

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

Spring 2007

Final Consulting Report

Guide Runners

Alissa Briggs

Guide Runners

Executive Summary

Student Consultant, Alissa Briggs
Community Partner, Tyrone Wrice

I. Background Information

Guide Runners (GR) is an emerging non-profit organization based in Pittsburgh that brings blind/visually impaired and sighted runners together to run races.

According to the organization's mission statement,

“Guide runners encourages and promotes running as an outlet and recreational development for youth and adult blind and visually impaired athletes by providing guided assistance and training to complete short and long distance competitive and non-competitive running events in the USA and Canada.”

Guide Runners is currently in a startup phase. Its short term goal is to be recognized as a non-profit organization. Its long term goal is to send a blind athlete to a major athletic event with the next five years.

Currently, GR offers a guide/runner matching service, race-related information, sponsorship, and training. The staff consists of about 15 volunteers whose areas of expertise vary. Mr. Tyrone Wrice is the founder and leader of the organization. He makes all personal and web technology decisions involving GR.

II. Consulting Tasks

Task 1: Design and Implement Database

Prior to the consulting period, GR kept all information about sponsors, runners, and guides in a paper folder which had no information management structure. This resulted in a loss of sponsor opportunities because GR could not strategically track donations or provide concrete information about runners/guides/other sponsors. This also impacted athletes because it was challenging to match runners and guides based on location, ability, or preference. The proposed solution to these problems was the design and implementation of a database that would manage information.

Task 2: Create Accessible Website with Room for Growth

Prior to the consulting period, GR owned a domain name and web hosting space, but did not have any real content on the website. However, it had the potential to be developed into a tool that could increase GR's exposure and its ability to serve as an information hub. By building a website that would be accessible to sighted, blind, and visually impaired users, GR would gain the opportunities to serve a larger population and to increase the organization's size.

III. Outcomes Analysis and Recommendations

Task 1: Design and Implement Database

The design and implementation of a structure to manage information was broken into two phases—creating and populating a series of spreadsheets, and designing and building a database. The first phase was successful, and Mr. Wrice attests to using the spreadsheets regularly. In the second phase, the design of the database was completed but it has yet to be implemented. The implementation may need to wait until this option becomes financially viable.

Task 2: Create Accessible Website with Room for Growth

GR now has a website that is accessible to sighted, blind, and visually impaired users and offers useful information about the GR organization. Although many of the pages are still under construction, this has given Mr. Wrice the opportunity to practice updating web pages as he creates new content. Mr. Wrice directs potential sponsors, guides, and runners to the website regularly so that they can find out more about the organization and be encouraged to join it. The website also increases GR's validity which improves its ability to be recognized as a non-profit organization.

Recommendation 1: Create a Guide Runners Blog

Currently, GR has very little communication between different staff members. Guides and runners also do not hear much about what the organization is doing unless it affects them directly. GR could increase communication between staff members, guides, runners, sponsors, volunteers, and the general public by adding a weblog ("blog") to the website. This could be done by using one of the many cheap, easy-to-use blogging services that exist.

Recommendation 2: Use Website to Streamline Signups

One of GR's most time-consuming services is helping guides and runners to fill out the paperwork needed to register for races and events. As GR grows, the time required by this service will increase several fold. Although it may not be a good investment of resources right now, in the future the GR website could implement an online sign up system. This would allow members to learn about, decide to participate in, and sign up for an event (or multiple events) in the span on a single website visit. This could be achieved by hiring a web developer or to using a pre-made event signup system. This would involve some level of cost and should not be implemented until it has been shown that the project will have a positive ROI because signups have become too time consuming.

Community Partner
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guiderunners@hotmail.com

Guide Runners
http://www.guiderunners.org

Guide Runners
Alissa Briggs, Student Consultant

About the Consultant
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Page 2 of 12
May 11, 2007

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I. About the Organization

Organization

Guide Runners (GR) is an emerging non-profit organization based in Pittsburgh that brings blind/visually impaired and sighted runners together to run races.

According to the organization's mission statement,

“Guide runners encourages and promotes running as an outlet and recreational development for youth and adult blind and visually impaired athletes by providing guided assistance and training to complete short and long distance competitive and non-competitive running events in the USA and Canada.”

Guide Runners is currently in a startup phase. Its short term goal is to be recognized as a non-profit organization. Its long term goal is to send a blind athlete to a major athletic event with the next five years.

Programs

Guide Runners offers a variety of services directed towards blind/visually impaired and sighted guide runners.

- **Guides/Runners Matching Service:** Blind/visually impaired runners are matched up with sighted guides so that they can train for and participate in short and long distance running events. Runners and guides are matched based on experience and physical ability.
- **Information Hub:** GR provides athletes with information about training, races, racecourse descriptions, and events. It provides blank registration forms, waivers, and other legal documents to members and helps them to fill out and submit them correctly.
- **Sponsorship:** GR sponsors runners financially by paying event registration fees and hotel rental fees for runners and their guides.
- **Training:** Training is provided for sighted guides who have not served as guide runners before. In the future, partnerships with gyms that are “accessible” will allow guides and runners to train athletically together.
- **Summer Camp:** In the future, GR will offer a summer camp program focuses on running workshops and social development for blind/visually impaired runners of all ages.

Staff

The only full-time staff member is Tyrone Wrice, the organization's founder. He is familiar with Microsoft Office, Outlook, and Oracle Calendar. Yani Ivanov, a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon, volunteered with GR for Spring 2007 to assist in the creation of a database. He is a computer science major pursuing an advanced degree in IT and is certified in database creation and management. Todd Christensen is a website designer who helped to buy a domain name and web hosting service for GR. He is no longer directly involved in GR but provides technology advice to Mr. Wrice. Ken Elliot is a grant writer who is writing content for the GR website. He has never written for the web before but is willing to learn and contribute to the website.

There are about 10 other part-time staff members who work with GR on a purely volunteer basis. They include: legal adviser, volunteer coordinator, residential coordinator, program coordinator, and a conference/camp coordinator. Staff members are not all located in Pittsburgh and the farthest member lives in Rochester, NY. Roles are defined by area of expertise, often tied to current and previous occupations.

Technical Environment

GR does not have any dedicated technology systems at this time. All staff members have computers with internet access. Mr. Wrice owns a desktop PC at home, but works mainly on his laptop when at home or on the road. His laptop is an IBM machine running Windows XP Professional v. 2002. He has Microsoft Office 2003, which includes Word, PowerPoint, Access, Excel, Outlook, and Publisher. Prior to the consulting period, GR owned a domain name and web hosting space, but did not have any real content on the website.

Technical Management

Mr. Wrice manages all personal and web technology for Guide Runners. For technology advice, he relies on other members of the staff, such as Todd Christensen. Once initial technology is in place, Mr. Wrice plans to delegate certain technology-related tasks to other volunteers in order to maintain and further develop GR's technology.

Internal and External Communication

Currently all communication is done via phone and email.

- **Internal:** Staff communicates with Mr. Wrice via telephone and personal email accounts that are not associated with Guide Runners. Staff members communicate with Mr. Wrice, but as of yet, have little to no communication amongst themselves. This has not been a problem so far because most projects are completed by individual staff members or in conjunction with Mr. Wrice.
- **External:** Sponsors, runners, and guides usually hear about GR by word of mouth or are contacted directly by Mr. Wrice.

Information Management

Prior to the consulting period, information about sponsors, guides, runners, staff, and board members were kept on pieces of paper in a folder in Mr. Wrice's house.

II. Scope of Work

Task 1. Design and Implement Database

Prior to the consulting period, Guide Runners had no structure to manage information about sponsors, runners, and guides. This caused several problems:

- **Sponsors:** Inability to strategically ask sponsors for donations because there was no way to view their donation “track record” or the last time they made a contribution. Difficult to ensure that donated funds were being used for purposes dictated by the sponsor. Potential sponsors may have been hesitant to contribute because GR could not provide concrete information about runners/guides/other sponsors. Loss of sponsor opportunities limited GR’s ability to sponsor runners and guides in races and limited opportunities for the organization’s exposure.
- **Guides/Runners:** Difficulty pairing up runners and guides because there was no system to keep track of their location, ability, or preferences. Paper file of contact information was hard to sort through and papers could easily be misplaced. This led to general inefficiency and risk of losing important and potentially sensitive information relating to guides and runners. Potential guides and runners may have been hesitant to join GR if it could not provide information about available training partners, thus limiting GR’s ability to grow as an organization.

The proposed solution to these problems was the design and implementation of a database that would manage information.

Task 2. Create Accessible Website with Room for Growth

Prior to the consulting period, GR owned a domain name and web hosting space, but did not have any real content on the website. Although the website did not have any information on it at the time, it had the potential to be developed into something that could be useful to solve several of GR’s problems:

- **Lack of Exposure:** One of the main obstacles standing in the way of GR’s development was that relatively few people have heard of them. Even those who had heard of them had a hard time learning more because there were no available sources of information related to the organization. This limited sponsorship and the ability of runners/guides to join GR.
- **Limited Services:** Many of the services that GR offers were impossible for people not associated with GR to benefit from. For example, GR was not an effective information hub because it did not have the financial resources to create direct mailings or distribute fliers.

With a website, GR would have a cost effective way to bring their services to a larger population and create the opportunity to increase the organization’s size.

III. Outcomes and Recommendations

Task 1. Design and Implement Database

The consultant helped Guide Runners (GR) design a structure to manage information about sponsors, guides, and runners. This project was broken into 2 phases—creating and populating a series of spreadsheets, and designing and building a database.

- **Phase 1:** Before the arrival of the consultant, Mr. Wrice stored all information relating to the organization on scraps of paper in a folder. The consultant helped Mr. Wrice to create 5 spreadsheets that track guides, runners, sponsors, staff/volunteers, and board members. Each spreadsheet has about 15 fields, primarily storing contact information such as home address, email address, and phone number. These spreadsheets were created using MS Excel. Mr. Wrice migrated all of the information from the paper folder to the digital spreadsheets. Each spreadsheet currently has about 10 entries.

Mr. Wrice and the consultant also explored the possibilities of using Google Documents in order to share documents online. Mr. Wrice practiced putting the spreadsheets for guides, runners, and sponsors online via Google Documents and walked through changing the settings so that other staff members could access the spreadsheets. Although Mr. Wrice does not currently maintain copies of the spreadsheets online via Google Documents, he said that when his organization grows to the point where he needs to share the spreadsheets with other staff members, he will know how to.

Mr. Wrice said that creating the spreadsheets helped him because he was able to see how much information GR needs to deal with. Now he has a better idea of what sorts of information he needs to gather from his contacts. The spreadsheets also make it easy to access information when on the road, which he could not do beforehand when he was using a paper file.

- **Phase 2:** The next phase of database construction is still ongoing. The consultant collaborated with Yani Ivanov, a GR volunteer who is experienced with database design, to plan a real database for GR. These plans were drawn up in Microsoft PowerPoint and saved in .ppt and .pdf files so that they can be shared with others (See Appendix A). Although Yani did not have enough time to actually implement the database, he said that the “database design is quite helpful” and “well done.” He said that if the plans were shown to a database developer, the developer would be able to build a database from them while asking for only a few minor clarifications.

Once the database is built, Mr. Wrice and other staff members will be able to use it productively because the database fields will be very similar to those created in the spreadsheets in Phase 1. There is some risk that GR will not have the funds to hire a developer or will not be able to find a volunteer who is experienced in database development. However, Mr. Wrice has said that he would eventually like to have a database, so as the organization grows and funding becomes available, Mr. Wrice will be able to hire a developer. In the meantime, the spreadsheets from Phase 1 remain fully functional and Mr. Wrice says that they have made recording and managing information much easier.

Task 2. Create Accessible Website with Room for Growth

The consultant helped GR build a website that is accessible to sighted, blind, and visually impaired users. This website is a cost effective way for GR to increase exposure and offer services to others.

- **Building an Accessible Website:** Before the arrival of the consultant, GR owned a domain name and web hosting space, but did not have any real content on the website. Mr. Wrice and the consultant created a sitemap listing pages that the final website will have. It includes 7 main categories: About, Guides, Runners, Events & Resources, FAQ, Contribute, and Contact. In the future, most of these will have 5-7 sub pages, although each has only have one page each at this time. The sitemap was used to build a website, located at <http://www.guiderunners.org> (See Appendix B). The website complies with W3C Accessibility standards, for example providing alternate text for graphics, creating meaningful link text, and specifying tab orders. The consultant tested the website using Fangs, a screen reader emulator that shows what a blind users hears when visiting a website.
- **Website Impacts:** Now that GR has a website, people do not have to contact Mr. Wrice directly in order to find out more about the organization. Mr. Wrice also directs potential sponsors, guides, and runners to the website when he meets them in order to engage their interest. Mr. Wrice plans to increase web presence by asking other websites to link to the GR website. Mr. Wrice has reported that many potential sponsors “Google” him when deciding whether or not to donate to GR, and now they will be able to learn not only about Mr. Wrice, but about the organization itself. This will also help with volunteer recruitment because all of GR’s services are listed and described on their website. By having a website, GR also increases its validity, thus helping it to achieve its goal of being recognized as a non-profit organization.
- **Room for Growth:** Although the website has a sitemap, currently there is only content for about 5 of the pages. The pages without content currently say “Under Construction.” Mr. Wrice will use NVU, a free WYSIWYG (“What You See is What You Get”) HTML editor, in order to add more content as it is created. With the consultant’s assistance, he practiced modifying test pages then uploaded them to the website himself. He also practiced using Filezilla, a free FTP (File Transfer Protocol) client to send copies of files between his local hard drive and the web server. He practiced downloading a file to his computer with Filezilla, making a local copy of it, modifying the copy with NVU, then uploading it to the website in order to create a new page that fit the website’s template.

Although Mr. Wrice is capable of updating the web pages himself, he is considering training other staff members to update the website or finding volunteers who are experienced in web design so that they can spend more time on it. He has already mentioned training Ken, who is helping to write website content, to update the website as well. Mr. Wrice says that the response that website has gotten has been very positive. He has also said that he always points potential sponsors to it, so he is eager to replace all of the “Under Construction” pages with actual content. The website has shown GR how to use technology as a cost-effective way to promote itself and reach out to new members.

Recommendation 1. Create a Guide Runners Blog

Currently, GR has very little communication between different staff members. Guides and runners also do not hear much about what the organization is doing unless it affects them directly. GR could

increase communication between staff members, guides, runners, sponsors, volunteers, and the general public by adding a weblog (“blog”) to the website. According to 5starsupport.com, a blog is

“... a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. Similar to a personal diary, but shared over the web. Blogs are typically updated daily using software that allows people with little or no technical background to update and maintain the blog. Postings on a blog are almost always arranged in chronological order with the most recent additions featured most prominently.”

There are many cheap, easy-to-use blogging services in the market today. These blogs are often fully customizable and easy to use.

Potential benefits of adding a blog:

- **Increase Inter-staff Communication:** Staff usually communicate with Mr. Wrice, but do not communicate amongst themselves. If a blog were implemented, different staff members could write entries about their contributions to the organization. Since all staff members are volunteers, this could help them to express their passion for the organization and its mission. This would keep staff interested and involved by increasing a feeling of unity between coworkers who may never have met face-to-face. It will also open lines of communication so that they can use each other as resources.
- **Reach Out to Current and Prospective Members:** By allowing staff members to write about their contributions, other people might be inspired to join the organization. Sponsors will be happy to be kept updated about how their contributions are being used. Other sponsors may be inspired to contribute if their competitors are; they may see the blog as a form of publicity for them. Runners and guides will also appreciate being kept up to date about training and events and hearing how the GR organization is working to make these happen.

The possibilities for the blog are endless. For example, a section could later be added that will be updated by guides and runners about training or different races. The blog will increase communication and awareness about the organization whether it is updated by Mr. Wrice, staff members, or even other members of the organization such as board members, guides, or runners.

Steps for adding a blog:

- **Learn More About Blogging:** There are many online resources that describe how to start a blog. A simple introduction to blogging can be found at http://www.livingroom.org.au/blog/archives/blog_tips_for_beginners.php. Another helpful resource is <http://weblogs.about.com/od/bloggingbasics/tp/howtoblog.htm>, which provides basic advice about what blogs are and how to write for them. Also, since the blog will be targeted at such a wide audience, it would be valuable to read http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/97/open_5-things.html, which describes how to start a “business” blog.
- **Select a Blogging Service:** There are many different websites that offer blogging services. Some of the more popular blogging websites are Blogger, TypePad, and WordPress. Several popular websites are compared at http://www.ojr.org/ojr/images/blog_software_comparison.cfm. Some factors to consider are

whether multiple people can be authorized to write blog entries, how customizable the layout is, if there is advertising on the page, and whether tech support is offered, all of which are points described in the prior website. Another factor to consider is if the blog is accessible to blind and visually impaired viewers. A good resource about blog accessibility is <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=57&TopicID=167&DocumentID=2757>.

- **Purchase and Set Up the Blog:** After selecting which blog service to go with, make sure that it is included in the budget because there is often a monthly or yearly fee. Set up the blog according to the website's directions. It may be valuable to check whether a service offers a free trial month in which to acquaint oneself with the blogging process. Also, to be most effective, the blog should be prominently linked to from the main GR website. The blog should also have a link back to the main GR website and be branded with the GR logo if possible.
- **Update the Blog Regularly:** Putting a blog on the GR website includes an unspoken commitment to update it. Visitors who are initially excited about reading about GR in the blog will quickly lose interest if it is not updated for months. It does not have to be updated daily, but at least once a week is often appropriate so that people will keep checking for new updates.
- **Monitor Comments:** If visitors are allowed to leave comments on blog entries, it is important that someone check them regularly to make sure that they are appropriate. There are often settings included in the blog service which censor foul language, but there are ways to get around these. Also, if people leave questions or interesting comments on an entry, it can be nice to reply to those comments with another comment.

Recommendation 2. Use Website to Streamline Signups

One of GR's most time-consuming services is helping guides and runners to fill out the paperwork needed to register for races and events. Currently, this service is usually provided in person, with Mr. Wrice helping guides and runners to fill out paperwork. As GR grows, the time required by this service will increase several fold, probably extending to assistance by phone and mail. This could become overwhelmingly time consuming for GR staff members. Although it may not be a good investment of resources right now, in the future the GR website could implement an online sign up system. This would allow members to learn about, decide to participate in, and sign up for an event (or multiple events) in the span of a single website visit. There are many ways to offer an online signup system, but the best solutions would be to hire a web developer or to use a pre-made event signup system.

- **Hiring a Web Developer:** Although it is challenging to create a dynamic website that offers online signup systems, many web developers are capable of building one that would fit into the existing GR website. Some resources to refer to when looking for a web developer who can build the website are <http://www.sitepoint.com/article/how-to-hire-a-web-designer>, <http://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/stories/2002/10/28/focus8.html>, and <http://www.smallbusinessnewz.com/smallbusinessnewz-13-20050909HowToHireAWebDeveloper.html>. Hiring a web developer can be expensive, so GR should make sure that the benefits will outweigh the costs before investing in one.
- **Using a Pre-made Event Signup System:** There are many different websites that offer event signup services. One possible choice is <http://www.mysignup.com/>, which allows

people to sign up for events for a small fee. It would be valuable to have a blind user test this website before investing in it because it does not make any claims about accessibility. Some free open source alternatives which are parts of Content Management Systems (CMS) can be found at <http://www.easywebmanager.com/>, <http://www.alfresco.com/products/>, and <http://www.dnni.com/>. It may be useful to employ a web developer in order to implement these solutions.

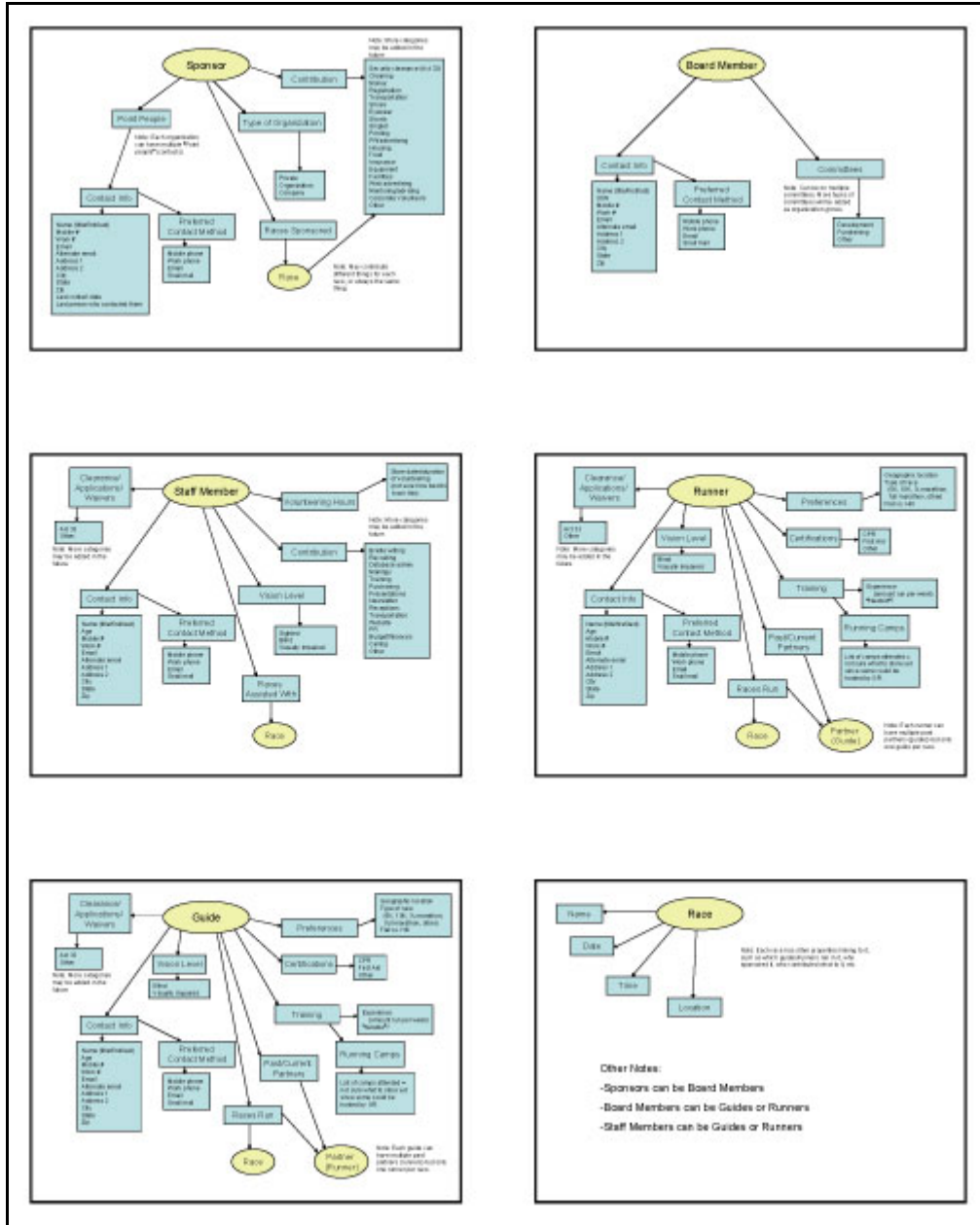
For both cases, there are fees involved that need to be worked into the budget. It may not be a good idea to implement this recommendation until it has been proven that the amount of signups takes up a significant amount of time that should be used for other tasks, in order to improve ROI. Once the signup system is created, it should be linked to it from the main GR website so that visitors use it. Also, GR members should be informed about it so that they use it instead of contacting the organization by phone or by mail.

About the Consultant

Alissa Briggs is a sophomore majoring in Computer Science and Human-Computer Interaction at Carnegie Mellon University. She is interested in exploring and redesigning the ways that people interact with technology. For more information, see <http://www.blinkwide.com>.

Appendix A.

Database Structure Guidelines. The consultant, Mr. Wrice, and Yani Ivanov collaborated in order to create these diagrams which show how sponsors, board members, staff/volunteers, runners, guides, and races are connected. In the future, these diagrams can be used by a developer to build a relational database for GR.



Appendix B.

Guide Runners Website, <http://www.guiderunners.org>. The following is a screenshot of the new website's home page, which is accessible to sighted, blind, and visually impaired visitors.



Past Community Partners

4 Kids Early Learning Centers
Addison Behavioral Care, Inc.
Alafia Cultural Services
Alcoa Collaborative
Allegheny County Housing Authority
Allegheny General Hospital Pastoral Staff
American Association of University Women
Animal Friends, Inc.
Animal Rescue League
ASSET, Inc.
ASTEP-Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church
Auberle
Bedford Hope Center
Bedford Initiatives
Bethany House Ministry
Bethlehem Haven
Bishop Boyle Center
Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation
Borough of Crafton
Boys & Girls Club of Duquesne-West Mifflin
Boys & Girls of Wilkensburg
Braddock Carnegie Library & Community Center
Braddock Redux
Brashear Association, Inc.
Breachmenders
BTC Center
Calliope: The Folk Music Society
Career and Workforce Development Center East
Carnegie Library of Homestead
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
Carnegie Science Center
Center Avenue YMCA
Center for Creative Play
Center for Hearing and Deaf Services, Inc.
Center of Life
Central Academy
Central New Development Corporation
Child Watch of Pittsburgh
Children Youth Ministry
Children's Museum
Christian Life Skills
Citizens to Abolish Domestic Apartheid
Community Day School
Community House
Community Human Services Corporation
Community Technical Assistance Center
Competitive Employment Opportunities
Conflict Resolution Center International
Consumer Action Response Team
CONTACT Pittsburgh
Creative Nonfiction Foundation
Dance Alloy
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
Family Tyes
First Charities/First United Methodist Church
Friendship Development Association
Garfield Jubilee Association, Inc.
Gateway to the Arts
Girl Scouts - Trillium Council
Glen Hazel Family Reading Center
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council
Greenfield Senior Center
Guide Runners
Gwen's Girls
Hazelwood Senior Center
Hazelwood YMCA
Heritage Health Foundation
Hill House Association
Hill/Oakland Workforce Collaborative
Himalayan Institute of Pittsburgh
Hope Academy of Music and the Arts
Hosanna House
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
HUB Downtown Street Outreach Center
Hunger Services Network
Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers
Jane Holmes Residence
Jewish Family & Children's Service
Jewish Residential Services
Joy-Full-Gospel Fellowship After School Program
Just Harvest
KidsVoice
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
Mental Health Association of Allegheny County
Message Carriers
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
National Alliance of the Mentally Ill
National Association of Minority Contractors /
Black Contractors Association
Negro Educational Emergency Drive
New Beginnings Learning Center
New Penley Place

Past Community Partners (continued)

Northside Coalition for Fair Housing
Northside Institutional Children Youth Ministry
Northside Leadership Conference
OASIS Senior Center
Opera Theater of Pittsburgh
Operation Better Block
Orr Compassionate Care Center
Outreach Teen & Family Services
Parental Stress Center
Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership
Pennsylvania Low Income Housing Coalition
Peoples Oakland
Phase 4 Learning Centers, Inc.
Pittsburgh Action Against Rape
Pittsburgh Citizens' Police Review Board
Pittsburgh Foundation
Pittsburgh Health Corps
Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network
Pittsburgh Mediation Center
Pittsburgh Social Venture Partners
Pittsburgh Toy Lending Library
Pittsburgh Vision Services
Pittsburgh Voyager
Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra
POISE Foundation
Program for Health Care to Underserved
Populations
Project Educate
Providence Family Support Center
Radio Information Service
Reading Is Fundamental Pittsburgh
Regional Coalition of Community Builders
River Valley School
Rodef Shalom
Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Pittsburgh
Rosedale Block Cluster
Sacred Heart Elementary School
Rx Council of Western PA
Salvation Army Family Crisis Center
Sarah Heinz House
Schenley Heights Community Development
Center
Second East Hills Social Services Center
Sharry Everett Scholarship Fund
Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church
Southwest Pennsylvania Area Health
St. James School
St. Stephen Elementary School
Sustainable Pittsburgh
Thomas Merton Center
Three Rivers Center for Independent Living
Three Rivers Youth
TLC-USA
Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments
Tzu Chi Wen Chinese School
Union Project
United Cerebral Palsy
Univ. of Pittsburgh - Division of Applied Research
and Evaluation
Urban League of Pittsburgh
Urban Youth Action
Ursuline Services
Vintage Senior Center
Weed & Seed Program, Mayor's Office
Wesley Center
West Pittsburgh Partnership
Wireless Neighborhoods
Women's Enterprise Center
Working Order
YMCA McKeesport
YMCA Senior AIDE Center
Youth Fair Chance
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.)

(continued inside back cover)