

**For information
on 12 January 2009**

**Legislative Council Panel on
Information Technology and Broadcasting**

Progress Report on the Pilot Scheme on District Cyber Centres

Purpose

This paper aims to update Members the latest progress of the pilot scheme on District Cyber Centres (DCC).

Background

2. The Financial Secretary announced in his Budget Speech of 2008-09 the launching of a pilot scheme on DCC.

3. To ensure that a holistic approach is taken in tackling the digital divide issue with regard to the different needs of sub-groups, a Task Force on Digital Inclusion was established in mid 2008 comprising representatives from relevant government departments as well as industry and community stakeholders to formulate strategies and initiatives for digital inclusion. It is the Task Force's consensus that the top priorities with regard to digital inclusion issues in the needy community include access to computer hardware and software, Internet connections, and technical support, relevant ICT knowledge and online content.

4. The main objective of the DCC scheme is, through providing computing facilities, Internet connectivity, training and technical support, to help narrow the digital divide by enabling young people from poor families and other needy members of the community to access and use ICT and online services and help them integrate into the information society.

5. The DCC initiative complements other digital inclusion initiatives, such as sponsorship of the Digital Solidarity Fund, and technology donation and sponsored broadband programmes. These initiatives – and others being considered by the Task Force on Digital Inclusion – address priorities, such as access to the Internet at home, which are not covered by the DCC programme.

Current Issue

6. Many organisations, either private corporations or social service bodies, are running various digital inclusion programmes to help tackle the digital divide issue in Hong Kong. Some of them have been operating computer centres in various districts for some time. These centres normally provide computer access with Internet connection for different needy groups or the general public; they also organise basic training courses on computer usage and application.

7. Many of these centres are facing similar challenges in operation, including lack of adequate technical support for maintaining the computer facilities and rendering assistance to the users; lack of funding for daily operations as well as for periodic hardware and software updates; and difficulties in attracting, engaging and sustaining the target users' participation.

8. There is no overall coordination of these centres' operations. The continuity and scope of service provision are subject to the organisers' own business and resource priorities and their individual ability to secure support/sponsorship from various sources. Centres often find it hard to sustain themselves and this inevitably hinders on-going support and commitment to the needy.

9. On the other hand, there are also many organisations that are willing to support different district based computer centres. These include private sector companies, ICT industry bodies and professional associations as well as community organisations and the Government. The support offered includes cash or in-kind donation, such as hardware

and software; professional ICT advice; technical support; and volunteer services. However, there is no overall coordination of this support. This means that individual centres – particularly smaller ones – can find it difficult to attract the attention of relevant sponsors, let alone to secure their sustained support to the centres' operation.

Expression of Interest Exercise

10. Through the DCC pilot scheme, the Government seeks to explore viable proposals to address the afore-mentioned challenges. Community organisations and private sector sponsors have been invited to form a tripartite partnership with the Government in leading the implementation and management of the DCC.

11. In mid 2008, the OGCIO invited over 160 ICT professional bodies and industry associations, community organisations as well as the private sector to submit expressions of interest with proposals for participating in the pilot scheme.

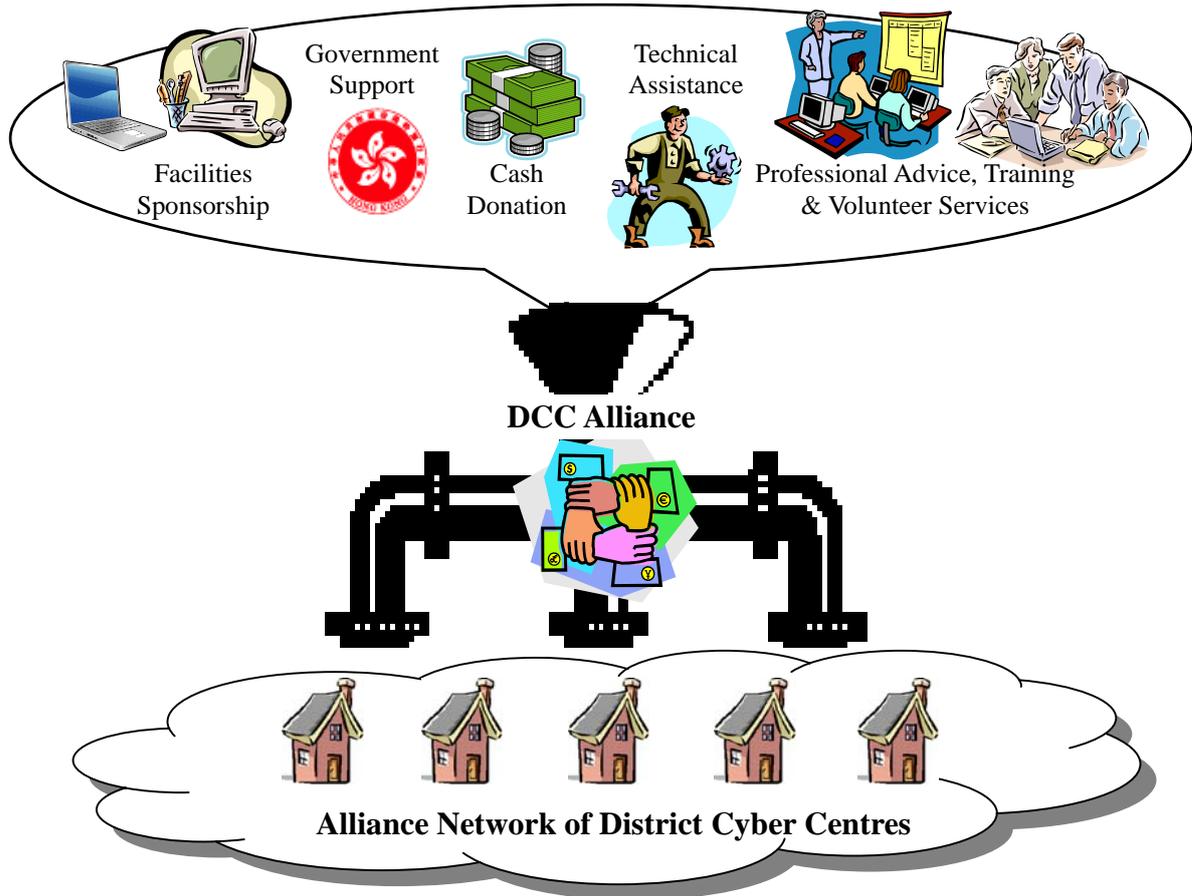
12. A total of 24 proposals were received in response to our invitation. After detailed assessment and further discussion with proposers of the shortlisted prospective proposals, a joint proposal from three organisations was identified as providing the greatest benefit and potential in driving the sustainable development of the DCC movement in the wider community.

The Proposal

13. The joint proposal was submitted by the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Internet Professional Association. It seeks to enhance the capacity of district based cyber centres, both existing and new ones, by forming an allied network amongst them. Through strengthening the branding, coordination and support network with those district cyber centres joining the alliance (affiliated centres), more ongoing and sustainable sponsorship and support can be secured for cyber

centres in different districts to provide more effective and quality services to the needy groups in the community, and in turn help them integrate into the information society.

14. The proposed service model is depicted in the following diagram.



15. Some of the major service provisions proposed are highlighted as follows –

- the Alliance will develop and promote the DCC branding for the affiliated centres to attract and coordinate support and sponsorship, both in cash and in-kind, from major IT companies, industry and professional bodies, Internet Service Providers as well as other donors for the affiliated centres;

- the Alliance will advise individual centres about the resources they require to meet their social objectives, and will mobilize the appropriate support and sponsorship from donors;
- the Alliance will provide helpdesk and on-site technical support service to help its affiliates solve daily ICT operational issues, maintenance issues, etc;
- the affiliates will be offered an opportunity to purchase high-end computers via a lease-to-own method at a price much lower than the market price;
- a Laptop Library will be set up for needy users to borrow via the cyber centres network of the Alliance; and
- professional volunteers will be pooled together to develop practical course syllabus and materials, and to deliver customised training to the affiliated centres' staff, trainers as well as the needy groups served by individual centres.

16. The Alliance has lined up over 40 partners, supporting organisations and private sector sponsors to support the implementation of the proposal, which include community and education organizations, professional and industry organisations, business community, as well as a number of interested district based computer centres serving different needy communities.

Initial pilot

17. Implementation work of the Alliance is currently underway and is scheduled for an initial pilot launch in February 2009. Over the following 4-6 months, the Alliance will develop and test out the business processes, governance arrangements and management structures needed to support its operation.

18. During the initial pilot phase, the Alliance plans to support up to 10 affiliated centres equipped with a total of 250 computers and

related ICT facilities, at various locations serving different needy communities including youth, elderly, women, etc. A Laptop Library with 250 laptop computers for loan to cyber centres and their users will be established. Training curricula/programmes will also be devised for the affiliated centres.

19. Under the tripartite partnership arrangement of the DCC pilot scheme, OGCIO has provided a sponsorship of HK\$4.7 million to support the proposal while the Alliance has also secured commercial sponsorship of a similar amount of some HK\$4.7 million, both in cash and in-kind, including professional support, hardware, software, service donation etc., to facilitate the implementation and rollout of the pilot operation.

Future Development

20. The initial pilot is intended to pave the way for longer term service development, with a view to expanding the alliance network to cover more cyber centres in different districts and through creating more value added support services to the affiliated centres.

21. The proposal projects a further 12 months' plan of service development and expansion of the pilot operation to 25 affiliated centres with 625 computer equipment and ICT facilities, and making up a sum of 1,000 laptop computers in the Laptop Library for share use among the affiliated centres and their users. An award scheme will be developed for members of the affiliated centres to encourage life-long education and application on ICT skills as well as promote mutual help in ICT teaching and learning within the community. To strengthen the sustainable development of the DCC movement, an ICT professional training and development programme for volunteers and youth will also be introduced.

22. An additional funding of some HK\$23.8 million is estimated for the expanded pilot operation. Besides seeking further support from the Government, the Alliance will extend the tripartite partnership with private sector to leverage more commercial sponsorship.

23. Government's support to the future development of the Alliance will be contingent upon the experience and outcome of the initial pilot and further exploration with the Alliance in more details on the projected expansion of the pilot operation.

Advice Sought

24. Members are invited to note the above progress update on the DCC pilot scheme.

**Office of the Government Chief Information Officer
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