



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**Status:**

Laureate

**Year:**

2013

**Organization Name:**

California Emerging Technology Fund, California 2-1-1/United Ways of California

**Organization URL:**

[cetfund.org](http://cetfund.org), [getconnectedtoday.org](http://getconnectedtoday.org)

**Project Name:**

CETF Get Connected! Grant

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

Mobile Access

**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.)**

In our "Information Age," it is tempting to think that we can just "Google" whatever we need. That doesn't work for helping people who don't have access to the Internet. Low-income families need access to trusted "knowledge navigators" to help them access the health, food, financial, educational and other resources they need. 2-1-1 is a free phone number and online database that connects Californians from all income levels, languages and cultural backgrounds to services. 2-1-1 California/United Ways California is a statewide network of local information and referral providers, a collaboration of United Ways of California and California Alliance of Information and Referral Services. California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) was launched by the California Public Utilities Commission to promote digital literacy and broadband adoption in underserved communities. In 2010, CETF and 2-1-1 California were awarded a \$1.8 million American Reinvestment and Recovery Act grant to address two pressing challenges: Building a new technology platform to allow the 2-1-1 California network to share expanded resource information across 27 counties (serving 90% of Californians) and helping low-

income residents gain online training and tools to succeed. The plan centered on developing a coordinated telecommunications, IT, software and organizational infrastructure to better coordinate more than two dozen regional 2-1-1's statewide. CETF managed a statewide Get Connected! media campaign to highlight the benefits of high-speed Internet at home and guided people to 2-1-1. California 2-1-1 built a robust referral service aimed at digital services. The results: programs in the new database offering public Internet access jumped 184%, computer classes increased 81% and sources with free or low-cost computers grew 30%. Nearly 60,000 callers have been referred to computers and digital services.

**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 two-year project launched in April 2010, and the new software platform and cloud-based telephony solutions were implemented in the following year. The program's first mobile app has been designed and beta testing is finishing now.

**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.

**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.)**

A year into the collaboration, several 2-1-1 California providers began participating in a pilot program with a non-profit called iFoster. Working with 2-1-1 referrals, iFoster offered deeply discounted refurbished computers to low-income families. The program was successful, filling an important resource gap for struggling households. It has since been expanded to other 2-1-1s across the state. Through iFoster and other partners, 2-1-1 California has distributed more than 3,500 computers. The most positive results of our work are the impact of the resources we've been able to provide: "Some callers were especially happy that we had iFoster and that they had the opportunity to purchase computers at prices that were within their means. A lot of our callers -- due to [their] low income -- do not have personal computers in their home, and thus, giving them the resources where they would be able to access these was of great help. This was especially true where there were school-aged children in the household and the children had to complete writing or research assignments." -- Susan, Call Specialist

**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.)**

California 2-1-1 and CETF believe technology's greatest purpose is to transform lives and communities. The strength of 2-1-1 and the entire CETF collaboration strategy is the focus on connecting people seeking resources to people who have good information to share. Integrating broadband in the delivery of social services is a key component. When



a person calls 2-1-1, the call is answered by a live specialist who can take calls in 150 languages and provide immediate assessment of need and make referrals to appropriate assistance. Without 2-1-1, callers can make an average of eight phone calls to different numbers before finding the services they need. 2-1-1 cuts through the red tape and helps Californians quickly find help, often at critical times in their lives. If it's a mom seeking food stamps, the call specialist now explains it's a process done more quickly online, and then refers her to computer training classes and sources for an affordable computer and Internet connection. In California, residents, emergency service providers, government and non-profit agencies and businesses have all come to understand how 2-1-1 connects people with the services they need. As agencies begin to implement larger and more sophisticated information and referral services, such as the kind that will be required with the implementation of health benefit exchanges, this project serves as a proven model that delivers measurable results.