eTech Ohio

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- eTech Ohio created to merge the functions of OET and NET

- Total funding in FY 2006 is 6.2% above FY 2005 expenditure levels for OET and NET combined

- Total funding in FY 2007 is 1.8% below the FY 2006 appropriation level

OVERVIEW

Duties and Responsibilities

The enacted budget created eTech Ohio to merge the educational technology functions and support provided by the Ohio Educational Telecommunications Network Commission (OET) and the Ohio SchoolNet Commission (NET). eTech Ohio is charged with advancing education and accelerating the learning of the citizens of Ohio through technology. It is responsible for providing leadership and support in extending the knowledge of Ohio's citizens by promoting access to and use of all forms of educational technology. eTech Ohio is also responsible for administering programs to provide financial and other assistance to school districts and other educational institutions for the acquisition and utilization of educational technology.

eTech Ohio is governed by a 13-member commission, which consists of 9 voting members and 4 non-voting members. Voting members include the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, and the Director of the Department of Administrative Services, and 6 public representatives. An executive director, who is to be appointed by the eTech Ohio Commission, oversees day-to-day operations.

Some of the specific responsibilities of eTech Ohio include:

(1)   Administers grants for the provision of technical assistance, professional development, and other support services to enable school districts, community schools, and other educational institutions to utilize educational technology;

(2)   Establishes a reporting system for school districts, community schools, and other educational entities to ensure the technology funds are spent and the results are compatible with the state academic standards;

(3)   Ensures educational technology products produced for use in public schools are aligned with the state academic standards and promotes accessibility to such products;

(4)   Promotes the coherent development and growth of public telecommunications for the citizens of Ohio by working directly with Ohio public radio stations, television stations, and radio reading services.

Agency in Brief

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Number of Employees*	Total Appropriations-All Funds		GRF Appropriations		Appropriation Bill(s)
	2006	2007	2006	2007	
64	$31.2 million	$30.7 million	$26.0 million	$25.8 million	Am. Sub. H.B. 66

*Employee count obtained from eTech Ohio as of August 2005

As can be seen from the table above, eTech Ohio's staff consists of 64 employees as of August 2005. eTech Ohio's current authorized personnel level, however, is at 82.5 slots. The vacancies are a result of positions intentionally left vacant by both the Ohio SchoolNet Commission (NET) and the Ohio Educational Telecommunications Network Commission (OET) prior to the merger. In addition, a number of employees left as a result of the merger, in some cases due to an early retirement incentive plan that was offered. Some of these vacancies are likely to be filled over the biennium.

The enacted budget appropriates total funding of $31,229,395 in FY 2006, an increase of 6.2% from the FY 2005 expenditure levels for both NET and OET. The total funding level for FY 2007 is $30,654,413, a decrease of 1.8% from the FY 2006 appropriation level.

GRF funding for eTech Ohio is $25,989,387 for FY 2006 (a decrease of 4.2% from the combined FY 2005 GRF expenditure levels for NET and OET) and $25,768,233 for FY 2007 (a decrease of 0.9% from the FY 2006 appropriation level). The GRF funding decreases are largely due to a shift in funding for personnel costs associated with eTech Ohio's annual state technology conference. Prior to FY 2006, these costs were paid from the GRF. Under the enacted budget, conference registration and vendor fees, which are deposited in the General Services Fund group appropriation item (Fund 5D4) 935-640, Conference/Special Purposes, will gradually replace the GRF to fund personnel costs associated with the conference. This transition is expected to be completed beginning in FY 2008.

Chart 1 shows eTech Ohio's biennial budget by fund group. As can be seen from the chart, 83.6% of eTech Ohio's budget comes from the General Revenue Fund. General Services Funds account for 12.5% and the Federal Special Revenue and State Special Revenue Fund groups account for the remaining 3.9%.

Chart 1. eTech FY 2006-2007 Budget by Fund Group
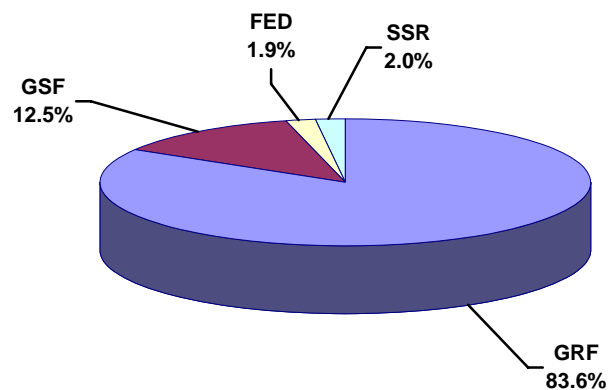
ANALYSIS OF THE ENACTED BUDGET

Given that eTech Ohio was created in the enacted budget, information on funding by program series is not available at this time. Instead, this analysis will focus on the three key areas for which eTech Ohio was appropriated funds under the enacted budget. These include Educational Technology Use and Access Assistance, Public Telecommunications Network Support, and Operations.

Educational Technology Use and Access Assistance

The following table shows appropriations for the major line items that are used to fund the Educational Technology Use and Access Assistance.

Major Appropriations for Education Technology Use and Access Assistance				
Fund	**ALI**	**Title**	**FY 2006**	**FY 2007**
General Revenue Fund				
GRF	935-406	Technical and Instructional Professional Development	$6,484,763	$6,607,144
GRF	935-539	Education Technology	$5,968,791	$5,968,791
General Services Fund				
5D4	935-640	Conference/Special Purposes	$1,600,645	$1,821,817

Technical and Instructional Professional Development

This appropriation item provides funding for eTech Ohio to carry out various activities to assist school districts, community schools, and other educational entities in educational technology use and access and to ensure educational technology products used in public schools are aligned with the statewide academic standards. The major activities, which are discussed in more detail below, are educational technology grants, eLearning, eTech Ohio Equipment and Services Catalog, and the Biennial Education Technology Assessment.

Educational Technology Grants. Three main grant programs are funded in this appropriation item.

- Professional Development District Grants - District grants are available to all Ohio public schools, the School for the Blind, the School for the Deaf, the Department of Youth Services, and educational service centers with alternative schools. Approximately $2.8 million in each fiscal year will be distributed under this grant program. Recipients have used these grants to attend educational technology conferences, to pay licenses or fees for access to eLearning courses, and to purchase other professional development resource materials.

- Public Television Grants - The enacted budget earmarks $1,260,000 in each fiscal year to be distributed equally among the 12 Ohio educational television stations. This funding will be used for the production of interactive instructional programming series with priority given to resources aligned with state academic content standards in consultation with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and for teleconferences to support eTech Ohio. The programming is to be targeted to the needs of the 200 lowest wealth school districts in the state.

- Innovation Grants - The enacted budget earmarks $200,000 in each fiscal year for eTech Ohio to provide competitive professional development grants to school districts, with priority given to districts in academic emergency, academic watch, or continuous improvement. Grants will be awarded to proposals that focus on developing innovative programs to assist teachers in integrating technology to implement the state academic content standards. eTech Ohio is required to develop a web site to share information learned through these programs with school districts statewide and to link the web site to ODE's Instructional Management System.

eLearning. Approximately $1.4 million in each year is provided for the eLearning initiative, which utilizes the Internet to maximize teacher access to professional development training through on-line courses. eTech Ohio's initial eLearning activity began in FY 1997 with the Ohio Assistive Technology Distance Learning Project partnership that intended to increase the capacity of Ohio's educators to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In FY 2003, the eLearning Process Model (ELPM) was created to provide a framework for the development of an on-line professional development system that is aligned to both eTech Ohio and ODE goals. Related to the ELPM, ODE has created an Information Management System (IMS) that enables educators to learn about state academic content standards and model curricula, lesson planning and model lessons, as well as classroom and state assessments. Currently, 18 different on-line professional development courses have been developed by eTech Ohio (in partnership with ODE) and are being utilized by Ohio's educators. eTech Ohio estimates that over 8,000 educators will receive professional development training in educational technology under this program each year directly through eTech Ohio.

eTech Ohio Equipment and Services Catalog. eTech Ohio provides school districts in Ohio with reduced cost software and hardware purchases by negotiating statewide pricing contracts with vendors. It has coordinated the development of the on-line Technology Planning Tool to better utilize limited technology dollars for districts. There are currently six product categories included in the catalog: workstations, laptops, servers, handhelds, printers, and displays. eTech Ohio estimates that districts can save an average of 36% off the manufacturer's list price for computers with a three-year, on-site warranty included. It estimated that savings to the districts totaled $10.1 million in FY 2004.

Biennial Education Technology Assessment (BETA). Each biennium eTech Ohio conducts three (teacher, building, and district) surveys that collect a variety of data regarding technology accessibility and usage in Ohio's public schools. BETA was originally developed in FY 2000 in response to legislation requesting a statewide view of technology access and usage in Ohio's public K-12 districts. The data are designed to assist policymakers and school districts in making more informed decisions on technology integration and to assist eTech Ohio and ODE in determining technology needs of school districts.

Education Technology

This appropriation item is earmarked for operations of the Ohio K-12 Network and providing instructional resources and services for Ohio public schools.

Ohio K-12 Network. The enacted budget earmarks $1,829,240 in each fiscal year for the Ohio K-12 Network (formerly the ONEnet Network). The Network connects all public and some chartered nonpublic schools to each other and to the Internet, providing access to voice, video, and data educational resources to Ohio students. It also provides a link between Ohio's schools and the public, giving parents, homeowners, and businesses access to school-provided web materials, electronic mails, and other information resources. The Educational Management Information System (EMIS) data collection, school

continuous improvement planning, and many other grant applications and administration, are transacted over the Ohio K-12 Network.

> ***Instructional Resources and Services.***   The enacted budget earmarks $4,139,551 in each fiscal year for eTech Ohio to contract with educational television to provide Ohio public schools with instructional resources and services with priority given to those aligned with state academic content standards.

Annual State Technology Conference

> eTech Ohio's annual technology conference is a three-day event serving Ohio's K-12 teachers, instructional integrationists, curriculum coordinators, technology coordinators, and administrators. It provides Ohio's educators with exposure to current educational technologies and approaches for using this technology in classrooms. The annual state technology conference has been partially funded by GRF and partially funded by registration fees of attendees and exhibitors, which are deposited in General Service Fund (Fund 5D4) appropriation item 935-640, Conference/Special Purpose. The enacted budget phases out GRF funding for the conference. The conference will be completely funded by registration and vendor fees beginning in FY 2008. The 2005 conference included 13 keynote and featured speakers, 360 concurrent sessions, 1,125 vendor exhibits, 19 hands-on workshops, and 40 student and teacher displays. Serving the entire state, the 2005 conference saw over 6,800 participants.

Public Telecommunications Network Support

> The following table shows appropriations for the major line items that are used to fund Public Telecommunications Network Support.

Major Appropriations for Public Telecommunications Network Support				
Fund	**ALI**	**Title**	**FY 2006**	**FY 2007**
General Revenue Fund				
GRF	935-401	Statehouse News Bureau	$244,400	$244,400
GRF	935-402	Ohio Government Telecommunications Studio	$716,417	$716,417
GRF	935-403	Technical Operations	$1,768,150	$1,768,150
GRF	935-404	Telecommunications Operating Subsidy	$3,632,413	$3,632,413
General Services Fund				
4F3	935-603	Affiliate Services	$2,000,000	$2,000,000

Telecommunications Operating Subsidy

> This appropriation item provides $3,587,413 in subsidies per fiscal year to help fund Ohio's public television stations, public radio stations, and radio reading services. The subsidies are currently distributed according to the following formula developed by the former Ohio Educational Telecommunications Commission: 67.5% to public television stations, 22.5% to public radio stations, and 10% to public radio reading services. The enacted budget requires that eTech Ohio use this formula unless and until eTech Ohio develops a new formula in consultation with Ohio's qualified public educational television stations, radio reading services, and educational radio stations. Ohio has 8 public television licensees who operate 12 public television stations, 15 public radio licensees who operate 34 public radio stations across the state, and 9 stations that deliver the radio reading service. The radio

reading service provides access to many local, state, and national newspapers for individuals who otherwise would have difficulty in reading the newspaper or other printed material.

The enacted budget earmarks $45,000 in each fiscal year for eTech Ohio to contract for dial-up newspaper reading services for the blind and physically handicapped. eTech Ohio is required to use a competitive bidding process in awarding the contract.

Statehouse News Bureau and Ohio Government Telecommunications Studio

These two appropriation items provide subsidies for the Statehouse News Bureau (SNB) and the Ohio Government Telecommunications Studio (OGT). As the sole dedicated news outlets for Ohio government, SNB and OGT provide coverage of legislative and governmental activities for Ohio's citizens. SNB produces news reports of state government activities for broadcast on Ohio's public 34 radio stations and produces a weekly half-hour video program providing a focus on the latest statewide news and events. While SNB is primarily responsible for news reports of state government events, OGT broadcasts House and Senate floor sessions in addition to sessions of the Ohio Supreme Court through the Ohio Channel. OGT produces educational documentaries on Ohio civics, history, government, and culture for use in Ohio's schools as well as for broadcast on public television stations. OGT is also responsible for coordinating all media events for members of the General Assembly and events at the Statehouse.

Technical Operations and Affiliate Services

GRF appropriation item 935-403, Technical Operations, provides funding to operate and maintain the statewide fiber optic network connecting Ohio's 12 public television stations, 34 public radio stations, 9 radio reading services, the Statehouse News Bureau, the Ohio Government Telecommunications Studio, and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency (a division within the Ohio Department of Public Safety) to eTech Ohio's network operations center (NOC) in Columbus. The NOC is staffed 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. With the assistance of a video file server, the NOC provides audio and video content to eTech Ohio affiliates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The NOC's array of satellite antennas allows eTech Ohio to uplink and downlink programming for immediate or delayed distribution to any of eTech Ohio's affiliates and to all state agencies. Some services (primarily the lease of office and tower broadcast capability) are provided to affiliated entities, other state and federal agencies, and private entities on a fee basis. The fees are deposited in General Services Fund (Fund 4F3) appropriation item 935-603, Affiliated Services.

Operations

The following table shows appropriations for the major line items that are used to fund Operations.

Major Appropriations for Operations				
Fund	**ALI**	**Title**	**FY 2006**	**FY 2007**
General Revenue Fund				
GRF	935-321	Operations	$7,174,453	$6,830,918

GRF appropriation item 935-321, Operations, provides funding for salaries and fringe benefits of approximately 82 personnel of eTech Ohio in addition to maintenance expenses and new equipment

purchases necessary for the agency to administer its programs. Again, the decrease in FY 2007 is largely due to a shift in funding for personnel costs associated with the annual state technology conference.

A portion of the maintenance funding is used to maintain eTech Ohio's 22 public telecommunications broadcast towers. eTech Ohio's FY 2006 budget allocates approximately $800,000 for maintenance of the broadcasting related equipment. Of this amount, approximately $30,000 (or 3.8%) is estimated to be used for tower maintenance. The enacted budget requires eTech Ohio to enter into an agreement with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to provide for the maintenance of the tower system. eTech Ohio and DAS are also required to submit a plan to the Office of Budget and Management by January 1, 2006 to address the best method for transferring ownership and control of all towers to DAS.

With the creation of the new agency, the budget authorized the Governor to appoint an interim executive director to oversee eTech Ohio's day-to-day operations. The Governor appointed the interim executive director in August 2005. The interim executive director will serve no longer than one year, until the eTech Ohio Commission appoints an executive director.

The enacted budget requires eTech Ohio to monitor the developments of technology, coordinate with the Office of Information Technology, and assures the most effective and highest quality operation of eTech Ohio networks.