

## Mercer County Community-Based Organizations Sector

### Why Is This Important?

Non-profit agencies provide a wide variety of services to citizens including human and social services, religious services, community sports and athletic facilities, and public entertainment. Like any organization, community-based organizations need technology to manage operations, apply for grants, reduce costs, improve client services and better serve the community. Unfortunately, their budgets are typically limited and they often depend on outdated technologies and donated services. As a result, community-based organizations must be creative in order to serve their constituents in the best manner possible. Fortunately, there is no shortage of creativity among community-based organizations and many are using innovative solutions to offer important local services. As with other sectors, the Internet is an enabling factor for these creative solutions. Currently with the State's Association of Nonprofit Organizations more connectivity and resources are available for this sector.

When it comes to community-based organizations, the best technology practice is for the organization to present a clear vision of the organization's mission, goals and activities through a well developed website. Applications like online donations, volunteer forms and continuing education allow the visitor to get involved without ever leaving home. Features such as photo galleries, virtual tours and streaming videos allow the visitor to become engaged in the online experience and invested in the organization with the click of a mouse.

#### Mercer County Community-Based Organizations

- United Way of Mercer County,  
[www.ouw.org](http://www.ouw.org)
- Auglaize Mercer Counties YMCA,  
[www.amymca.com](http://www.amymca.com)
- American Red Cross Mercer County Chapter,  
[www.mercercountyohio.redcross.org](http://www.mercercountyohio.redcross.org)
- Harbor House Maternity Home,  
[life@harborhouse.org](mailto:life@harborhouse.org).

### Where Are We Today?

There are numerous community-based organizations in Mercer County which include religious, educational, charitable, scientific and literary organizations. The following are some examples:

- Family YMCA

- United Way of Mercer County
- American Red Cross Mercer County
- Harbor House Maternity Home

Community-based organizations are committed to reaching out to citizens around the area to provide arts, services and entertainment. These organizations use technology to simplify activities, reach more citizens and better serve the community.

Many community-based organizations see the Internet as a way of increasing giving and promotion. Since community-based organizations are charged with being the best possible stewards of donations, technology is viewed as a great way to save money.

Community-Based Organizations Sector Assessment Overview			
Category	Current Assessment	Future Vision	Additional Comments
Networked Places	3	4	
Applications & Services	3	4	
Leadership	2	3	

The Mercer County eCommunity Leadership Team found that the community-based organizations sector is just beginning to use technology to its advantage and believes the Internet to be essential to business operations.

- **Networked Places** – In the category of networked places, Mercer County’s community-based organizations sector is currently at stage 3 on a 0 to 5 scale. Most organizations with at least five paid staff have at least one computer for every three employees. Many organizations have email.
- **Applications & Services** – In the category of technology applications & services, the community-based organizations sector is currently at stage 3 on a 0 to 5 scale. Many organizations have informational websites. Many local chapters are able to share data electronically with the national parent organization. Some organizations accept online donations.
- **Leadership** – In terms of technology leadership within the community-based organizations, Mercer County is currently at stage 2 on a 0 to 5 scale. Organizations are minimally involved in community economic development issues. Little or no plans exist for better using telecommunications services

and technologies. Some organizations provide technology training to their staff at least once a year.

### Where Do We Need To Be?

The Mercer County eCommunity Leadership Team sees great potential for the use of technology in the community-based organization sector but understands the sector is limited in its resources and ability to implement changes within a brief period. The team has set goals to move Networked Places from stage 3 to stage 4, Applications & Services from stage 3 to stage 4, and Leadership from stage 2 to stage 3, all on a 0 to 5 scale. The ability to have constant internet connections will enable organizations to further educate and protect citizens concerning disaster preparedness, weather alerts, and current disaster-related information. The team's vision includes:

- Many organizations with at least five employees have direct connections to the Internet. All paid staff have email accounts. Some organizations use VoIP to save money. Some office workers have converted from desktop computers to portable wireless devices. Some office computers have video cameras.
- Most organizations have an informational website. A unified portal provides access to a broad range of community information and services. Most local chapters are able to share data with the parent organization.
- Some organizations are involved in specific economic development initiatives, but most do not participate. Some organizations plan to use telecommunications services and technologies within the next year. Some organizations provide technology training to their staff at least once a year.

### How Do We Get There?

#### Project Ideas

- Internet upgrades and accessibility for the public to utilize organizations websites.
- To reach and educate more people in our area.
- Have online donations and online payments.

#### Other Potential Projects

- Make training programs and workshops available at night and on weekends to make them more accessible to community-based organizations.
- Provide classes on health and safety.
- Develop a networking event to share information, ideas and innovations in technology deployment.
- Facilitate collaboration and cooperation among community-based organizations to help them share the costs of technology and expertise.
- Encourage organizations to develop websites using advanced features and functions.
- Use websites to help recruit and retain volunteers, and enable volunteers to sign up online.

The eCommunity Leaders within the Community-Based Organizations sector include:

Doug Eberle, Harbor House

Julie Miller, Grand Lake Mercer Research and Development

In working toward the implementation of the sector-specific goals, Connect Ohio recommends that additional participants be brought into the process, which may include technology providers, subject matter experts, other community organizations, and the resources of agencies and commercial providers of products and services to the community-based organizations sector.

Sage Cutler, Southwest State Operations Manager for Connect Ohio will continue to work with the sector leaders to advance selected projects toward their completion. By leveraging Connect Ohio's project management process, its research information, and its partners, projects will be defined, developed, and reviewed to help assure that the local teams are equipped to execute them. Connect Ohio will assist in the identification of funding sources, introducing technical resources, and helping to define the measurable goals that will ensure that the projects are actionable, measurable, and valuable.