

## Northstar Digital Literacy/Core Computer Literacy Standards designed to help bridge Digital Divide, improve technology skills for low-income adults



[SPCLC](#) was recently asked to convene a **community task force to develop basic computer Digital Literacy standards**. Over the past several months, representatives from community based non-profits, libraries, school district and non-profit ABE programs, state agencies, and other organizations collaborated to develop these standards.

Kit Hadley, Director of the [St. Paul Public Library](#), suggested the task force: **"It seemed to me that we could better help people who are struggling with literacy, including digital literacy, if we worked together more intentionally.** This could be accomplished by developing more consistent and high quality standards that we all agreed to use."

Kit noted that because funding in general is tight, "We have to try to be more effective with what we've got. We have an excellent network of organizations in St. Paul, and by working collectively we can benefit the larger community."

The mission of the Task Force has been "to develop a commonly accepted set of digital literacy standards that will facilitate empowerment of adults needing technology skills for daily living, employment preparation, and/or transition to higher education," said facilitator Tom Cytron-Hysom.

The [Northstar Digital Literacy/Core Computer Literacy Standards](#) are designed to help low-skilled adults perform a variety of daily tasks on the

computer and online. **The primary focus is to help people gain basic digital literacy skills needed to search for, obtain, and succeed in entry-level jobs.** They will also help people communicate with their children's schools, connect to community resources, etc. Once adults master the skills, they will be able to receive a Certificate of Basic Digital Literacy Skills (in process), which can be used with employers when applying for work.

The [standards](#) include basic computer digital literacy standards in five main areas: **basic computer use, internet, Windows operating system, email, and word processing (Word).** The Task Force is currently applying for funds to create a professionally developed, online, self-guided assessment for use by adult learners, as well as an organized rollout of the standards with employers and the larger community.

### St. Paul leads state effort to expand broadband access among low-income adults as part of federal project

Minnesota is part of a five-state partnership funded through a 30-month federal [Broadband Technology Opportunities Program](#) (BTOP) grant through the U.S. Department of Commerce in October 2010.

The project, "[Learner Web Partnership: A Multi-State Support System for Broadband Adoption by Vulnerable Adults](#)," will increase broadband use by implementing [Learner Web](#), an innovative online system of self-paced Learning Plans focused on digital literacy, education on how to be an informed consumer of broadband technology, and career pathways.



SPCLC will provide management assistance for the grant, and the [Minnesota Literacy Council](#) will serve as fiscal agent for the state. Minnesota partners include Minnesota Workforce Centers in [Ramsey County](#), [Minneapolis South](#), [Mankato](#), and [New Ulm](#); [Minneapolis ABE](#), McDonough Public Housing (St. Paul), and [Project for Pride in Living](#). Minnesota lead staff include [Jen Vanek](#), Minnesota Learner Web Coordinator, and [Tom Cytron-Hysom](#), Project Coordinator.

The first six months of the grant will involve development of consumer Learning Plans (led by Minnesota) that will be used in over 60 community locations around the country during the following 24 months of the grant, to serve economically vulnerable populations move across the digital divide. In addition, the project will recruit and train numerous volunteer tutors to work with populations using the learning plans, using a learning plan developed by [ProLiteracy](#).

The grant was submitted through [Portland State University](#), where Learner Web originated and continues to develop under the leadership of Dr. Stephen Reder, with partners including New York, Central and South Texas, New Orleans, Louisiana and Richmond, California. The grant began October 1, and runs through March 2013. The \$5.8 M grant includes \$3.3 M in federal funding and \$2.5 M in matching funds, and is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

## **FastTRAC projects help learners enter career pathways supporting in-demand job skills**

SPCLC is actively engaged with [FastTRAC](#), the state-wide initiative to develop and deliver collaborative adult career pathways education involving ABE, MNSCU, workforce development, and community based organizations. The philosophy is to **assist ABE students to prepare for and successfully enter specific occupations, utilizing integrated curricula, academic support, and case management**. Pathways provide ways to achieve higher levels of education and employment in a given sector over time.

The **Medical Careers Pathway** involves [SPCLC](#), [St. Paul College](#), Ramsey County Workforce Centers, [Goodwill/Easter Seals](#), [United Way](#), and other groups. Work skills and career planning are embedded into lower level ELL classes, leading into midlevel English for Careers. Students then complete [Medical Office Prep](#), providing foundational skills and focused preparation for various medical office careers. Finally, students enroll at St. Paul College for the three-credit Medical Terminology course, which integrates ABE support, pre-teaching, and review to help learners successfully transition into higher education. **About a dozen learners are enrolled in this course, which begins in January**. Once the course is successfully completed, students can continue work towards a 17-credit Medical Records Certificate, or other medical office professions.

The **Child Development Initiative** supports ABE learners in the first steps on the child development careers pathway. Participants enhance their reading and writing skills, develop foundational knowledge and career awareness of child development, earn a Work Readiness Credential, and obtain digital literacy skills. Once students complete the [Advanced Child Development](#) course at the [Hubbs Center](#), they can apply for and enroll for the three-credit Early Childhood Education course at St. Paul College, which integrates ABE support. They can proceed to further courses needed to obtain an Early Childhood education certificate. The project includes [St. Paul Public Schools ABE](#), Metro East, Goodwill/Easter Seals, St. Paul College, and Workforce Solutions.

