

Enabling Access Initiative

Board Update: Q3 2008

Throughout its 15 year history, ISOC has built a strong commitment to enabling access globally. Over the years, ISOC has helped give Internet communities around the world the skills, tools, and knowledge needed to build infrastructure, foster the technical leadership, and educate governments on Internet-enabling policies and regulatory approaches.

The importance of this work, however, is not historic in nature – it continues to be critical to ensuring the development and expansion of the Internet in many regions and countries around the world. ISOC believes the “Internet is for Everyone,” yet the world is far from reaching that ideal.

For example, just last week on the Chapters’ list, we heard that the 50+ computers connected to the Internet at PICISOC’s PacINET meeting used up most of the bandwidth of the Pacific host nation, the Cook Islands. In Africa, much local Internet traffic still travels through expensive international links, burdening network operations and raising access costs. Onerous licensing requirements, regulations and short-sighted policies still prevent Internet growth and new market opportunities in many countries.

- **The Enabling Access Initiative**

ISOC’s Enabling Access Initiative is designed to address the fundamental impediments to Internet growth and usability. It is comprised of three programmatic areas: *Technical Capacity Building; Policy, Regulation, and the Access Environment; and Underserved Communities.*

We are already seeing early responses to ISOC’s reinvigorated access focus. ISOC is emerging as recognised partner and advisor in many intergovernmental bodies and multi-stakeholder forums, where ISOC’s challenge to “connect the next billion” has resonated strongly. Our work in networking education and local leadership development has positioned us a trusted resource for technical knowledge and capacity building, with new requests for assistance and collaboration outstripping our current capacity. Our near term goal is to incorporate our Chapters more closely into the work. In Quarter 4 2008, ISOC will progress a Chapter outreach project for the initiative, starting with a comprehensive Chapter survey on local Access priorities, in order to bolster ISOC-wide action and impact on Enabling Access issues.

The following provides an overview of ISOC’s approach and 2008 activities in each area of the Initiative.

Program: Technical Capacity Building

Approach: Many developing countries suffer from the lack of adequately trained Internet professionals that can deploy and maintain Internet infrastructures. This has a direct impact on enabling access. If network providers do not have an adequate *supply* of well-trained professionals, the *supply* of network services will be hampered. Inefficient operations add unnecessary costs to access provision, which ultimately get passed on to end users. High prices and the lack of access points, in turn, negatively impact the *demand* for services by consumers and users. As such, our Technical Capacity Building approach focuses in three areas:

- 1) Improving professional inputs and network efficiency (Supply Side),
- 2) Stimulating user demand and infrastructure accessibility (Demand Side), and
- 3) Growing technical leadership (Foundational).

Recent Activities: A comprehensive overview of ISOC’s technical capacity building activities in 2008 (Jan. – Sept.) is provided in the attached Appendix. Between sponsored and organised workshops and events, we will have contributed to the networking skills development of over 700 technologists in the developing world by the end of 2008.

Going Forward: Our plan is to continue the work in these two areas through at least 2009. We would like to assess other “underserved communities” projects that ISOC may be strongly positioned to address, such as the unique technical and market challenges associated with rural, remote, and disparate communities.

Conclusions and Requests:

We would appreciate input from board members on specific access impediments and challenges they see in their regions or from their experience in various forums and professional activities. Would the three program areas above provide enough scope to address those challenges or are there major, significant areas being overlooked? Also, the Enabling Access Initiative is focused on the developing world and connecting the “next billion.” We generally believe this is the appropriate focus at an initiative level, but there have been some suggestions that the work could also include issues like broadband dispersion in more developed countries. Is the developing world and the “next billion” the appropriate target areas at Enabling Access Initiative level?