all of their telecommunications resources.

Because this tool focuses on various issues and is comprised of many questions, it is impossible for a single member of a community to answer all the questions included in the TRI. It is important to elicit input from a diverse group of community leaders; therefore, a committee representing the community should be called to direct this activity. What is the best way to do that?

The TRI as a Benchmarking Tool

The TRI surveys calculate a score or index value based on how a community evaluates its telecommunications infrastructure. The score, itself, may not truly be a good surrogate for the state of telecommunications in the community; however, looking at the index over time allows us to measure change and progress toward community-driven goals.

In this capacity, the TRI becomes an effective *benchmarking* tool. The TRI can be completed now to create a baseline measure of your community's level of infrastructure. Use this tool again in six months, in one year and in two years to measure progress toward meeting your local community goals.

How Should A Community Use the TRI?

Use a projection unit and computer and login to the TRI and project the survey on a screen. A committee of community leaders can go through the questionnaire and shout-out answers to the survey. One person serves as a recorder checking responses to the questionnaire online. This process

would be enhanced if a facilitator managed the activity. The facilitator will make certain that there is full participation enabling group decision-making. The facilitator will bring the group to consensus as they answer each of the questions.

or

Print copies of the TRI and ask each member of the committee to answer as many questions as they can. Then, at a group meeting the committee can come to consensus as they complete the questionnaire as a group.

At the end of the activity, the committee can have immediate feedback by submitting their responses. The TRI calculator will instantly assess a score that can be used as a baseline or benchmark of community development capacity.

The TRI Surveys

TRI explores different aspects of the telecommunications infrastructure. **Part A, the Telecommunications Quotient**, allows an individual to measure their affinity toward using telecommunications. This survey can help individuals understand their own attitudes toward telecommunications innovation. The Quotient is based on eight questions focusing on the use of email and Internet resources. The score calculated at the bottom of the survey reflects the respondent's values toward technology. A score lower than 24 suggests that the individual is not at all comfortable using telecommunications technologies on a regular basis and may have some difficulty completing Part B of the Infrastructure Readiness Inventory. A score of 34 to 40 indicates that the individual uses telecommunications technologies but may not be completely comfortable on a regular basis. A score greater than 40 implies that the individual has incorporated telecommunications technologies into everyday life.

Communities can use this section of the TRI when they first begin to address community issues related to telecommunications. The questions can become a catalyst for discussion about the role of telecommunications technology in their professional and personal lives. The Telecommunications Quotient can be used to benchmark change in attitudes and opinions as this technology becomes more common in the community.

Part B is a survey of how well the community incorporates telecommunications and Internet technology into community life. The survey includes questions related to the local web presence and local telecommunications services; and the way public and community agencies are incorporating information and communications technologies into their daily operations. The score calculated at the bottom of the survey represents a community's level of telecommunications infrastructure at any point in time (don't forget to "**Calculate Telecommunications Readiness Index**" at the bottom of the survey). The

community can return to the site to update the information and monitor change in the infrastructure. Use this score only as a measure of progress toward the spread of telecommunications technology in the community.

Once the community has calculated their score, a click on **“Evaluate Your Score”** will provide a few guidelines that will get the community moving in the right direction to develop a local telecommunications strategic plan.

Part C provides a worksheet to use in creating an inventory of telecommunications services. This final section of the TRI asks for information about the Internet services provided to the community. Some of the information needed for this survey is more difficult to collect; however, completing the worksheet will help a community better understand where resources should be directed. The tool is also useful as a community negotiates with telecommunications providers to assure they receive the spectrum of services that they believe are necessary for their community.

Logging on to TRI

To login to TRI, go to <http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/tcii/> Enter with an easy to remember User ID. Your privacy will be protected, the Laboratory for Community and Economic Development does not release the data collected to any third party. Each time you access the site, use the same ID, the information you inputted earlier will be stored and displayed. Select Part A, B or C and begin to enter your information. If this is your first time at the site, begin with Part A and test your telecommunications quotient. Especially for Parts B

and C, print the forms and seek out others in your community that may be able to help answer those questions where you were not sure or did not know the answer. Once you are satisfied with how you have completed the survey, then enter your information one more time. When done, click on the bar at the bottom to calculate your telecommunications index. Return to the site often as you make progress on telecommunications and economic development initiatives. Use this tool as a benchmark of development in your community.

How Does the TRI Benefit My Community?

Completing the TRI surveys provides communities with valuable insight to formulate community-wide policy for allocating funds for telecommunications initiatives. The surveys highlight gaps in community telecommunication infrastructure; help identify areas where local community groups could

collaborate to more effectively use resources; and provide direction for short term and long-term investment. TRI, used as an evaluation tool, can lend insight to some of the less tangible outcomes of telecommunications investments, such as greater community collaboration.

Using the Community Development Capacity Index (CDCI) in Conjunction with TRI

Together, the two tools provide insight to telecommunications investments in the context of the community as a *system*. Investment in one sector cannot be made without consequences in another. Whereas CDCI explores the community capacity infrastructure, the two tools used in conjunction can improve understanding of how local

telecommunications goals are integral to community development goals. These tools contribute to the knowledge base of the social applications of telecommunications and information technology, which will help accelerate the diffusion of technology innovation, especially in rural areas. Find the CDCI at www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/surveys/

Start Now!

Complete the CDCI and TRI now to create a baseline measure of your community’s readiness to undertake community and economic development activities related to telecommunications. Use this

tool again in six months, in one year and in two years to measure progress toward meeting your local community goals.

