



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**Year:**  
2013

**Status:**  
Laureate

**Organization Name:**  
Genesys Works

**Organization URL:**  
<http://www.genesysworks.org/houston/>

**Project Name:**  
Workforce Development for Economically Disadvantaged Young People

**Category:**  
Economic Development

**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.)**

Genesys Works is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that gives economically disadvantaged high school seniors the knowledge and opportunity to work and succeed in a corporate environment before they graduate from high school, and therefore helps them realize that they can engage into a much higher socio-economic path in life. Students start with an 8-week intensive training program during the summer between their junior and senior years. The training is designed specifically to arm students with the knowledge they need to have in

order to provide value to corporations. Training across all sites focuses on information technology, preparing young professionals with the knowledge and experience needed to enter and succeed in the IT departments of major corporations. Furthermore, students are trained in Career and College Connection, including career planning, college entry, financial aid application, and professional skills, such as communication and corporate culture. Students are exposed to a high level of expectations in our training facilities, where they are trained in the Cisco IT curriculum by skilled professional trainers. After the summer, students are assigned to work 20 hours a week in meaningful internships during their entire senior year. Currently, over 150 corporations partner with Genesys Works, engaging our interns. In addition, one evening per week they return to Genesys Works' training centers to continue Career and College Connection, with active guidance on work performance, college access, and scholarships. Throughout the program, students realize firsthand that they can indeed thrive in a corporate environment and can achieve a much higher standard of living than what they are used to by pursuing a professional career. With this knowledge, along with the continuous guidance from the Genesys Works staff, they significantly redefine their long-term goals and set plans to pursue them.

**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.)**

While serving as a board member of a local charter school, Rafael Alvarez, at the time a corporate strategist for Compaq, was struck by the bleak prospects facing economically challenged high school students who lacked the skills necessary to compete in the changing job market. In response to that need, Mr. Alvarez founded Genesys Works in June 2002. Starting with only 10 students and one corporate partner, our organization quickly grew to serve hundreds of students each year. Our national office is located in Houston and our sites are located in corporate towers in Houston, St. Paul/Minneapolis, Chicago, and Bay Area California, with further expansion planned in the near future. Training center workstations at the Houston site were updated to virtual desktop technology in June 2012. This upgrade migrated our 170 training center computers from a standalone, personal computer system to a virtual desktop solution. This replaced our out-of-date, out-of-warranty electronic data server equipment, on which our growth and sustainability depend, and the individual PCs that the server equipment supports. Each day during our eight-week summer training program, which prepares the young professionals for their corporate internships, forty students train in each classroom (two classes per day, one morning, one afternoon, each with twenty students) in technical job and professional skills. The computers are also used by the interns one night each week, throughout their senior year, when they return to the training centers to plan their careers and

apply for college admission and financial aid, including scholarships. This virtual desktop technology will be implemented across all national sites in June 2013.

**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.)**

No, this project of workforce development of economically disadvantaged young people is not complete, but rather ongoing. Currently, each national site is recruiting its next class of students for summer training. While the virtual desktop technology has been implemented in training centers in Houston, all other sites will implement the same technology in June 2013, ahead of their upcoming class.

**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.)**

Genesys Works is meeting the needs of the changing workforce demands through our IT training program. Young professionals complete summer training with an understanding and practical application of the following: Help desk support; system refreshes, migrations, imaging, and core loads; software installation; hardware upgrades; computer deployment and setup; general PC and network troubleshooting; cable making and cable pulls; ticket tracking and resolution; updating corporate IT database information; manage computer and equipment inventory control; customer service. Armed with the knowledge they gain during summer training, our interns provide valuable skills to the departments and corporations in which they work. Take, for example, Enrique Deleon. Enrique was a member of Houston's ninth class, joining the Operations Department of Copano Energy, a midstream natural gas company with over \$2 billion in assets. With over 6,700 miles of interstate pipeline, the company was challenged with keeping track of a vast amount of information, including construction drawings, right-of-way documents, and property records. Initially, Copano looked at outsourcing this project at a cost of over \$150,000 to the company. Under the supervision of Jim Doss, vice president of operations, Enrique designed and implemented a mapping system to accurately display this information, saving Copano the high cost of outsourcing and providing a valuable tool to their field engineers. In Jim's own words, "It is overwhelming what a Genesys Works intern can do without a lot of investment from us in terms of time or money. The interns are sharp, pick things up quickly, and are a great asset to Copano."

**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.)**

Today, more than 67% of jobs require post-secondary education. Yet, according to Houston Independent School District reports, only 15% of each of its freshmen classes is predicted to graduate from college after finishing high school. As a result, employers face a generation that is less educated than the previous one and, therefore, unprepared to enter the economic mainstream and pursue a meaningful career. Genesys Works' innovative program solves this social and economic disconnect by preparing economically disadvantaged young people, graduating from high schools in low-income neighborhoods, to enter the workforce by arming them with the technical and professional skills needed. The need was underscored by the Gulf Coast Workforce Board's 2006 Workforce Report Card. It indicates reason for great concern about the region's future workforce: a high dropout rate, generational differences in attitudes and values about work, lack of basic skills and job readiness, low educational attainment, and a growing gap for technical and problem-solving skills. Genesys Works' innovative model solves this obvious disconnect between education and business by providing not just an internship, but a new world of future possibilities that participants would not otherwise know were possible. The key to Genesys Works' success is its win-win model: companies benefit from reliable, motivated and cost-effective resources while students get to experience a life-changing opportunity. And, because companies value the services the students provide, they pay a rate that covers 77% of Genesys Works' expenses, requiring only 23% from philanthropy, a powerful model of economic self-sufficiency for non-profits. Currently, over 150 companies, across all sites, engage Genesys Works' students and over 90 percent renew their commitment year over year. With its innovative model, Genesys Works has gained national visibility as a leading example of social entrepreneurship.

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

The mission of Genesys Works is to enable economically disadvantaged high school students to enter and thrive in the economic mainstream by providing them the knowledge and work experience required to succeed as IT professionals. Throughout the workforce development program, students realize firsthand that they can thrive in a corporate environment and that pursuing a professional career can help them achieve a much higher standard of living than they are accustomed to. With this knowledge and continuous guidance from the Genesys Works staff, they significantly redefine their long-term goals and set plans to pursue them. In fact, over 95 percent of Genesys Works graduates enroll



in college immediately after high school, and most are the first in their family to do so. In true partnership with high schools across sites, Genesys Works aims to achieve a new culture in inner-city schools in which the pursuit of a professional career becomes "the given" for all students. We change the trajectory of life for low-income high school students, from one destined to a lifetime of minimum-wage, dead-end jobs, to one of professional growth and financial independence. We do this by providing our students the knowledge and work experience required to succeed as professionals.