The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
Tidewater Comunity College Computer Club

Organization URL:
www.facebook.com/Computersforstudentsuccess , www.facebook.com/tcccompclub

Project Name:
Computers for Student Success

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

Students attending college require computer access to complete coursework. Many students attending community colleges do not have the resources to acquire computers in addition to meeting living expenses, transportation, tuition, books, fees, and family expenses. Those without computers face the daunting task of finding time and locations to use computers either on campus or local libraries. Though it may be practical for single young adults with no other responsibilities except college to use the library or college computer lab, it becomes insurmountable to a single parent with limited childcare options and no transportation. The TCC Computer Club was established to accomplish two goals: to provide deserving IT and computer science students with refurbished donated computers as well as hands-on training. The club's Computers for Student Success Program has given out over 1,000 computers to deserving students and community members in a little over two years of operation. The first measure of success is the number of computers refurbished and given to deserving students. In the first year of operations, over 200 computers were refurbished and given to Tidewater Community College (TCC) students. By the second year of operation (2011), the program gained the support of Sentara Healthcare and local notoriety through a WVEC Channel 13 newscast (see http://www.wvec.com/home/TCC-Computer-Club-118531864.html) and an article in the Virginia Pilot (http://hamptonroads.com/2011/04/tcc-computer-club-lets-students-help-peers). This publicity gave the program additional sources of computers, increasing the number of computer giveaways to deserving students to over 800 in the second year and surpassing 1,000 overall.

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The second measure of success is the knowledge and hands-on experience gained by the more than 70 volunteers working in the program.

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 main innovation is the program itself. It allows individuals and organizations to make tax deductible donations of computer hardware. Volunteer students get needed hands-on training and a chance to help their fellow students. Receiving students have a greatly increased chance of success. The program is a win, win, win. Upon receipt in the program, donated computers are tested for usability and repaired, and new operating systems and applications are installed. Nine free applications are installed on each computer. A web tool from Ninite.com is used to install all applications. Ninite creates install scripts that download and install the latest versions of selected applications without user intervention, reducing installation times for applications by 75%. As more like models were received, hard drive cloning was used to speed up the process. This improves refurbish times from 3-4 hours per computer to less than twenty minutes per computer and introduces volunteer students to tools used in enterprise environments. These changes have allowed up to 40 computers to be refurbished in one 4-hour period. To date, the club has received over 1,800 computers and refurbished over 1,200. Efficiency in gathering applications and selecting students to receive computers has become critical as throughput increases. Over 1,500 applications for computers have been received and ranked by club members. Currently the club receives the vast majority of applications by the online Google docs form. Email was originally used to inform faculty and staff about the program. They were encouraged to recommend deserving students to the program or provide donations. As the program expanded, Facebook and YouTube have been used to provide information to students, club members, faculty, staff and supporters. Links below: www.facebook.com/tcccompclub www.facebook.com/computersforstudentsuccess www.youtube.com/watch?v=wft7Nskl0H0.

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

The vast majority of refurbished computers go to TCC students that do not have a working computer in the household. Each application for a computer is evaluated and ranked by four club members. This allows the database to be queried for applicants with the most urgent need, ensuring they receive computers first. Many students when receiving computers will get emotional as they are briefed on their computer and how to maintain it. Many express their appreciation, telling club members how much this means to them and how much easier it will be to be successful students. In addition to TCC students, six computers have gone to students from other colleges in the area. Four have gone to high school students selected by high school staff, and three have gone to the families of elementary school students selected by the students' school staff. Five computers have been provided to a Montessori School to replace Win 98 machines. The program also provides 3 computers a month to local employment offices, where the staff select clients who they feel could most benefit from a computer to assist them in getting jobs. Members also set up two computer centers at a woman's shelter for the residents and their children and repaired 100+ personal computers for students, faculty and staff. Student interns and 70+ volunteers who have worked in the program gain up to 20 hours per week of needed hands-on experience. This experience has proven vital in getting jobs upon graduation. The program has always used the term "deserving students" versus "needy students" to define recipients. This terminology allows for a sense of pride in the selection process for the students receiving the computers. They are working hard and doing their best, and they are recognized and assisted by their fellow students.

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.

Recipients' comments: "I set up my computer on Thursday night; words cannot express how I am feeling or what I am feeling for this wonderful gift. I thank you from the depth of my heart…and I will continue to strive for greatness, and thank you again Computer Club !!!!" "This single act of compassion by you, for me and others, is eternally appreciated. I had to let you know that I am very thankful and proud to have been chosen to receive a computer. From the bottom of my and my children hearts, we want to tell you thank you so very much for giving me the tools to be the best student that I can be. Thank you & God Bless." -Helena Roberts, receiving student. "TCC Computer Club is the best. It helps us become productive and successful students." The program has given more than 1,000 computers to students in two years. In the coming year, the program's goal of 1,200 computers will reach 2.6% of the 45,000+ students at the college, greatly increasing their chances of receiving a college education and improving chances for employment, higher incomes and better lives for those individuals and their families. The hands-on training the IT and computer science students receive in the program will allow many students to move into the workforce with a broad base of experience, allowing them to find jobs easier and get higher starting incomes. They are also a part of a meaningful community service project. The entire college community has been involved, through donations or recommending students to the program, all adding to its success in helping deserving students. The program has won one statewide award for Innovative Student Projects and is a finalist in a second statewide Student Service Award (April 2012 winner selection).