



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

Year:

2013

Status:

Laureate

Organization Name:

Technology For All

Organization URL:

www.techforall.org

Project Name:

Texas Connects Coalition project

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry.

Collaboration

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

The Texas Connects Coalition (TXC2) project empowers low-income and underserved urban and rural communities with the tools, skills and knowledge they need to fully participate in today's digital economy. Our program places Public Computer Centers (PCCs) in pre-existing community organizations in 92 PCCs in 17 counties across Texas, including Houston, Austin and San Antonio. We provide computer technology and the Internet in communities where it was unavailable or outdated. Program Specialists provide hands-on training suited to the needs of the participant and community organization. This personalized training, coupled with on-site availability of the latest technology, builds our program's success. Thirty-four Program Specialists have logged nearly 2 million

hours training participants. The communities served by the TXC2 project have historically low income levels and educational attainment, higher poverty and crime rates, or a lack of broadband access and infrastructure due to geographic location. Our participants range from seniors, students, youth, homeless persons, retirees, ex-convicts looking for a fresh start, office workers seeking additional training, unemployed persons, non-English speakers and entrepreneurs to the physically challenged, but they all struggle to fully use technology and the Internet. Participants are able to draw from a range of subjects, including Basic Internet and Computer Use; College Preparatory; Employment/Job Search, including resume writing; ESL; GED; Office Skills; Certified Training; Multimedia and emerging technologies, such as tablets. Technology For All and Austin Free-Net provide a direct community benefit by placing professionals and updated technology in a community organization already assisting vulnerable populations. Our programming lessens the burden for partnering organizations, allowing them to focus resources on direct program services. The TXC2 project has made available the tools, training and technology needed to impact the economy, create and train a viable workforce, and eliminate barriers to education.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

The Texas Connects Coalition project launched on September 30, 2010 and is ongoing. Technology For All (TFA), the lead fiscal agent of a \$9.6 million grant from the Department of Commerce, partnered with Austin-based Austin Free-Net to implement the Coalition and drive the project. Since initiation, the project was designed to make the most impact in low-income and under-resourced communities using technology and training. One of the major milestones in the project has been the successful deployment of 1,672 computers and workstations to libraries, workforce and community centers, and schools. Each of the computers has a standard image, which allows for ease of training, updates and best practices. One of the key components is project partner Microsoft, whose in-kind software contribution is nearly \$2 million. Through our project procurement contract, we are able to stretch our dollars and invest in the latest technology tablets to add a more modern and engaging dimension to training and outreach. In 2012, ESRI provided TFA through the Texas Connects Coalition Project with Geographic Information System (GIS) technology. The GIS software was provided for distribution to rural schools and 4-H entities throughout the service area. TFA is currently working on a pilot project with the Smithville Independent School District as students map the damage of the Bastrop County Complex Wildfires on the community's agriculture, ranching and population.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

In 2010, Technology For All, as the lead organization, received a three-year, \$9.6 million Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to fund the Texas Connects Coalition project (TxC2). The grant ensures the sustainability of the Coalition through August 2013. Over 40 Program Specialists serve the project across Texas. Technology For All will continue the project beyond August 31, 2013, when the project's federal commitments end. This is an on-going project created to serve the needs of Texas' most vulnerable and under-served communities through the tools of technology by helping them gain self-sufficiency in our modern world. We are committed to its success.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

With nearly 2 million users, it is impossible to identify a typical TxC2 participant. Program Specialists are continuously inspired by the participants and their stories, which cut across demographics, cultures and counties. A grandmother from the Kashmere Gardens area in Houston is able to communicate with family through email and Facebook®. "This program is very practical, especially to help the upper generation function in the world of technology today," she says. Another participant in Centerville, Texas, began as a computer novice and is now enrolled in online community college courses. A high school student from Smithville, Texas, who could not be engaged by his educators was inspired by the TFA/ESRI pilot program that uses Geographic Information System (GIS) computer technology to map the 2011 Bastrop County Complex Wildfires' effect on local agriculture and environments. Today, that same student consistently volunteers to research and compare findings. Men and women who once faced incarceration are now rebuilding their lives, creating resumes and looking for gainful employment in Austin, Texas. Lives are being changed each day. The technology skills taught in our labs not only enable our computer users to participate in the 21st century economy, but to actively better their lives as they learn to use technology as a self-help tool. They are impacted by technology and the programs provided by Technology For All and Austin Free Net through the Texas Connects Coalition project and our Program Specialists within our community partnerships.



Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

The Texas Connects Coalition Project has been described as an innovation and a best practice source. The project has been hailed by officers at the Department of Commerce as a marker on how to impact vast amounts of people through collaboration and partnerships via existing organizations. The project is currently being studied by the LBJ School of Public Policy at the University of Texas. Technology For All and Austin Free Net, partners in the project, have been tapped by Connected Texas, a statewide nonprofit on technology and broadband policy, to be the leader of digital inclusion in Texas. The sharing of best practices will take place at a symposium scheduled for April of this year. Participants and partners alike have also noted that the project is better equipped to meet their needs, more so than other digital literacy projects available, including library classes and community college courses. The TXC2 project harnesses innovation to meet demands in over 90 communities. Program Specialists add a dimension of personal attention and a tailored curriculum of digital education and computer literacy. Without this project, such a unique approach would either not be available in the areas we serve, or would be beyond our communities' reach due to high cost and lack of flexibility.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

In the National Broadband Plan, the FCC makes clear that uniting our communities with access to the Internet and knowledge of how to use it is critical to the health of our nation's economy and the vitality of our society. For the 1.4 million Texans who cite an inability to use and learn technology, digital literacy education translates into new employment opportunities, increased access to services and enhanced avenues for educational achievement for both adult learners and through greater parental involvement. Through the Texas Connects Coalition (TXC2) project, we have met the challenge to provide this education head-on. This project has enabled hundreds of thousands of Texans of all ages and creeds to gain the knowledge, skills and abilities to fully participate in today's digital world. We are excited to have the opportunity to submit the TXC2 project for your consideration.