

TOP UPDATE



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Technology Opportunities Program

Connecting Americans to the World of Information

Portland, Oregon, Creates Online Access to Affordable Housing

Project Replicated in Three Additional Counties

When the City of Portland's TOP-supported project was launched in October, 2000, its goal was to impose logic and order on the city's administration of affordable housing. Now, 18 months later, as the project approaches full deployment, it is narrowing the information gap facing low-income residents when they seek information and social services related to affordable housing. In a recent Pew Internet & American Life Project report on "Cities Online: Urban Development and the Internet," social research specialist John Horrigan reports that the TOP-supported Portland Area Housing Clearinghouse (PAHC) — along with a similar, TOP-supported project, the Cleveland Housing Network — is presenting housing providers with strong incentives to keep online housing data current in order to rent inventory and minimize inquiries about already-rented properties.

In addition, Horrigan writes, the system will help mitigate the negative effects of high staff turnover in social services agencies by enabling new workers to see histories of services already provided to clients. And, with vast amounts of housing data publicly available on the Internet, users will be able to search for properties far more easily on their own.

As project director Andy Miller puts it, a client who comes to a legal services office to fight an eviction notice ought not only get relevant information about legal options, but also — at the same time — find out what alternative housing is currently available. With the PAHC in place, this is precisely the kind of comprehensive help a staff member can offer.

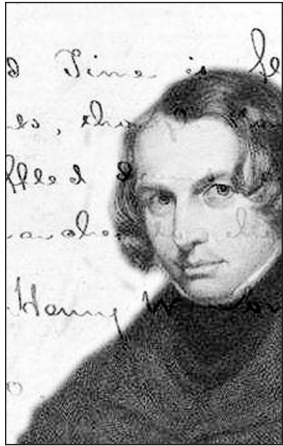
Originally, this project was to serve only Multnomah County, which includes the City of Portland. Through a partnership with a group of regional housing managers, however, the project is now scheduled to serve three additional counties. When fully deployed, the PAHC promises to provide a model for other cities as they harness information technology to address complex social and economic issues related to assuring affordable housing. (For more information, see www.ci.portland.or.us/bbcd/what/projects.html). For other TOP projects dealing with housing, see the Cleveland Housing Network (www.t2k.org/), Chicago Housing Authority's RightMovesNet (www.thecha.org/), and the National Council of La Raza (www.nclr.org/).

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News From the Field

Mixing Memory and Technology



Portland, ME. The “Maine Memory Network” will allow users to search for historical documents, research Maine’s rich history, view online documentaries, and read transcribed letters and journals. You also can create slide shows, download or share lesson plans, and create online reports – making it one of the most comprehensive and ambitious state-history initiatives ever undertaken.

The project is based on a partnership network of over 200 small museums and historical societies, and features a

database that will incorporate over 50,000 records. Teachers will be able to create their own albums of images that can be saved, arranged, annotated with text, sound and video, and used to create multimedia presentations. Down the line, an e-commerce feature will allow participants to sell images and products through the network.

What’s most intriguing about the Maine Memory Network is its potential to remove the geographic isolation of cultural institutions. Unlike most online information repositories, the Maine Memory Network is based on a many-to-many model of information sharing. This means that organizations can input high resolution document scans from their own locations, exponentially increasing the number of documents in the system without installing gigantic, costly storage hardware. Clearly, there will be security and ownership issues to control; therefore, every document in the system will be individually catalogued at its source according to a carefully worked out and accepted set of international standards.

It also means that contributors will be able to maintain strict control over their documents. They can always update or delete images and restrict access to certain documents. In this way, the system can dramatically minimize the risk of theft or copyright violation. (See www.mainememory.net)

Urban Homesteaders Aggregate Demand for Broadband

New York City. Just two blocks from Ground Zero, the Urban Homesteading Assistance Project (UHAB) got underway October 1, with faltering phone lines and absent partners busy with relief efforts just three weeks after the attack on the World Trade Towers.

The newly-funded UHAB project will use networking technology to empower residents of 1,200 low-income cooperatively-owned buildings to improve their economic conditions, and to aggregate their demand for technology and Internet access. The project will benefit the City of New York in two ways. First, as a result of the project, more of these buildings will succeed in self-management, while generating tax revenues for the city. Related to this positive cycle, it is expected that the buildings’ residents will catalyze

neighborhood improvements, such as crime and litter reduction and fostering the development of businesses and community gardens. All of this at no cost to government, while improving the City’s environment and economy.

UHAB leaders also are interested in tracking how their efforts affect broadband availability and pricing in the low-income neighborhoods where the housing co-ops are located. One of the options UHAB is investigating is Wi-Fi wireless (“wireless fidelity,” a standard for an over-the-air interface between wireless clients). Using a series of inexpensive antennas, Wi-Fi also will be able to connect other neighborhood institutions (such as local businesses and low-income families) to the Internet at low or no cost. (See www.ubab.org/)

Michigan Uses Telemedicine for Crisis Intervention

Jackson, MI. Michigan State University (MSU), in partnership with LifeWays, is using video conferencing technology to give patients in crisis shelters 24-hour access to psychiatric care. For many people battling mental illness, the crisis shelter is a place to get help and treatment and avoid lengthy hospitalizations. For residents in Jackson, Michigan, MSU is helping ensure that access to care is available when patients often need it most, in the evening, when the only alternative is the emergency room. The Crisis Home in Jackson is equipped with video conferencing that links residents to a psychiatrist directly in his home so that care can be delivered whenever it is needed. The Crisis Home doctor has been so pleased with the benefits to clients, that a second Crisis Home doctor is also being given a unit to provide after hours support.

Providing SHELTRS through Technology

Austin, TX. The University of Texas at Austin Charles A. Dana Center provides educational resources to homeless children. The project, Support for Homeless Education: Linking Technology Resources to Shelters (SHELTRS), provides technology resources at four Austin homeless shelters.

In total, 128 children completed project surveys that asked them to give three words that described their feelings about the project. The project evaluator reported that the descriptors were almost universally positive, and the most commonly used words were “fun,” “educational,” and “interesting.” Given the daily circumstances and experiences of the children in homeless situations, such positive commentary and feelings are especially encouraging. The responses demonstrate the potential for interaction with computers and tutors to foster positive feelings and approaches in this exceptionally at risk population.

The children who participated in the SHELTRS program also reported a wide variety of dreams for the future – from working for the CIA to nursing to being a cartoonist. A positive attitude toward educational opportunities is key to the realization and development of these dreams. To learn more about the SHELTRS project, see www.utdanacenter.org/shelters

LESSONS LEARNED

An End User Moves from Unemployed to CEO



Fresno, CA. Last year, while Grant Melocik was attending his father's funeral in the Midwest, he received "the phone call" from a company in California's Central Valley. The firm where he worked had declared bankruptcy and they were calling to tell him he'd been "laid off."

Lacking deep roots in the Valley, Grant joined a class for unemployed professionals at the local California Economic Development Center (EDC). While at the class, he heard a representative from California State

University-Fresno talking about entrepreneurial training opportunities at the University, and the new, TOP-supported, Internet-based AcceleratorOnline course.

AcceleratorOnline participants have access to resources and services all aimed at increasing entrepreneurial activity in the rural Central Valley, including desktop computers, standard business software, videoconferencing cameras, and printers. All qualified participants receive a high-bandwidth Internet connection, via DSL where available. Through this technology, participants have direct access to a pool of consultants and

experts. Virtual Classrooms also are set up for participants to receive specialized assistance in business plan development. The AcceleratorOnline course revolved around developing a participant's business plan.

The Internet-based course meant that Grant could plow away at something as long as he wanted to understand it and get it right. His days were spent getting the company started. He knew that the type of business he was contemplating would take at least two years to generate any significant profits, so getting started early was important. There was good interaction between students and faculty, and a discussion board through which the students could interact. "The course led me to 'do the steps,'" he reports, "and I completed and filed the necessary forms and started my own business."

Grant's company, SuperiorVP, develops and markets industrial parts. One of its leading products is a high frequency switching charger to provide a constant electric current. It's a definition of the "niche market." And he's anticipating success in the venture.

"It has been six months since I started and the company is past break-even and should start to make money," he reports. "I never thought I would look forward to paying taxes, but I want to pay taxes so badly now since it will be indicative of making money!" He credits the AcceleratorOnline with helping him to realize a lifelong dream.

FACES OF TOP

Terry L. Cross, Executive Director, National Indian Child Welfare Association

Portland, OR. The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) is developing NICWAnet (TOP 2001), a Web-accessible resource to provide access to information, training, registries of families and attorneys, and networking opportunities to the approximately 20,000 people nationwide who work in Indian child welfare. The network will be used by tribal social workers, state and county social workers, adoption attorneys, judges, and Native American families.

Terry Cross, Executive Director of NICWA, has a commitment to service. He believes that Indian culture retains a heritage for helping, dedication to service, and a vision for change. The TOP-funded NICWA project will let Indian child advocates access the

resources they need to not only streamline the process, but also alleviate many of the current barriers they face in their endeavor to improve the lives of Indian children. (See www.nicwa.org/)



More Than 740 New Projects Seek TOP Backing

Awards to be Announced in September

The Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) received more than 740 applications for grants to support innovative public and nonprofit uses of digital networks at the beginning of the Fiscal Year 2002 cycle.

The applications request a total of approximately \$350 million in federal funds, and they include pledges of \$469 million in non-federal matching funds. Applications represent 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

TOP has begun the comprehensive and highly competitive review process. Approximately \$12 million will be available for grants. NTIA expects to announce between 25 and 30 awards late in September for Fiscal Year 2002 funding.

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