



The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization:
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Organization URL:
<http://www.ymcachicago.org>

Project Name:
Y-Zones

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

With a focus on youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago makes accessible the support and opportunities that empower people and communities to learn, grow and thrive. The Y-Zones project was designed to serve as an intentional and measurable approach to improving the physical, social and emotional well-being of children and families in a specific geographic area, with a YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago center serving as a central hub. As a place-based organization, the association recognized the need to include detailed geographic information in Y-Zones business intelligence activities, and the integration of a geographic information system was proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the Y-Zones initiative. Incorporating geographic information system (GIS) data provided by local, state and federal governments and third-party providers has helped the association better match local areas of need with YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago offerings. The GIS tools generate compelling insights that have helped strengthen collaborations within the association, build community and funding partnerships, identify optimal opportunities to enhance programs and facilities, and ultimately result in a broader and deeper impact on children and families. The sponsors of the project identified a variety of outcomes-based metrics to be used as a measure of the project's success, including but not limited to graduation rates, crime rates, teen pregnancy rates, survey results from program participants regarding impact, and program quality assessment ratings as measured by nationally recognized tools. The integration of the GIS toolset helps insure that the association can measure and monitor impact at various levels of

geographic specificity from neighborhoods to specific blocks within a neighborhood resulting in a geographically aware feedback mechanism to help inform ongoing program development.

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 project utilizes ArcGIS Desktop software from ESRI, Business Objects from SAP, and Tableau Desktop from Tableau Software, to examine relationships and answer questions that help YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago better understand the needs of the communities it serves. Our existing stakeholders were familiar with Business Objects and Tableau Software, but had no prior experience with GIS solutions. As a non-profit organization, the association's first challenges were budgetary -- primarily due to the significant licensing cost for GIS tools. ESRI offers a generous discount to non-profit organizations with a 501(c) (3) designation, which helped the association quickly overcome the budget challenge. Subsequent technology challenges occurred as business stakeholders became more experienced with the GIS tool and sought to perform detailed analysis of more granular geographic areas, which quickly exceeded the capacity of the initial hardware and low-cost graphics accelerator purchased for the project. The purchase of a more powerful workstation has now eliminated many of these issues. As of now, most technical challenges are related to transforming additional third-party data sources so that they are suitable for use within the GIS.

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

The project has helped better quantify communities of need for YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago programs in the areas of early learning, out-of-school programs, healthy food and nutrition education, and violence prevention, which fosters youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Information gleaned from the GIS-enabled business intelligence system has helped better quantify the need for partnerships with organizations that address the needs of residents near YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago centers that are considered food deserts areas, where healthy, affordable food is difficult to obtain. The solution has also helped better quantify the growing need for the expansion of several of the organization's youth development programs, including the Community Schools initiative, the Black and Latino Achievers program, and the Street Intervention program. During after-school hours and in the summer, the Y's Community Schools provide a safe place for kids, while fostering academic enhancement and healthy lifestyles. YMCA Community Schools also provide a variety of comprehensive programming available to the greater community, assuring that both student and family educational opportunities are met. The Black and Latino Achievers program helps youth and teens raise their academic standards, develop a positive sense of self, build character, explore diverse college and career options, and meet and interact with professionals of color who serve as role models to inspire them to greater heights. The Street Intervention program workers mediate gang disputes, promoting non-violent solutions to interpersonal and group conflicts -- meeting youth at school during the day and on street corners at night. Their goal is to increase young people's self-esteem by providing after-school programs and tutoring sessions.

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 GIS business analytics integration has made a tremendous impact on the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago's ability to advance the mission in a more strategic, intentional and targeted manner. The ArcGIS Desktop tool is used for community assessment and service gap identification, allowing the organization to visualize and analyze community demographics,

population density, income, crime, and existing resources by region, ward, neighborhood, block, etc., which promotes a greater understanding of the need for the association's services in a particular location. The tool also facilitates more engaging interactive presentations to potential community partners, and encourages internal service collaboration sessions due to the ability to provide instant answers to ad-hoc questions. Ultimately the solution allows the organization to better quantify the opportunity for the delivery of impactful human services programs to communities of need, including but not limited to early childhood programs and after-school programs that provide a safe, nurturing environment for children to learn and grow. Susan Kennedy, Group Vice President, Human Services for YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, has best expressed the GIS solution's benefits by stating, "It has removed the guesswork! It has made all the difference in the world and helps us help others."