The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

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STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
NPower

Organization URL:
www.npower.org

Project Name:
The Community Corps of NPower

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

"We do have state-of-the-art technology for 1978!" - Hale House official underscoring need for TCC. Through efforts large and small in communities across our nation, the nonprofit sector plays a vital role in our culture and our economy, as a force for good, a safety net for vulnerable populations and a critical resource for all Americans. Yet, in survey after survey, U.S. nonprofits (now numbering 1.6 million) identify technology as one of their most mission-critical needs. Forty percent (40%) of U.S.-based nonprofits, which serve tens of millions of Americans, continue to say they lack sufficient technology to serve their constituents. It is startling, as well, that in 2012, 88% of nonprofits in our nation have little to no in-house IT resources. A large-scale Community Technology Survey conducted by NPower in 2009 revealed that for many in the sector: the cost of IT is prohibitive; manual methods of data collection, tracking, reporting, etc. still predominate; and that IT integration (both of different IT solutions with one another, and of IT solutions with actual workflows) are especially difficult to plan and achieve. NPower developed The Community Corps (TCC) to address the crucial technology deficit in our nation's nonprofits through an innovative, fully automated online program that matches (via algorithms) and connects skilled IT professionals to nonprofits in need of specific IT support. In its first year, with 1,441 volunteers, 903 registered nonprofits and 73 project templates, TCC delivered $1.5 million of social value through 10,311 hours of free, skilled IT service to nonprofits. Other key program metrics relate to number of projects posted, matched/unmatched, completed; number/type of project templates plus corporation-specific metrics. (See TCC Scorecard/Dashboard, Appendix 1.)

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.

TCC is a 100% Salesforce.com/Force.com solution. It is built on top of Salesforce's Enterprise Edition and Service Cloud Portal. In addition to the core platform, NPower (with support from Accenture) developed a comprehensive set of Apex and VisualForce pages to run the site. TCC is an excellent example of how the nonprofit sector can leverage the breadth of Salesforce.com technologies from Sites to Portals to Answers. As our technology evolves, we also hope to use emerging Salesforce technologies such as Chatter. The TCC platform, built with scalability in mind, is able to accommodate a large number of users across different countries. TCC already has one registered nonprofit outside the U.S. and nearly 19% of volunteers are based internationally. These speak to the global significance of TCC and its tremendous potential for growth and impact after only one year of operation. Key to the success of TCC was a thorough planning process involving staged testing (alpha and beta pilots) and implementation. These pilots helped ensure that TCC addressed deficits identified in other volunteer link platforms, including a lack of effective, sustained project monitoring, follow-through and post-project assessment. TCC's innovative deployment of technology is reflected in its outstanding success in simultaneously and effectively addressing needs of nonprofits, IT volunteers and the corporations providing pro bono support. A 2009 NPower national survey, conducted in preparation for TCC's development, indicated that, while many of the most prevalent IT issues plaguing nonprofits were not very labor-intensive, many organizations lacked skilled staff and resources to counter even modest IT challenges. The survey also recognized a strong demand in corporations for high-quality, well-managed opportunities to engage personnel in corporate social responsibility efforts and the interest of IT volunteers to provide targeted assistance to nonprofits.

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

Technology is clearly a powerful tool that can help us all work smarter, reach higher, and have greater impact. For the nonprofit sector, heightened efficiency and effectiveness take on added meaning. For these organizations and the communities they serve, technology is a gateway to more lives touched and more people reconnected with hope. Using innovative technology, TCC has provided that gateway for hundreds of nonprofits already served. Whether these organizations offer community services, programs for children and youth, education/literacy projects, women's programs or advocacy, homeless/housing or employment services, TCC's impact on these nonprofits, their constituents and the communities they serve has been extraordinary. Without TCC: A contribution of 25 brand new computers and servers, while much-appreciated, could have no effect on Hale House's functioning to help families and children in need when they had neither the staff nor the funding to set them up. The three IT staff members supporting over 350 employees at more than 11 sites of Union Settlement Association, one of East Harlem's largest social service agencies, could hardly engage in needed asset management IT planning when working at capacity with limited IT resources. A sudden increase in national visibility for the Pajama Program, which helps needy, abused and/or abandoned children, could not be fully embraced when it underscored an outdated website in need of immediate help to make it professional, user-friendly and responsive to significantly increased traffic. Like these agencies, hundreds of small local nonprofits, large national organizations and community foundations, devoid of necessary IT resources or lacking IT staff, have relied on TCC to meet pressing needs, accommodate growth and increase their ability to serve. NPower takes great pride in TCC's engagement of corporations, nonprofits and volunteers alike to extend their reach in service to many.

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 project made a huge difference, making us more efficient and able to reach our goal. Even though our volunteer was far away, he made a big impact here." - Lynn, Palo Alto Library Foundation. With plans to rebuild and upgrade all of its libraries, the city of Palo Alto is in the midst of one of its biggest civic projects in decades. To equip these libraries with furniture, technology, and books, The Palo Alto Library Foundation launched a campaign to raise $6M by the end of 2012. With only two staff members, a university student was brought on to help implement a Salesforce database critical to the operations of the Foundation and the development efforts of their board members and community volunteers. Many issues arose during the transfer of data from their current database to Salesforce due to the student's lack of expertise. With data quality issues and the need for database customization, the Executive Director realized that specialized help was needed, but there was no budget for this project. After contacting TCC, they were matched and connected to a Salesforce volunteer who was able to fix outstanding data migration issues and customize the database. One of the enhancements implemented was the ability to roll up donations by household, critical to accounting and accurate donor recognition. Because of the ED's concern about giving an unknown volunteer access to confidential data, TCC worked with the volunteer to address this issue using a Sandbox (testing environment replicating the real database) with dummy data to implement all the enhancements. The volunteer then trained staff members on database utilization. TCC's dynamic design accommodated nonprofit and volunteer, providing a specific project template, carefully matching and connecting volunteer and project despite distance and providing specialized assistance. Their second TCC project is already underway.