



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
Temple University

Organization URL:
www.temple.edu

Project Name:
Green Methods of Closing the Digital Divide

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

Temple University is a large urban school located primarily in an economically depressed area of Philadelphia. We are historically and continue to be a "blue collar" university. The term "digital divide" is a very real feature of the landscape for a significant portion of our student population and our surrounding communities. Many things now can only be done online or are designed to be better done online. This includes job applications, school applications, research and communication. Especially in a period of economic hardship, limited or no access to the Internet is a very difficult obstacle to overcome and severely limits the ability to better your situation. In addition, school-age children need a place to go to work on homework and develop computer skills. Using the resources of Temple's Computer Recycling Center (CRC), we are reaching out to bridge that gap. We have built a nationally recognized program for e-recycling. In 2009, the EPA awarded the CRC an "Environmental Achievement Award." This past year, NACUBO recognized the CRC as "A Model of Efficiency." Thousands of pounds of e-waste have been diverted from landfills through these efforts. A big part of this is finding new uses for equipment that is no longer needed by the university. This provides the opportunity to get computers into the hands of those most in need. An added benefit is our student workers gain technical experience working on computers and they learn the importance and positive end results of sustainability efforts. The measure of success in this case is how many machines make it into the hands of students and community organizations. During the past four years, 1,475 computers have been sold at nominal cost to Temple students. In that same period, 970 computers have been donated to community

organizations. In most cases, these donations came with assistance in setting up the equipment, as technical expertise was generally limited at the agency receiving the donation.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

The core technologies revolve around the refurbishment of surplus computer equipment. Once collected, all items are evaluated for usability. Usable equipment has hard drives wiped and Temple identification removed. Machines are then reassembled and tested for operability. Next, equipment is moved in our proprietary database to the CRC store. Equipment is first available for purchase by other Temple departments. After several weeks, the equipment moves to the employee/student purchase area. If, after several more weeks, no purchase is made, we seek to match the equipment with the needs requests from community organizations. By developing our own repair abilities and purchasing some low-cost components to help the computers function better, we have been able to repurpose over 70% of the machines that we collect.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

In the past 4 years, 1,475 computers have been sold at nominal cost to Temple students. In that same period, 970 computers have been donated to community organizations. The benefits are numerous. Student purchases have entered the home, allowing the whole family to benefit from a low-cost entry onto the digital highway. As Mayor Michael Nutter recently commented, common needs can only be done or are best done online. Companies typically steer potential applicants to an online application process. Even job search options are becoming increasingly digital only. Communication with others, the ability to purchase items in areas less served by major retail outlets and the ability to contact federal, state and local authorities about available services are all enhanced by having access to the Internet.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

The ongoing effects from this program are constant. In just the most recent two month period, Temple has completed four significant donations. On January 6 of this year, Temple participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Frankford Community Development Center's new computer lab along with Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter. The computers used to furnish the lab were provided from the university's Computer Recycling Center. Mayor Nutter praised Temple's participation in the community and took the time to also mention Temple's work with Dunbar Elementary School. At Dunbar, which adjoins the Temple campus, we have set up a computer lab for student and parent access. "On behalf of Pastor Thomas, and the entire AME Union family, I would like to let you know how great it was to work with an outstanding group of young adults; all the help was very much appreciated. And we would not have been able to do it without you," said Shawna R. Lucas, AME Union Church. "On behalf of St. Donato's School, I want you to know how much we appreciate the university's generosity with the donation of 20 computers to our school. It is because of your generous donation our students will benefit and have greater access to technology," said Amelia Lucci, Principal at St. Donato School. In each of these cases, Temple not only provided the hardware but through staff and student volunteers, also provided the setup of the equipment. Even working with the volunteers has returned benefits, as indicated by a Temple professor and her son: "Jesse and I wanted to send a sincere thanks for including us in the events for the Martin Luther King Day of Service. Jesse had a great day installing computers, and I am grateful he got to do a meaningful and relevant project" (Dr. Amy L. Friedman, Temple University).