



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**Status:**

Laureate

**Year:**

2013

**Organization Name:**

OneCommunity

**Organization URL:**

<http://www.onecommunity.org/>

**Project Name:**

Connect Your Community

**Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:**

Human Services

**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.)**

CYC was intended to solve the problem of computer illiteracy among low-income populations. The project has been innovative and has overcome several technical challenges in a number of ways. First, the scale of the project itself was a major challenge. The competitive grant for the project was one of the largest competitive grants ever given in the country for community digital literacy training and home broadband adoption. This challenge was overcome by the innovation of Local Community Agencies (LCAs) collaborating nationally and bringing in local partners the program needed. For example, one of the LCAs in Florida partnered with a startup computer refurbishing program, opened up a satellite office, and got their program started through word of mouth. Furthermore, such

accomplishments were made through close collaboration involving quarterly visits by a team to all the sites. The team also met weekly using WebEx to talk about the challenges and successes each region had. The data gathering process also posed a significant challenge. The solution for this was innovative in that the staff utilized an open source data management system called Moodle to gather national data and enable checks and balances to help teams in the different regions understand their own levels of responsibility. This, in turn, enabled the staff to complete thousands of phone surveys in a very efficient manner. Finally, the training for the participants in the program was innovative in and of itself. The core CYC curriculum included modules that focused on computer and Internet basics, safety, security, and maintaining a home computer and broadband connection. There were also a variety of helpful elective modules in which trainees may participate. These were customized by each site to meet the needs of their student population, and to ensure the use of broadband to its fullest capacity.

**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 CYC project began in October of 2010 when OneCommunity received federal funding from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), which operates under the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration. The program has incorporated numerous innovations since its initial deployment. These include the aforementioned innovations in overcoming the scale of the project, in addition to those regarding the data gathering process and training itself. Furthermore, OneCommunity has secured broadband access for participants at a rate they can afford to sustain. This is a product of regional lead agencies negotiating with local for-profit Internet providers to secure discounted service for participants. Since its initial deployment, CYC has used technology and other teaching methods in very innovative ways to teach the classes and train the participants of the program. For example, many of the participants in the program have consisted of the elderly and senior citizens. Therefore, the classes had to be tweaked to provide the most efficient training for these participants. Specifically, the instructors implemented computer accommodations to improve vision for the participants. These methods have included using larger screens, magnifiers, and using contrasting color changes on the screens.

As of December 31st, 2012, more than 33,000 individuals had participated in the CYC classes. Furthermore, CYC Cleveland has registered over 8,800 total students and more than 6,000 have been identified as "sustainable broadband adopters" meaning they have the tools to sustain broadband use even after the implementation of the project. As seen in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 in a 2011

survey, 44 percent of CYC participants in the Cleveland area who undertook the training mainly for employment purposes have since found new or better jobs, received a promotion, entered work training programs, or started their own business since completing the training. Additionally, according to Appendix 1, 18 percent of such participants were hired into new full-time or part-time positions. Furthermore, according to Appendix 2, 75 percent of such participants now help their children or grandchildren with homework as an important area of personal development. In another 2012 survey, 60 percent of parents that went through the CYC program reported the training increased their ability to engage with their child's school and teachers.

**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.)**

Yes, the program is essentially complete and will be slowly shutting down its operations as the federal grant expires in the coming months.

**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.)**

CYC has impacted the life of nearly every participant that has been involved in the program since its inception. Although much of this cannot be documented with metrics, several participants have experienced life changing personal and professional developments because of the program. Here are a few direct quotes from participants that reflect these developments. "The program is important because it gives people more confidence in themselves. It gave me the confidence to go to the next level [using the Internet] to pursue employment." - Elaine Harris. "The program inspired me to get my GED online and I am now pursuing an associate's degree. I really enjoy helping others through the classes, especially because I can relate to them since most [of the people taking the class] are older." - Alice Brown. "I discovered my own passion to offer the knowledge I had to others in need." - Donte Harper. "I never thought I was smart enough or knew enough about technology to be good with computers, now I have a photography business in which I download and share photos online. I'm also much closer with my family now because of the program." In fact, she sends pictures back and forth to her brother in Mississippi whom she has never met. "We plan on meeting one day in person." - Eva Taylor.



**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.)**

Two techniques and methods used in the CYC program could be adopted or tailored for other organizations and used as best practices for this type of project in a number of ways. First, the LCAs the program implemented could be used in other ways to target any type of specified demographic in local communities. The strong national core of the CYC program has promoted and shared resources, while the deep local roots have connected with communities. Specifically, these local partners could conduct neighbor-to-neighbor outreach to promote virtually any type of initiative among its community. The local partners could also engage, train, and equip local communities for any sort of endeavor undertaken requiring the same type of training at a local level. The trained and compassionate staff and web of collaboration at all levels that has led to success for the CYC program may be duplicated for virtually any endeavor requiring similar collaboration and local outreach. In the same sense, the data collection methods used in the program could be adopted for other uses not related to broadband research. In other words, the data collection methods used could be tailored for and used by any national research study requiring close collaboration and preservation of data integrity on a national scale. Specifically, the percentage of participants that finished the 2011 workforce survey after starting it (624/666 or nearly 94%) was very high for national polls of this size. Therefore, the same methods and techniques used to achieve this high rate may be transferred to nearly any national poll of this magnitude.

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

Although there are many other details about the project, the most important have been previously mentioned.