

**School of Computer Science
Course 15-391**

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Final Consulting Report

**Pennsylvania Biodiversity
Partnership**

Audra-Breanne Dove



Final Consulting Report

Audra-Breanne Dove, Student Consultant

Sue Thompson, Community Partner

Executive Summary

The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership (PBP) was created to promote the conservation of native species and their habitats. It brings together organizations and individuals of differing backgrounds whose common interest is conserving biodiversity statewide. The mission of PBP is “to conserve biodiversity statewide by fostering communication and cooperation among everyone concerned with natural resource values throughout the state.” Some of their objectives are to:

- Educate people on the ways biodiversity sustains economic and environmental health and ensures quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.
- Promote voluntary conservation of biodiversity on private lands.
- Assess and regularly account for progress on biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Sue Thompson has been with PBP since its inception. A botanist by training, Sue is the President and CEO of the organization. She has done an extensive amount of work around the world. Sue has more than 20 years of experience in the biodiversity field, having worked with the Governor’s Invasive Species Council, the Wild Resource Conservation Fund Advisory Committee, and the Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals. She is also an Adjunct Research Scientist at the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation at Carnegie Mellon University.

One of the major tasks we took on was learning to use Microsoft Outlook more efficiently, discovering some of its hidden features and putting them to good use. Our goal was to make Outlook a better and more useful tool in connecting with contacts. We also worked on making the PBP website easier to use and work with. We did some work to make the design of the site more appealing and less straining to the eye. Measures were taken to improve the infrastructure of the website as well. Work was also done to improve the state of PBP’s database. Since a lot of information about PBP’s donors and contacts are kept in the database, it was very important to

make sure that it was well organized. It was also important to create forms and queries that made it easier for Sue to retrieve information from the database.

Some of the outcomes of our work included new forms being created for the database, improvements in the layout of the website and a better understanding of how Microsoft Outlook works. The Microsoft Online Help site was discovered to be a very resourceful page in trying to understand some of the ins and outs of Outlook. As a result, we were able to accomplish many of the goals we set out to do in Outlook. This resource also provides insights on other things Outlook is useful for, such as using the Business Contact Manager. Work on the website not only produced an easier to read site, but also new ideas on how the website can be used to facilitate the joining of members to PBP. For these results to be sustained, it is necessary that the staff of PBP continue seeking out different resources to assist them in their work. Many of the tasks they wanted to accomplish had relatively easy solutions; the challenge came in knowing where to find these solutions.

Two important recommendations for PBP are to create documentation for their database and to add a "Join Us" page to their website. The documentation for the database is necessary for the sustainability of the database. If any of the PBP staff were to leave, the documentation will be needed for the person replacing them to be able to use and understand it. The added web page will make things easier for the PBP staff. Instead of having to collect information from people personally and then spending valuable time entering it into the database themselves, the PBP staff can take on other tasks while members enter their contact information on their own using a web form on the PBP website. There are other recommendations as well as more details on these recommendations in a latter section of this report.

The Consulting Situation

- *Organization:* PBP was created in 2001 as a response to a recommendation made by the Pennsylvania 21st Century Environment Commission. The mission of PBP is “to conserve biodiversity statewide by promoting communication and cooperation among a broad spectrum of stakeholders, both public and private.” Its function is to bring together organizations and individuals with diverse interests and backgrounds in order to promote the conservation of native species and their habitats. PBP has several objectives that they want to accomplish. Some of these are:
 - Educate stakeholders and the public on the ways biodiversity sustains the Commonwealth’s economic and environmental health and ensures quality of life for all citizens
 - Develop a scientifically based plan for short-term and long-term conservation of biodiversity.
 - Promote voluntary conservation of biodiversity on private lands through information, education, and demonstration initiatives and by encouraging non-regulatory best stewardship practices that take into account economic, environmental, and social needs.
 - Advocate both private and public long-term funding for biodiversity conservation initiatives.
 - Assess and regularly account for progress on biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania.

The main project of PBP since its formation has been the development of a statewide plan for biodiversity conservation. This plan will be released in March 2006.

- *Facilities:* The office space of PBP is located inside 16 Terminal Way on the South Side of Pittsburgh. The area is about 750 ft.² and is shared by Sue Thompson, the president and CEO of PBP and Merewyn Boak, the executive administrator. There are two doors leading into the actual office space and visitors have to be let in these doors. There is a lot of lighting in the office and file cabinets are used to section off areas.
- *Programs:* PBP staff sometimes does presentations in Pennsylvania. They also attend and hold lectures (Sue does this for the most part). In 2001 and 2004, they held conferences in State College and Harrisburg, respectively. At the fairs and lectures, attendees often leave their business cards or sign up to be added to the listserv. Merewyn adds these people into their database of contacts.
- *Staff:* Both Sue and Merewyn use computers with Windows XP and Microsoft Office applications. Word, Excel, and Access are all important programs for them. Sue took courses in various Microsoft applications at New Horizons three years ago and Merewyn attended a two-day course in Access.
- *Technical Environment:* There are three computers in the office, a notebook that Sue uses, and two desktops (one on Merewyn’s desk and another on a different desk). Sue’s notebook is a Dell Inspiron 4100 that she uses with a docking station. Attached to this

she has a Planar monitor, a docking station for a Palm V, and a printer. The notebook has an Intel Pentium III processor and 256 MB of RAM. Merewyn has a Dell Dimension 4500 desktop computer with a Planar monitor as well. This computer has an Intel Pentium IV processor and 256 MB of RAM as well. Besides a keyboard and mouse, the only extra peripheral that Merewyn uses is an external hard drive that is not left plugged in all the time. This hard drive is used to back up all three computers. The hard drive of the third computer died recently. The office is wired with Cat5 Ethernet cable and all three computers are linked for file sharing. The staff is also able to connect to the internet.

- *Technology Management:* The staff of PBP gets a lot of help from their friend Mitch, who works a couple offices away from theirs. He wired their office, hosts their website, does tech and systems support for them. He is also the person through whom they get their internet service.
- *Technology Planning:* At this time there is no formal technology budget or plan nor was one attempted. When decisions need to be made regarding technology, Sue makes the majority of these, taking suggestions from Merewyn.
- *Internal & External Communications:* Internally, the three computers are connected and networked. At one time, each computer's hard drive could be accessed by the other two computers. Now, ever since Sue's hard drive crashed and was upgraded, the other two computers have not been able to access her hard drive although she can still get to theirs. As far as external communications go, both staff members have internet email accounts that both of them use to send communications to their contacts. PBP website is up and operational but it is not updated regularly. Sue would like to have a search function added to make it easier for members and other visitors to the website to be able to search through the archives of the listserv that they monitor. Some pages also need to be finished. Security is accomplished with a firewall as well as Symantec Anti-Virus on every computer. The beta version of Microsoft Spyware is also installed on Merewyn's computer.
- *Information Management:* Some vital information that PBP needs is information about donors, contacts, and other organizations involved in the partnership. It is important that they keep track of those who are members of PBP, those who give donations as well as making sure they thank all these people. Donations and grants are very important to PBP as it is a non-profit and is not generating funds on its own. They use an Access database to manage this information, such as contact info, stewarding info and other vital information. However, there is little understanding of all the information contained in Other information important to PBP is keeping track of the grants they have applied for as well as whether they received them or not. There is a good mix of information managed electronically and by paper, although some things are handled strictly by paper. Ideally, information should flow electronically between each of the computers in the office. For some of their financial information, they use Excel. However, the primary financial information is handled by their umbrella company, TIDES, which uses their own software.

❖ Major Consulting Task – 1

➤ *Finding and implementing a good email service*

The PBP staff initially found it difficult and frustrating to use Microsoft Outlook for all of their emailing needs. They did not know how to use all of its features and they felt that some of these unknown features would be a large help in their keeping in contact with people interested in the work done by PBP.

A big part of PBP's mission is reaching out and communicating with the partners involved with PBP. Therefore, email and external communications are very important. With the number of emails needing to be sent and the number of people these emails have to be sent to, it is most beneficial to have an email service that is efficient and easy to use

For this task, I had two things I wanted to do: 1) I researched the functions of Microsoft Outlook and examined how it fit the needs of PBP and 2) I looked into other features of Outlook that could better address the needs of PBP. Some of these needs included being able to create distribution lists, deleting old email addresses, and creating contact groups.

Before, Sue used an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of her mailing lists. I hoped to help her to create a distribution list inside of the emailing program. I also expected that Sue and Merewyn would find sending emails and finding contacts to be easier and that using their email application as a whole will be less trying.

❖ **Major Consulting Task – 2**

➤ *Normalize and set up forms and queries on database*

The database that PBP has was not initially setup to allow the staff to create forms or search with queries. Sue expressed that this would make the database a lot easier for her to use.

PBP needed to be able to use their database to keep track of their contacts and partners. In order to follow through with the part of their mission that involves promoting communication and cooperation, it is necessary for them to be able to keep track of their contacts easily.

Since the database was already in third normal form. I did not have to do much with normalizing the database. I tried to help them set up different forms and queries so that information could be easily accessed. We also planned come up with some documentation for the database so that future employees will be able to understand what is in it.

By the end of the semester, it was hoped that Sue and Merewyn would be able to create simple forms and run simple queries on their database. They also hoped to be able to readily and easily access data that they needed without having to look through the entire database. The ultimate goal was to make the database a useful tool and not just somewhere to store data. Since there is no documentation for the database right now, we expected to have some at the end of this task.

Sue and Merewyn were both very committed to accomplishing this task. Between the three of us, this task was not be a problem to complete. Once the documentation was created, sustainability was insured.

❖ Major Consulting Task – 3

➤ *Providing insight on improving the website*

The PBP website was up and running and there were not a lot of problems with it. However, there were some design and file issues, such as font size and the use of cascading style sheets that needed to be addressed in order to make the updating of the website more efficient.

This website is an important means by which PBP communicates with its audience. In order to attract more people and encourage them into helping to preserve Pennsylvania's biodiversity, a good, well-organized website is a must. The information available on the website should be extensive enough to allow people to learn more about the PBP's plan and should provide methods by which they can become involved themselves.

Because the website had already been created, there was not a lot of work that needed to be done in creating the structure of it. However, I planned to work to make the design and layout more consistent, following the guidelines I learned in my technical writing class, namely contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity. These concepts help to create a more visually attractive website.

At the close of our time together, Merewyn is able to work with cascading style sheets, which has made making changes to the website much easier for her. One task that was not obtained was finding a search function that could be used on the website in order to help members find certain items in the listserv archives.

Outcome for Outlook Task

For this task, Sue and Merewyn were hoping to find a way to more efficiently use their email client, Microsoft Outlook. They wanted to learn how to use more of its features in a way that would help them to continue their mission.

For this task, it is hoped that both Sue and Merewyn have become proficient in their use of Microsoft Outlook as their email client and more specifically, in their ability to find resources to help them in using this application. At this time, they are able to do the majority of tasks we set out to do in the beginning of the semester, namely deleting unwanted contacts from the auto-complete list and organizing contacts into groups.

Before the consulting partnership began, Sue and Merewyn did not know how to do some of the main things they wanted to do with Outlook, such as the tasks mentioned above. These tasks were necessary as they made it easier for Sue and Merewyn to keep track of important contacts. They were also unsure of where to look for and find solutions to these problems either.

Now that Sue and Merewyn have been shown where to find answers to some of their questions about Outlook, it is fully expected that they will be able to use it to their advantage. They have

been shown how to access the Microsoft Online Help site and it is hoped that they will continue to use it. Sue and Merewyn have been given solutions to problems such as deleting unwanted email addresses and creating distribution lists. It is hoped that this will not only enable them to find help on Outlook problems but also to find resources for other problems.

A part of PBP's mission is "to conserve biodiversity ... by promoting communication" and email is a very important means of communication. By being able to use Outlook more efficiently, PBP will be able to expand on the "promoting communication" part of its mission. They will be able to reach out to more people in a manner that is easy and hassle-free.

This outcome is sustainable because Sue and Merewyn have been given the tools needed to solve their current problems as well as future ones. Current questions have been answered and they now know how to access Microsoft Online Help to get answers later on.

This outcome has not really inspired a new vision as far as technology goes because they were using Outlook before. Now they will just be using it more efficiently.

Recommendation for Outlook Task

It is recommended that Sue and Merewyn continue to make regular use of the Microsoft Office Online help site. This site has many references on how to use the applications of the Office Suite. It provides assistance and training, along with other useful items such as templates, clip art and other downloads to make their use of Office applications much easier. Using the training tools may take some time out of their busy work schedule, so it could possibly be done on down time, but utilizing this resource can be very helpful later on.

Outcome for Database Task

After taking a look at the database, it was determined that it was normalized to the best level possible for use by PBP. Merewyn was also able to create some simple forms and queries for Sue to use.

This is an improvement over the past state, because, although the database was in third normal form for the most part, there were no forms or queries set up for Sue to use. Being in third normal form meant that there were not any repeating fields in different tables of the database, there were not any fields that only depended on one part of any of the composite keys and there were not any fields in tables where they did not belong. By there not being forms or queries set up for Sue to use, the database was pretty useless to her and she did not access it on a regular basis. She generally had Merewyn take care of her database needs.

At this time, it is not certain that the forms Merewyn has created will actually be useful to Sue. Also, Sue has not tried to create these forms on her own. Sustainability is threatened if Merewyn should decide to leave PBP. This will leave Sue alone without the knowledge to create forms and queries, especially if she has not tried to do them herself.

PBP has a lot of contacts that it needs to keep track of. Potential partners and donors, members, and people who may be interested in PBP's mission are all people that Sue and Merewyn want to keep in contact with. Having an organized database with information about these people and their relationship to PBP is very important to the organization.

This outcome cannot be sustained if Merewyn were to leave PBP because Sue does not have the knowledge about the database that she needs. If something were to cause Merewyn to leave, she must make sure that either her replacement or Sue knows how to generate forms and queries in Access. Also, it is important for both Sue and Merewyn to know how to properly normalize their database, so that, as they add more to it, they keep it organized.

This outcome has not really given the staff at PBP a new vision of how to use Access to further their mission.

Recommendation for Database Task

For the results of this task to be sustainable, it is recommended that documentation be written up on the database, explaining what each of the fields are in the database and how they are related to each other. Both staff members of PBP will want to be familiar with the documentation and its meaning, in case either one of them was to leave PBP. The database is a vital tool for keeping track of important PBP contacts and can be used very effectively as long as everyone knows how to use it. Merewyn has already created some documentation. It would be helpful for this information to be made available to the full time staff and possibly the volunteers.

Outcome for Website Task

The purpose of this task was to make improvements to the website that would make it more appealing and easier to use. Specifically, Sue wanted some of the fonts made bigger and a search function added to the listserv archives.

Most of the tasks and plans for the website have been implemented. Merewyn has been shown more effective ways of laying out the web page so that updating it will be easier for her. She has learned how to resize the page according the percentage of space available in the window, use cascading style sheets, and change the font size relative to information surrounding it. By learning these techniques, she has also learned how to improve the infrastructure of the site.

With the current state of affairs, only Merewyn is capable of editing the website. In order for the website to continue to be useful, Merewyn would need to play a large part in its upkeep. If she were to leave PBP without giving some insight on the website and its files to Sue or her replacement, then problems with sustaining the website could arise. It is important that changes to the website are able to be made easily.

Recommendation for Website Task

A recommended resource for doing web pages is the book, "Creating Web Pages with HTML and XML", by Patrick Carey. This book does an excellent job in explaining how to do nearly anything with a web page, from using cascading style sheets, to writing JavaScript functions. It would make a good addition to other web design resources that PBP already has. Currently, Merewyn is updating their website. This book can be used to answer many of her questions on web design, so PBP would not have to pay for outside help. It can be bought new from Barnes and Noble for about \$70, although it is available through other sites for less. This recommendation should be implemented because it will allow PBP to continue to inform its community through a better website without costing too much.

An additional recommendation for the website is the addition of a page that allows interested parties to join PBP directly using an internet form. This form would have a link to it on the Members Area page. The link would be an invitation to join PBP and once it is clicked on, will direct the user to a page where they can enter their contact information and even decide to join PBP by paying the membership fee. Then this information can be transmitted to the database. This would save a lot of time for Merewyn because then she would not have to enter information given to her directly into the database. Also, members may feel like they are really connecting and contributing to the PBP if they have the opportunity to “sign up” on their own.

A third recommendation is to have a file explaining the files and hierarchy of the website so that someone coming in behind Merewyn will not have a hard time editing it or updating it. Although the majority of the site is written in basic HTML, there are some parts written in JavaScript that other people may not understand. In order to make sure that the upkeep of the website is sustainable, the file should be used to explain any of the more intricate details of the site, such as the drop-down menus, the style sheets, and, if created, the “Join Us” form.

The “Join-Us” form is a result of a new vision to expand on their mission. It will give PBP the opportunity to reach more people who are interested in preserving Pennsylvania’s biodiversity.

Other Recommendations

It is recommended that the staff of PBP come up with a business/technology plan. Because of the rapid changes in technology, it need not be longer than two years. This plan will include a “statement describing the organization’s current use of technology and how it supports program operations, inventory of the organizations current hardware and software and inventory of staff computer skills.”¹ It is also suggested that a budget be set aside for technology issues such as upgrades, payments for internet service, and unexpected problems, like a hard drive crashing. This plan does not have to be extremely detailed; rather, it should provide a framework for the staff to build upon. It can really be as simple as writing down what technology is used now and for what operations, who has the skills to use this technology, and some possible areas to expand the use of technology in. A plan will be useful in helping to organize and maximize PBP’s technology potential.

Another recommendation is to explore new ways of using the internet in order to reach more people. One suggestion is to have “web-inars” or web-based seminars that people can “attend” online. This can be in somewhat of a chat format. It is possible to have a panel of “speakers” come online and chat about certain issues and then allow members included in the “web-inar” ask questions. A second suggestion is adding recordings of talks at conferences, if any are taken, and then adding these recordings to the archives. In that way, people who cannot attend conferences but are still interested in the topics discussed can be included and educated about those particular topics. PBP will be fulfilling its mission in a whole new way.

¹ Technology Literacy Benchmarks for Nonprofit Organizations, pg. 11

About the Consultant:

Audra-Breanne Dove is a junior Information Systems major. She loves the French language and would like to live in France someday. After graduating, she would like to teach in the Teach for America program in order to “give back” to her community.

Past Community Partners

4 Kids Early Learning Centers
Addison Behavioral Care, Inc.
Alafia Cultural Services
Alcoa Collaborative
Allegheny Co. Housing Authority
Allegheny General Hospital Pastoral Staff
American Association of University Women
Animal Friends, Inc.
ASSET, Inc.
ASTEP-Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church
Auberle
Auberle In-Home Services
Bedford Hope Center – Resident Council
Bedford Initiatives
Bethany House Ministry
Bishop Boyle Center
Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation
Borough of Crafton
Boys & Girls of Wilkinsburg
Braddock Carnegie Library & Community Center
Brashear Association, Inc.
Breachmenders
BTC Center
CADA-Citizens to Abolish Domestic Apartheid
Career and Workforce Development Center East
Carnegie Library of Homestead
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
Carnegie Science Center – Hill House
Association
CART-Consumer Action Response Team
Center Avenue YMCA
Center Avenue YMCA, Allequippa Terrace
Center for Creative Play
Center for Hearing and Deaf Services, Inc.
Center of Life
Central Academy
Central New Development Corporation
Children Youth Ministry
Children's Museum
Christian Life Skills
Community Day
Community Day School
Community Human Services Corporation
Community Technical Assistance Center
Competitive Employment Opportunities
Conflict Resolution Center International
CONTACT Pittsburgh
CTAC-Community Technical Assistance Center
East End Cooperative Ministries
East End Neighborhood Employment Center
East End Neighborhood Forum
East Liberty Development
East Liberty Presbyterian Church
East Side Community Collaborative
Eastminster Child Care Center
Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center
Education Center
Every Child, Inc.
Fair Housing Partnership
Faison Development & Opportunities Center
FAME
Family Services of Western PA
First Charities/First United Methodist Church
Friendship Development Association
Garfield Jubilee Association, Inc.
Gateway to the Arts
Glen Hazel Family Reading Center
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council
Greenfield Senior Center
Gwen's Girls
Hazelwood Senior Center
Hazelwood YMCA
Hill House Association
Hill House Association – After School Program
Hill/Oakland Workforce Collaborative
Hope Academy of Music and the Arts
Hosanna House
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
Hunger Services Network
Jane Holmes Residence
Jewish Family & Children's Service
Jewish Residential Services
Joy-Full-Gospel Fellowship After School Program
Just Harvest
Kingsley Association
Lawrenceville Development Corporation
League of Young Voters
Light of Life Family Assistance Program
Madison Elementary School
Manchester Academic Charter School
McKees Rocks Terrace
McKeesport Collaborative
McKelvy Elementary School
Methodist Union of Social Agencies
Miller Elementary School, Principal's Office
Mon Valley Initiative
Mon Valley Providers Council
Mon Valley Resources Unlimited
Mon Valley Unemployment Committee
Mon Yough Community Services
Mount Ararat Community Activities Center
NAACP National Voter Fund
NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania
National Association of Minority Contractors /
Black Contractors Association
Negro Educational Emergency Drive
New Beginnings Learning Center
New Penley Place
Northside Coalition for Fair Housing
Northside Institutional Children Youth Ministry
Northside Leadership Conference
Northview Heights Family Support Center
OASIS Senior Center
Opera Theater of Pittsburgh
Operation Better Block
Orr Compassionate Care Center
Outreach Teen & Family Services
Parental Stress Center
Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership
(This list is continued on the next page...)

Past Community Partners (continued)

Pennsylvania Low Income Housing Coalition	St. James School
People's Oakland	St. Stephen Elementary School
Pittsburgh Action Against Rape	Sustainable Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh Citizens' Police Review Board	The Community House
Pittsburgh Health Corps	The HUB Downtown Street Outreach Center
Pittsburgh Mediation Center	Thomas Merton Center
Pittsburgh Social Venture Partners	Three Rivers Center for Independent Living
Pittsburgh Vision Services	Three Rivers Youth
Pittsburgh Voyager	TLC-USA
POISE Foundation	Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments
Program for Health Care to Underserved Populations	Tzu Chi Wen Chinese School
Providence Family Support Center	Union Project
Radio Information Service	United Cerebral Palsy
Reading Is Fundamental Pittsburgh	Urban League of Pittsburgh
Regional Coalition of Community Builders	Urban Youth Action
River Valley School	Ursuline Services
Rodef Shalom	Vintage Senior Center
Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church	Weed & Seed Program, Mayor's Office
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Pittsburgh	Wesley Center
Rosedale Block Cluster	West Pittsburgh Partnership
Rx Council of Western PA	Wireless Neighborhoods
Sacred Heart Elementary School	Women's Enterprise Center
Salvation Army Family Crisis Center	Working Order
Schenley Heights Community Development Center	YMCA McKeesport
Second East Hills Social Services Center	YMCA Senior AIDE Center
Sharry Everett Scholarship Fund	Youth Fair Chance
Southwest Pennsylvania Area Health	YouthBuild
	YWCA Bridge Housing
	YWCA of McKeesport

Community Partner Information FAQ

(continued from back cover)

7. What does it cost to be a Community Partner?

The cost for participating in this experience is your time and your commitment to follow through as agreed. As leaders of community organizations, we know your time is of premium value. Those who have made this investment of time have reaped returns many times over.

8. What does the Community Partner have to offer Carnegie Mellon students?

- Students learn to structure unstructured problems. Community organizations are complex environments with complex problems. Your organization provides excellent environments in which to practice the art of structuring problems.
- Students come from different cultural backgrounds and most have never been in a nonprofit organization. They are practicing how to communicate across cultural differences and across technical knowledge differences. They need to be able to make mistakes and learn from them. Community partners provide a supportive relationship in which students can take risks and learn about how to communicate, how to relate, and how to maintain professionalism.
- Students get the opportunity to practice process consulting. They are learning that expertise is only as valuable as the ability to help others solve authentic problems. You provide a context in which students can practice these skills.
- We've found that Community Partners are very appreciative for the students' assistance. There is nothing more rewarding than to experience your efforts as valuable and rewarding for others. You provide that experience for students.
- Finally, you offer a glimpse into career opportunities in the nonprofit arena. Students learn to appreciate those who work in the nonprofit sector, and they grow to appreciate the role and function of community organizations. We hope this appreciation not only informs the choices they make in life, but also encourages them to care and give back to the community throughout their professional careers.

9. How do I become a Community Partner

Contact an instructor, Joe Mertz or Scott McElfresh. Send your contact information: name, title, name of organization, address, phone, fax, location of organization and your interest in being a Community Partner. You will have a telephone conversation and possibly an on-site visit. All organizations are considered, though preference is given to organizations providing services to a low-income community or a community at risk for falling into the "digital divide."

**Send email to
instructors@tcinc.org
(email preferred)**

**Or call
Joe Mertz: 412.268.2540
Scott McElfresh: 412.268.4859**

10. Caveats

- We do our best to ensure that students who sign-up for the class are committed to completing the class, however, occasionally, a student ends up withdrawing from the class during the semester. Typically, this happens when a student has underestimated the time they need for this class. We do our best to advise students so this does not happen. When it does happen, there is nothing we can do except to invite the Community Partner to participate in the following semester.
- The semester is short and the student has to do a lot of work in a short amount of time. For this reason, it is critical that you keep your scheduled appointments, do the work you agree to do, and maintain communication with the student. The student will need your feedback on reports quickly, often the next day. When we get to the final consulting reports, we will need fast turnaround time from Community Partners because we also need to get the reports published in time for the Community Technology Forum.
- If there is any chance that you think you will not be able to follow through with the requirements of this partnership, please wait until such time as when you are able to do it. Since the Community Partner is the focus for the student's learning, it is essential that the partnership be sustained for the semester.

Community Partner Information FAQ

1. What is the goal of the partnership in this course?

The goal of this class is to expand the capacity of the Community Partner to use, plan for, and manage technology, administratively and programmatically. The student is learning process consulting, project management, communication, relationship management, problem identification, and analysis.

2. As a Community Partner, what can I expect to happen?

Once you match with a student consultant, you will set a meeting schedule that you and the student will keep for the remainder of the semester. The student comes to your location for 3 hours a week. During this time you and the student work together. This is not an internship in which the student merely works on site. Rather, it is a consulting partnership in which you must work together to achieve your technology goals. The student facilitates a process that moves from assessment, to analysis of problems and opportunities, to defining a scope of work, to developing a work plan, to analyzing outcomes and finally presenting that analysis. As the Community Partner, you are the consulting client. You provide information and discuss that information with the student. But you are more than a client; you are also a learner. In process consulting the client "owns the problem" as well as its solution. The consultant facilitates the client in achieving that solution. The consultant doesn't "do for" the client. Rather, the consultant works with the client.

3. What types of activities are typically included in a scope of work?

Each scope of work is unique and depends solely upon the specific needs and opportunities of the individual Community Partner. Partnerships have focused on a wide range of activities, including: personal information management (how to use Windows, organize files, backup files, use various software packages, use time managers, use Palm Pilots and other personal information management tools, e-mail, etc.), developing a plan for how to train staff and how to incorporate knowledge and skill into job description, designing a local area network, implementing Internet connectivity, designing and developing a web site, determining effective data storage methods, analyzing the needs for an information database, designing and implementing a database, solving technical problems, designing a public community technology access center, determining the specifications for computers, developing disaster recovery plans, and more.

4. Who can be a Community Partner?

This course target individuals playing an administrative or programmatic leadership role within a community organization. Typically Community Partners are Executive Directors, Directors, Assistant/Associate Directors, Coordinators, and Managers. But, we make the selection based on the organization and the role that the individual plays within that organization, regardless of title.

5. Why do you focus on organizational leaders?

For an organization to use information technology effectively, its leaders must have a vision for how it can support the organization's mission, they must be comfortable enough to integrate technology into their personal work practices, and they must know enough to budget, staff, and subcontract appropriately. By partnering one-on-one with a student consultant, the leader has a unique opportunity to build that vision, comfort, and knowledge, no matter where they are starting from.

6. What are the requirements for being a Community Partner?

- Hold a leadership role within your organization.
- Have a computer in your office or one you could or do use in your job.
- Reliably meet with the student consultant 3 hours per week, every week, for about the 13 weeks.
- Come to an on-campus gathering 2 times during the semester. Once at the beginning and once at the end.
- Share information about your organization with the student consultant.
- Read project reports prepared by the student and give the student immediate feedback.
- Complete a brief response form after reading each report and return to the instructor.
- Keep a log of consulting sessions and send to instructors twice during the semester.
- Read the final consulting report. Give feedback to the student immediately.
- Make a brief presentation at the end of the semester (with the student) at the Community Technology Forum. (This is the 2nd on-campus gathering you are required to attend.)

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