

Philanthropy Journal

OF NORTH CAROLINA

A nonprofit newspaper about the nonprofit community

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Nonprofits need technology and training to keep up

While technological innovation continues to revolutionize the private sector, nonprofits are struggling to catch up. One group is developing a national technology strategy for the sector. It hopes a coherent approach will help funders and nonprofits be successful in their use of technology.

By SEAN BAILEY

Why should nonprofits concern themselves with technology? After all, isn't it enough that they already face a nearly crushing challenge to simply do more in their respective fields, everyday, often with less staff and

resources than ever before?

How can they afford not to, says Marshall Mayer, executive director of Desktop Assistance, a technology assistance nonprofit.

"The private sector is completely reinventing itself," Mayer says. "And those that recognize the importance of technology are racing ahead and those that are slow to catch on are at an extreme competitive disadvantage."

Mayer says fewer than 200 people in the United States are helping nonprofits understand how technology can help them do more, faster, better and cheaper. Compared to the private sector, that number is woefully low.

"There's not enough of it being

TECHNOLOGY

directed at the nonprofit sector," he says.

Mayer and a handful of other nonprofit technologists are working to rectify the situation. The group, with the support of Microsoft Corporation, Surdna Foundation, the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, is spearheading an effort to produce a "National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology."

The group hopes the plan, due out this December, will become the basis for funders to put their dollars successfully behind the right approach

for upgrading the sector's technology capacity.

"We decided now is a very opportune time to work strategically and collaboratively to figure out how to grow our field significantly," he says. "So, over the next five years we'll have 2,000, even 20,000 people, doing this."

Technology rising

The timing seems right, if not overdue. It's hard to ignore that the U.S. economy is evolving at a rapid pace, fueled by new technology. The evolution of the personal computer from word-processing, secretarial appliance to high-powered management tool affects nearly everyone in

the workforce.

But nonprofits have been slow to embrace technology. Enmeshed in their own struggles to meet the expanded needs of their programs, technology hasn't been a chief consideration among nonprofits, until recently.

"Ten years ago, nonprofits didn't buy technology," Mayer says. "Now they buy it but they're not adequately budgeting for training, upgrading or special applications."

Rob Stuart, director of the Rockefeller Technology Project for the Rockefeller Family Fund, says even those nonprofits that buy tech-

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Students as teachers

Wake Forest students help nonprofits plug in

A Wake Forest University program pairs faculty members and organizations with undergraduate mentors, who will show them how to incorporate technology into their teaching and work.

By PATTY COURTRIGHT

Winston-Salem

Wake Forest University students are bringing their knowledge of computers outside the classroom and into the community.

Ten students — mostly rising sophomores and juniors — are spending the summer helping nonprofit organizations find ways to expand their use of technology, with another 10 students doing the same for the corporate world.

The internships are an expansion of the Student Technology Advisors — or STARS — program, which was established last year through an anonymous donor as part of the university's effort to put technology to work in teaching and learning campuswide. Working one-on-one with faculty members, technologically astute students help the professors develop creative uses of technology in the classroom.

A \$137,300 gift over three years from the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund of Jacksonville, Fla., has helped take the program to communities around North Carolina through summer internships. The gift is funding five of the internships this summer,



Jessica Woodard, a rising junior from Winston-Salem (seated), helps Lisa Holleman of Winston-Salem's Hospice understand what technology can do for the organization.

for some students. The remaining internships are funded through Wake Forest and an anonymous donor.

"If it wasn't for the generosity of donors, it would not be possible for a nonprofit like us to have a STARS intern," says Lisa Holleman, director of community services for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County. "We feel so fortunate to be part of the program. What Jessica, our STARS intern, has done for us is phenomenal."

Jessica Woodard, a rising junior from Winston-Salem who wants to major in biology, has spent the past couple of months helping Hospice in Winston-

eight next year and five in 2000, providing housing and travel allowances

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Self-Help gets \$50 million grant

By EMILY BREWER

Durham

The Ford Foundation has given Durham-based Self-Help a \$50 million grant to expand the nonprofit's ability to help low-income families buy their first homes.

The grant — the largest the foundation has given this decade — will be used to expand Self-Help's operations throughout the United States.

"We have learned in our work in North Carolina that there are a lot of hardworking, bill paying low-income and low-wealth people who may not meet conventional standards but have

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Product donations focus of giving

High-tech firms slow to embrace philanthropy

Despite criticism of meager charity by technology companies, they make sizable product donations. Some give cash. And a new foundation in Silicon Valley encourages high-tech entrepreneurs to become philanthropists.

By EMILY BREWER

The rap on the technology industry is that it scrimps on charity.

In fact, while data on giving by the rapidly growing industry is hard to come by, the industry is generous in donating equipment, and some

observers say it eventually will follow in the footsteps of the nation's long-time philanthropic giants.

"They are a young industry," says Bill Reinhard, editor of Corporate Philanthropy Reports. "The most philanthropic industries out there have been around for a long time — some for a hundred years," he says.

"Computer companies over the past few years have been criticized for not giving enough," he says, "but I'm not sure that it's true that they're not giving as much as

"With the success of the companies, the number of companies cropping up each year and the individual wealth that's been generated, more people are thinking about how they can give back to the community."

Gib Myers
Entrepreneur's Foundation

other industries."

Total giving by technology companies in Silicon Valley grew 69 percent,

from \$29 million to \$49 million in the years between 1994 and 1997, according to a survey released this year and sponsored in part by the Community Foundation Silicon Valley.

And a 1996 study by the Conference Board found that the computer and office-equipment industry gave 2.6 percent of its U.S. pre-tax income to charity, a figure that research associate Audris Tillman says is "well-ahead of what other industries are giving."

Of the companies surveyed by the Conference Board, the average

contribution by industry was 0.9 percent of U.S. pre-tax income.

But a list of America's 25 most generous companies that was published in the summer issue of *American Benefactor*, a New York-based magazine, includes no computer companies.

Computer companies such as Hewlett-Packard Co., Intel Corp., Sun Microsystems Inc. and Seagate Technology Inc. all made it onto the Fortune 200 list — but not onto the list of generous givers.

In compiling its list, *American Benefactor* took into account not only

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