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Minority Access to Information Technology: Lessons Learned

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Occasional Paper No. 67

October 2000

ABSTRACT

This paper presents pertinent access and equity issues in information technology, as well as barriers that are faced by minority and low-income communities and how they can be overcome. It is now widely accepted that the approaching new century is developing as an information-based, global society in which digital literacy will be a prerequisite for full participation. Access becomes an issue of social equity, since equal access to the technology and the skills to use it are increasingly necessary for economic success. The implications of inequality of access to fundamental digital resources means nothing less than risking the exclusion of disadvantaged groups from economic, social, educative, and political life. To determine how access to information technology is best achieved in the nation's low-income urban areas, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute launched the Digital Steppingstones initiative with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The objective of this 3-year study is to explore the role of advanced technologies in low-income and minority communities, and determine their effectiveness in providing access to technology and training, preparing community members for the workforce, and filling communities' information needs. In this paper we discuss some key barriers to effective implementation of IT-related programs, including: the need to maintain dependable funding streams in order to develop and sustain programs and maintain current technologies; necessary on-going and comprehensive staff training; difficulties in maintaining consistent leadership and promoting information; and questions about the efficacy of technology in the classroom.

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