Mon Valley Initiative – Executive Office
Student Consultant, Le Wang
Community Partner, Laura Richeson Zinski

I. The Consulting Situation

About the Organization
The mission statement of Mon Valley Initiative is "*working together to unite communities and restore the economic vitality of the Mon Valley.*" The population served by the Mon Valley Initiative includes the entire residential, commercial population of the Mon Valley area.

Program and Services
Mon Valley Initiative is divided into four separate focus programs, including workforce development, housing development, community outreach and small business development.

The goals of the Workforce Development team are to help residents in the Mon Valley area to attain skill sets and career networks needed to acquire jobs and careers. They collaborate with regional employers to create a focus on the workforce and encourage economic development in Mon Valley. They are also developing training program for the residents of Mon Valley who are seeking jobs. At the same time, they are incorporating area employers concerns and needs into those training programs.

The mission of the Community Outreach Program is to enhance the public image of Mon Valley Initiative and its member community development corporations through public relations programs, special events and volunteer recruitment. They are responsible for the organization's press releases, publications and mailings. They are also responsible for Community Development Corporation meetings, and recruiting new members to join MVI. They recently have also set up a website for the organization at www.monvalleyinitiative.com.

The Small Business Development (Initiative Fund) team's mission is to expand opportunities for small businesses in economically distressed Mon Valley Communities by building wealth and creating financially sound, independent companies. Its primary focus is to offer flexible debt financing plans to business with needs for equipment purchasing, leasehold improvement etc. Since its inception in September of 1999, the Initiative Fund has closed 7 loans totaling over $300,000, creating more than 17 jobs and Initiative Fund team members project closing 12 loans in 2002.

The Housing Development team's goals are to provide a safe, affordable, attractive housing plans for low-income families in the Mon Valley area. They also aim to revitalize communities by renovating existing houses and building new houses. The housing development program has created over 175 units of affordable housing throughout the Mon Valley region. Recently Mon Valley Initiative secured 1 million dollars in funding that will allow the program to double their Rehab-for-Resale housing development program output in 2002.

Organizational Structure
Laura Richeson Zinski is the Chief Executive Officer of the organization. Her responsibilities within the organization include managing the four programs of MVI to implement organizational strategies aimed at community revitalization; searching and obtaining future funding opportunities for MVI and reporting outcomes and results to the board of directors, which consists of funding providers and community volunteers.

Sheila White is the Executive Assistant of Mon Valley Initiative. Her mission in the organization is to manage and perform the administrative support tasks in a manner which facilitates MVI's objectives and to maintain strong commitment to performance and quality. She reports to the Chief Executive Officer.

The four separate programs of MVI also have their own directors who are in charge of implementing specific strategies set fourth to each program. Ms. Zinski has regular meetings with program directors to keep track of progress and funding needs.

Financial Support
The total annual operating budget of MVI is about $1.2 million. The money is mainly raised from foundations, government sources, development fees, and individual donations. It's the board's job along with CEO Laura Zinski to make sure that all the necessary funds are raised each year.

The Current Technology Situation

Technology Usage
CEO Laura Zinski mostly uses her computer (connected to the Internet) and Microsoft Outlook for reading and sending emails, keeping a list of contacts, and occasionally uses it to keep her daily schedules. She uses Microsoft Word for funding application needs, and Internet Explorer to browse websites of other non-profit organizations and for funding resources.

Ms. Zinski's Executive Assistant, mainly uses her computer (also connected to the Internet) for email needs through Microsoft Outlook, and for keeping organizational contacts with both Outlook and Access. She also uses Microsoft Word for memo and other organization documentations.

Other staff members also use their networked computers to communicate in emails using Microsoft Outlook for scheduling meetings and exchanging information. They also use Internet Explorer to browse websites for housing databases, etc. Most of them also use Outlook to keep daily schedules and personal contact lists.

Technology Situation & Management
The Mon Valley Initiative has done relatively well since its start in 1988 in keeping pace with technology development and incorporating it into the organization to help them grow. The organization purchased computers to help them operate as early as 1992 when personal computing technology was just starting to grow. They kept up with the PC industry as they often upgraded their hardware and software as needed. In 1998, they installed network hardware into the organization, and gave Internet access and individual email addresses to all of their staff members.

As of today, Ms. Zinski's computer has a Pentium 233 MHz CPU with 32MB of RAM and 3 Gigabytes of hard drive space. It is currently running Windows 98 with Office 97 and Outlook installed. Every other staff member has similar desktop configurations with exception of two members who often travels. They recently received Pentium III laptops with Office XP so they can work on the road.

In terms of networks and Internet support, every staff member's desktop is networked to a central server, which acts as a proxy server and also an email server. Their server is connected to the Internet through DSL for continuous Internet connection provided by a local Internet provider, StarGate. They recently developed a website to further promote the organization; its address is www.monvalleyinitiative.com, also hosted by StarGate. They are looking into upgrading their PCs and Internet connections in the near future to keep up with the fast growing technology industry.

In terms of technology management, Mon Valley Initiative does not have a full time position for managing organization websites and network flows. They contract out their web design needs to IT consultants, and pay a monthly fee to keep their website on the Internet. The hardware and software support of the PCs are managed by their PC provider, Shiloh Technologies, which charges a fee for every time they come to service and upgrade MVI's computers. Eric Sloss, their Public Relation Coordinator is currently picking up the task of maintaining their proxy server. Mr. Sloss, Ms. Zinski and program directors are also responsible for developing purchasing plans for future upgrades related to PCs and network connections.

Organizational Technology Opportunities & Progress

MVI currently has several areas of opportunity within their technology side where they could make improvements to further help them attain their organizational goals, and also gain potential to grow in the future. One of the technology opportunities was to extend the usage of Microsoft Outlook within the organization to help Ms. Zinski schedule meetings with staff members, and also to keep track of convenient master contacts list for the entire organization to search from. They have Microsoft Outlook fully installed on Ms. Zinski's and other staff members' computer with the necessary network features for this. However, they needed someone to help them understand the benefits of using extended networking features, and help them get started on finding out how to use these features to assist Ms. Zinski and other staff members in gaining additional capacity in their daily tasks and routines.

Other technology opportunities at MVI include developing a long-term technology plan that can help them grow as technology advances in the future. They currently don't have a technology plan in place, however they have been consistently upgrading their computers and network as needed. They would need help in learning about the advantages of having a technology plan in place, and how to go about developing one that is often updated and referred to as they progress.

MVI's past experiences in managing technology have been reacting to the current technology needs, and contacting their computer support (Shiloh Services) when they feel an upgrade is needed or when they find a problem in their current computer usage. In terms of Microsoft Outlook, it was also installed by Shiloh Services when they purchased the current set of computers. Although the software is fully functional, the CEO and staff members of MVI were not aware of all the full potential and features of Outlook, and therefore they could not take advantages of these capacities to help them reach organizational goals.

Ms. Zinski would like to incorporate more usage of technology within her daily routine to gain efficiencies in tasks such as scheduling meetings, updating and sharing contacts. She wants to first explore the possibilities within the technology environment they currently have, such as Microsoft Outlook, and then extend to other technology as needed. The ideal situation would be when Ms. Zinski and all staff members can fully utilize the features of their current technology (software & hardware) to assist them in getting their daily tasks done more efficiently, and also have the ability to look ahead to future technologies in searching for additional capacities to help accomplish organizational goals.

The Consulting Partnership

Role of Community Partner in the organization

My Community Partner is Laura Richeson Zinski, the CEO of Mon Valley Initiative. Her mission is to manage the resources of the organizations effectively to support locally designed and implemented strategies aimed at comprehensive community revitalization and to ensure that there are necessary

resources available to support the objectives and missions of MVI. Her daily tasks include managing day-to-day operations of the organization; coordinating the cooperation between departments and implementing policies and strategies of the organization set forth by the board members. She also prepares budgets, identify funding resources, devise and implement fundraising strategies.

Technology Environment
Ms. Zinski often uses *MS Word* for her word processing needs (funding applications); *Outlook* for emails and contact list. For emails to work properly, she is also sharing Internet connection with other staff of MVI through a server-based network that connects all MVI computers and printers together.

Problems and Opportunities
As the CEO of Mon Valley Initiative, Laura Zinski has to coordinate many meetings and events across all four programs of MVI. Currently she is using email to schedule meetings, and keeping them on a poster board as a method of keeping track with all the scheduled events. Coordinating information such as meeting times from staff members, and program directors has become a time consuming part of her daily tasks. The problem of scheduling could eventually become worse as the organization expands and grows to include more departments and employees.

Another of Ms. Zinski's daily tasks is to maintain and update contact lists of potential funding resources and other organizational contacts. This task often gets behind as more contacts arrive, and it can be a time consuming task to update contacts piled up from previous days.

If the information coordination and sharing becomes more efficient, it will help Ms. Zinski to spend less time in scheduling meetings and entering contact information, and allow her more time to direct and implement organization's mission. It will also give MVI more potential to grow into a larger organization in the future.

Solutions to increase capacity
Currently Ms. Zinski and many staff members of Mon Valley Initiative are using Microsoft Outlook as a personal organizer and email application. Microsoft Outlook can be extended to use as a scheduling program across a computer network as a way to post or cancel meeting appointments. Staff members can schedule meetings with Ms. Zinski or any other employee by finding a link to others' online schedule and filling in an open slot, instead of using the back-and-forth email process to schedule meetings. As this feature becomes widely used among all staff members, it should help cut down scheduling times for Ms. Zinski and other staff members as well.

Microsoft Outlook can also be used to share contact list across the network. This way all staff members can help in creating a master contact list. The list will be more up to date and complete for everyone to use. It will also save Ms. Zinski a significant amount of time because the contact list update responsibility is now shared among all staff members.

Scope of Work
The consulting task is to find out the exact capacity Outlook can contribute in terms of its networking abilities for scheduling meetings. From the assessment, I came up with a list of the possible networking features in Outlook useful to accomplish the goals mentioned in the above description. I helped Ms. Zinski and the rest of the staff members to understand the issues related with the new method of scheduling meetings and also to assisted them in learning and using these new functions in Outlook to expand and sustained their capacities to accomplish their mission.

Consulting Task 1: Outlook schedule networking

The Outlook scheduling process can improve efficiency when majority of the staff members updates their Outlook schedules regularly. As more people keep their schedules up to date on the network, other staff members can find out when they are free and not free more accurately. Therefore, instead of emailing everyone with a suggested time, and then adjusting it slowly through email sessions, Outlook can help them to find a meeting time that works well for everyone through their online calendars.

The increase in capacity helps Ms. Zinski to spend more time to look for funding resources and to implement organizational strategies, and less on the logistics of scheduling meetings with staff members. The meetings themselves should also become more effective, as Outlook helps maximizing the number of people who can attend each meeting. It also helps staff members to remember when they have meetings to attend to. The organization would also gain the potential to grow larger, and have more departments while still be efficient in scheduling meetings and coordinate information across staff members.

Consulting Task 2: Creating master contact list

While working with Community Partner (Ms. Zinski) and staff members on the scheduling task, I also helped them learn the sharing of contact lists at the same time. As a result, MVI has a master contact list in their network, its being kept up to date by every staff member instead of by himself or herself separately. With in the allotted time, I was only able to consult with a handful of staff members; however in time they will become experts in these new features of Outlook and will be able to help other staff members in the future.

The sharing of contact lists through Microsoft Outlook can also provide significant benefits to the organization. The benefits are two fold. Every staff member gained access to a master contact list that is accessible at any computer attached to the network in the organization. This can help all employees save time in trying to look up contact information in a shared list, which helps each employee to become more efficient in their job tasks and helps the organization to better serve the Mon Valley community. Ms. Zinski also saves time by spending less time updating contact information, as it becomes a shared responsibility for all staff members.

The reason for focusing on consulting with both Ms. Zinski and other staff members to learn these new capacities is that Ms. Zinski cannot increase her efficiency in meeting scheduling unless the staff members she meets with also participate on the other end. This can also help staff members schedule meetings more efficiently among themselves. As for building an organizational contact list, the more staff members who participate, the more complete the contact information will be.

II. Outcomes and Recommendations

A. Consulting Outcomes

Consulting Task 1: Scheduling meetings with Microsoft Outlook

As the CEO of Mon Valley Initiative, Laura Zinski has to coordinate many meetings and events across all four programs of MVI. Coordinating information such as meeting times from staff members, and program directors has become a time consuming part of her daily tasks. Microsoft Outlook can be extended to use as a scheduling program across a computer network as a way to post or cancel meeting appointments. Staff members can schedule meetings with Ms. Zinski or any other employees by finding a link to other's online schedule and filling in an open slot, instead of using the back and forth email process to schedule meetings. As this feature becomes widely used among all staff members, it should help cut down scheduling times for Ms. Zinski and other staff members as well.

Outcome 1:
a. Update schedules into Outlook
- Ms. Zinski and many staff members have updated their personal schedule onto Outlook, and they are also consistently updating it as new meetings and events arrive to keep the shared schedules accurate.

- Ms. Zinski updated all the meetings and events from her paper formed organizer into Outlook's shared schedule. Her and other staff members' daily schedules can now be seen from any networked computer in Mon Valley Initiative. Ms. Zinski and other staff members are also consistently updating their Outlook schedules as they schedule new meetings and plan new events. Ms. Zinski's and many other staff members' shared schedule on the network is an accurate reflection of her daily work plan.

- An accurate shared schedule is a crucial ingredient for making the meeting scheduling process efficient and effective. If staff members can see each other's accurate daily schedules from their own desktops, then they can efficiently schedule meetings around those schedules. Therefore, saving time for Ms. Zinski and other staff members.

- Sustainability is an issue in this outcome. If Ms. Zinski and the rest of the staff members can form the habit of always updating changes onto Outlook, then this outcome will become more sustainable. However, other personalized electronic organizers might be helpful to form this habit, and keep the inputting time to a minimum.

b. Recommendations
- Equip Ms. Zinski and every staff members with PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) organizers to help them keep daily schedules updated on the network. By making the process of updating new and changed events faster, the process of updating events to Outlook will be more sustainable, contributing to more accurate schedules on the network.

- To implement this recommendation, MVI should form a study group of interested staff members to come up with the basic features of a PDA that would best fit their needs. One MVI staff, Monique King-Viehland already had months of experience using a PDA, MVI should include her in the study group to share her experiences with the group on what are the most suitable PDA features for MVI. An important topic they should discuss is

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whether a Window based PDA or Palm based PDA will be more suitable for their needs. This is one of the important features they will have to decide on before other steps of implementation.

- MVI can take advantage of online research sites that are readily available for analyzing price and feature differences between different brands of PDA organizers, such as Palm, Visor, Sony, Casio, HP, etc. This way, they can find out more specifically which brand seems to fit the list of features they came up with the most. Some of the questions they might ask themselves are what brands will be compatible with their current network, operating system, most importantly Outlook. Examples of online research sites are provided below for reference. They should also make visits to local electronic stores such as Best Buy or Circuit City to test out the PDA they wanted to see if its easy to use, and also get a sense of its price range.

- Purchasing PDAs is not an easy task. They should go to online pricing websites (also provided below) to compare prices between the brands that they choose in the last step (also compare it with the prices from electronic stores). They can make purchases directly through the web. They should purchase a small amount of PDAs first for the study group, and if the products are proven useful, they can then purchase in grater quantities so that one is available for every staff member in MVI.

c. Resources
- One of the important resources MVI currently has is a staff member who is already using a portable organizer as way of keeping daily schedules. Her name is Monique King-Viehland. She can help MVI a great deal in stepping in the right direction of choosing a PDA that fits their needs and also won't cost a lot. Ms. Zinski should definitely include her into the discussion group for opinions on PDAs.

- Some of the online information sites for portable organizers are: http://www.the-gadgeteer.com/palmos.html; http://chris.mckinney.net/palmos/; http://www.peachpit.com/vqs/palm/. They include a selection of reviews for the PDA in the current market, and information on how palm organizers work with existing computers and Outlook, and how it can help users to better organize their personal schedules. These pages are great references when MVI is deciding what features and brands to choose from the entire market of PDAs.

- Price and feature comparison websites such as www.pricewatch.com and www.pricescan.com will also be helpful to Ms. Zinski and staff members to search and find the model that fits their budget the most. These sites have direct connections to vendor sites so they can order online when they find the best price. Visiting electronics store such as Circuit City, Best Buy or Office Depot could also be a good resource to test out the product and compare the prices.

- Once they choose a brand to purchase, they should then aim to maximize efficient usage of the PDAs. MVI should purchase the reference book: The Essential Palm User's Guide: The Ultimate Reference Companion to Maximize Your PDA Performance. This book will help them use the existing features correctly and efficiently, and it will also help them know the possibilities of new applications and hardware add-ons for the PDAs.

Outcome 2:

a. Successfully scheduled meetings through Outlook

- Ms. Zinski has scheduled many staff meetings through Outlook's network feature; the process has helped her save time. Other staff members have also scheduled meetings through Outlook with Ms. Zinski and among themselves.

- Ms. Zinski has successfully scheduled many staff meetings through the Outlook network feature. She has noticed an increase in efficiency from using shared schedules to schedule meetings in comparison to requesting time through email. Other staff members have successfully replied to all of Ms. Zinski's meeting requests, and they have also started to use these Outlook features to schedule meetings among themselves. Some staff members are currently helping other staff members to learn these meeting request features so that they all can effectively take advantage of the shared scheduling system on Outlook.

- By having the ability to look at all attendees' daily schedules at once, Ms. Zinski can find an approximate time period when everyone can attend the meeting. This new feature has helped her and many staff members to save a lot of time when scheduling staff meetings. The increase in capacity will allow Ms. Zinski to spend more time looking for funding resources and implementing organizational strategies, and less time on the logistics of scheduling meetings with staff members. The meetings themselves could also become more effective, as Outlook helps in maximizing the number of people who can attend each meeting. This feature can also allow Ms. Zinski to schedule meetings with more staff members, allowing MVI the potential to grow larger as an organization.

- The sustainability of this outcome depends heavily on the accuracy of shared schedules on the network. If the shared schedules became outdated, then the meeting time chosen according to the shared schedules will also become less precise, making the process of scheduling longer to accomplish. The schedules shared on the network have been accurate so far; as more staff members are starting to use the feature and form the habit of updating schedules on Outlook, the scheduling process should become more efficient as well.

- The capacity of this method of scheduling is not yet maximized, as MVI expands into a bigger organization, scheduling with more staff members using the old email method will take much longer time and more email replies. Therefore, by switching to the shared scheduling method, the efficiency gained will more apparent in the long term.

b. Recommendations

- Since the effectiveness and sustainability of the scheduling process depends on the accuracy of the schedules kept on the shared network, then MVI should focus on motivating staff members to continuing their schedule updating process. As stated in the past section, the use of a PDA is a great way to help each staff member to keep one centralized schedule and also easily updating it to Outlook with the press of one synchronize button. However, it is still up to the owner of the PDAs to always remember to add on events to the PDA when new appointments arrive.

- Ms. Zinski should help motivate everyone in staff meetings on the importance of keeping schedules updated in Outlook as a daily habit. Once the habit is formed among a few of the staff members in MVI, then it will be easier for other staff members to follow the

trend, as more meetings are scheduled through shared calendars and often updated by PDAs.

- Keeping up with online and paper-form references for Outlook, so that they will know if any procedure changes are needed to be made for their shared scheduling process when they updated Outlook to newer versions.

c. Resources
- In addition to the palm websites and resources provided in the last outcome, other Outlook reference information websites includes: http://support.microsoft.com/support/outlook/faq/ol20/default.asp and http://www.computerhope.com/software/outlook.htm. These websites often gets updated as new versions of Outlook come out. As stated earlier, MVI should read over these websites to help them sustain the ability to schedule meetings even when Outlook is updated to new versions.

- Other Outlook books may also be helpful as a reference: Special Edition Using Microsoft Outlook 2000 by Gordon Padwick. This is a great source for help when they need to look up a specific feature in Outlook, and they should continue to purchase new versions of the book as new versions of Outlook comes out.

Consulting Task 2: Sharing master contact list on the network

Another of Ms. Zinski's daily tasks is to maintain and update contact lists of potential funding resources and other organizational contacts. This task often gets behind as more contacts arrive, and it can be a time consuming task to update contacts piled up from previous days. Microsoft Outlook can also be used to share contact list across the network. This way all staff members can help in building up a master contact list. The list will be more up to date and complete for everyone to use. It will also save Ms. Zinski a significant amount of time because the contact list update responsibility is now shared among all staff members.

Outcome:
a. Creating and updating shared contact list through Outlook
- Many staff members have updated their own personal contact lists in Outlook, and they have also created a shared contact list on the network while consistently updating the new contact list from their own contact lists in Outlook.

- Staff members have created a master contact list in Outlook's shared public folder. They have been updating their related contacts into this new list by transferring existing contacts from their personal folder into the shared folder. They have also been keeping up with updates in their own personal contacts in Outlook, while downloading contacts from the shared contact list directory into their own contact folder. Since contact lists updates are not as frequent as scheduling updates Outlook schedules, the outcomes are not as visible.

- Staff members have gained access to a more complete contact list that is accessible at any computer attached to the network in the organization. This helps all employees save time in trying to look up contact information in a more complete list, which helps each employee to become more efficient in their job tasks and helps the organization to better serve the Mon Valley community. Ms. Zinski will also save

time by spending less time updating contact information, as it becomes a shared responsibility for all staff members. She can focus more on other responsibilities and tasks such as fund raising and managing all parts of the organization to implement organizational strategies.

- Once the shared master contact list is completed, only occasional changes are needed as staff members receive new contacts.   Therefore, sustainability is likely in the future. Also when staff members need to find a contact, they can just go to the central location to find the contact they needed, and paste it into their own contact list.

b. Recommendations
- Establish a shortcut button on every staff member's Outlook menu so that they can access the shared contacts with ease.   The current location of the shared contact folder in Outlook is difficult to locate, one would have to click many times and remember where exactly it is located before finding it in Outlook. This problem could hurt the sustainability of the outcome in the future, as staff members tend to access the shared contact list in less frequency due to its location. Therefore, a solution to this is to add a shortcut button on to the Outlook menu, so that one click is all that's needed to find and access the shared contact list.

- MVI should consult the help pages in Outlook to find out how to create a short cut button. After locating the instructions, they need to find out where exactly is the shared folder located, and create the button so that it is linked to the folder.   They would have to repeat this process for all the computers on the network.

- Using PDAs to enter new contacts as they come in is also a good idea to keep contacts fresh in the shared contacts. PDA's contact list can also be synchronized with Outlook's contact list, therefore every time a user enters in a new contact on either the computer or the PDA, it can be updated on both sides with synchronization.

c. Resources
- Active help pages in Outlook are a good source to create the short cut for the shared contacts. It has detailed instructions to how to create short cuts within Outlook. Additional help can also be found on Microsoft's web page: http://support.microsoft.com/support/outlook/faq/ol20/default.asp, this might be a good source for support because Microsoft will often update it as they change to newer versions.

- Reference books for Outlook are another resource they could use as additional help pages for creating short cuts buttons within Outlook and also for creating a shared list on the network, such as: Special Edition Using Microsoft Outlook 2000 by Gordon Padwick. They do need to keep purchasing new versions of the book to keep the reference updated as they update their software.

- Please refer to the PDA reference book: The Essential Palm User's Guide: The Ultimate Reference Companion to Maximize Your PDA Performance if they need any additional information in synchronizing PDA's contact list with Outlook's contact list.

B. Additional Recommendations

Recommendation 1: File transfer through online chat server

Ms. Zinski and other staff members often share documents through Microsoft network installed on Windows 98. However this process of sharing files often takes a long time as one party needs to find his/her shared folder in the shared network drive, and place the new file in the folder while communicating to the other party about what the new file is called and where is it located.   The problem gets more complicated as the shared folder becomes disorganized, and files become hard to locate. In terms of national benchmarks, this recommendation is related to the measuring of network capabilities and maintenance of a non-profit organization.

By installing AOL instant messaging system onto every networked computer in MVI, Ms. Zinski can send and receive files directly through the chatting window. When she decides to send a file to a staff member, all that's needed is to drag the file onto the screen name of staff member in the chatting window. The staff member on the other side can just hit accepts and chooses the location to store it on his/her computer, and the file will be transferred through. The process of saving it on a shared drive and retrieving it on the other side is eliminated by the use of AOL instant messaging system. Due to its popularity, AOL is likely to continuously update and support it in the future, making it a sustainable solution.

The messaging system is available for free download on the Internet at www.aim.com. The installation process is simple and straightforward. MVI can create a unique screen name for every staff member. Once the messaging accounts are created, download the AOL messaging software and install it as instructed. Since MVI is connect to the Internet 24 hours a day through DSL, the messaging program can also be used whenever needed.

Resources:

One of the most important resources is AOL instant messaging's website at www.aim.com, which provides all the installing directions, actual software for download, account information needed to create the chatting system. One can also find additional information on the chatting/file transferring in the book: Instant Messaging in the Workplace by Jupiter Media Metrix. The help files of the instant messaging software is also very helpful, especially if it is a quick look up of how to use certain features of the software. They should also explore other alternatives for messaging systems between staff members to facilitate better communication and file transferring process. Some of the places to look for alternative chatting server include: www.icq.com and www.msn.com. Both are popular and easy to use services among Internet users.

Recommendation 2: Implement an intranet system

As the executive director of the Mon Valley Initiative, Ms. Zinski needs to maintain and manage the financial resources of the organization to accomplish its missions and goals. Often, she needs to meet with firms and fill out funding applications and reports to ensure enough resources are maintained for future organization plans and strategies. Currently she does not have an efficient way of keeping track with what applications are coming up, and what information she needs in order to fill out the applications and reports. The benchmark addressed in this recommendation is the business system requirements needed in a non-profit organization to carry out its mission. (Ref: Technology literacy benchmarks for nonprofit organizations, by Npower, at www.npower.org.)

An intranet is a website specifically designed to be accessed within a company for purposes of sharing information more efficiently across departments and staff members. Developing an intranet system can help Ms. Zinski in keeping up with funding reports. After an intranet system is developed for the organization, Ms. Zinski can post empty applications into the intranet. Not only it will remind her when they are due, Ms. Zinski can also complete and submit the application on the intranet if the funding application is in an electronic form.

Implementing an intranet website is not a small task, it will require a lot of planning, and a team of consultants to implement the system. Luckily, in Carnegie Mellon's Information System project course, students are sent to non-profit organizations to help them develop their own information systems. MVI can take advantage of this opportunity to plan the features and capabilities needed, and have the student consultants help them develop an intranet system.

Resources:
Websites are the best resources available for free to plan an intranet system. They include: http://www.intrack.com/intranet/iarchi.shtml, http://www.epa.gov/webguide/create/intranet/intrapub.html. These websites are intended for MVI to understand the usage and overall steps of Intranet, so that they can plan with the student consultant to build a customized intranet system. Some books on intranet are also available for purchase: The Intranet Data Warehouse : Tools and Techniques for Connecting Data Warehouses to Intranets by Richard Tanler; "The 21st Century Intranet" by Jennifer Stone Gonzalez. They will be very helpful to let MVI start thinking in the intranet direction in the future, and get some background information on it. Ms. Zinski can contact the Carnegie Mellon community outreach program at 412-268-7801, or by email at cmu-outreach@cmu.edu to explore options for having an information system group helping them setting up this intranet system.

Recommendation 3: Learning common shortcut keyboard strokes for Windows

Many Microsoft applications including Windows itself share common shortcut keys that are often used by its users. By always using these functions with mouse clicks and dragging menus takes a lot of time, especially if the functions are used repeatedly. In recent sharing of contact lists, the process of copying a personal contact and pasting into the shared contact folder is slowed significantly by repeating dragging the Edit menu to use the copy and paste functions. Many staff members did not know how to use shortcut keys to help them speed up the editing process. The benchmark involved in this recommendation relates to technology training of staff members.

By using Ctrl-C; Ctrl-V; etc, one can use one hand to control the keyboard, the other to click on where to copy or paste. This parallel action helps many Window users save significant of time, especially if large amount of editing is involved. Microsoft has been using a set of standard shortcut keystrokes for many of its mainstream applications, even software made by other software companies use these set of shortcut keys. Therefore, by learning use of these common shortcuts, users do not have to worry about learning new shortcuts due to changes in the software.

There are a set of basic editing features often used by Window users, such as copy, paste, undo and cut. Staff members can get to know these shortcuts by using pull down menus as before, but also pay attention to the shortcuts mentioned to the right of the menu commands. After remembering what these shortcuts keys do, simply practice using them as one edit a document or updating contact lists. Once the habit of using these keys is formed, the users will be able to sustain the benefits of using these shortcut keys. An organizational monthly

contest for best window short-cuts tips can help staff members help each other by encouraging them to look for useful shortcuts, and sharing it with public.

Resource:
The drag-down menus such as File, Edit, View, are great resources to find out what shortcut keys are available for each function. Help files for Windows also contains information on common shortcut keys. Tips from other staff members are a great source to find more about short-cut keys in Windows. There are additional resources on the web to add custom shortcuts into popular Office applications, such as http://ec.hku.hk/writing_turbocharger/turbotools/Shortcut.htm. This site gives screenshots and well-defined instructions to adding new short cuts to Office applications.

About the Consultant:
Le Wang is currently a 4th year senior majoring in computer science and business administration at Carnegie Mellon University. He is attending the Masters of Computational Finance program in New York after graduation, and currently pursuing a career in the field of quantitative financial analysis.