The Story of the TXC2 Project

2010-13

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TEXAS
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January 2, 2014

Dear Reader,

Austin Free-Net and Technology For All are two 501(c)3 non-profit organizations who formed a partnership in 2009 to provide technology and computer literacy training to underserved communities across Texas. Together, we are the Texas Connects Coalition (TXC2). Thanks to a Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce and support from many others, we have impacted the lives of almost two million Texans at 96 public computer centers. To date, we estimate the project value at $17 million, based on outcomes.

The Texas Connects Coalition partners with local community organizations to create Public Computer Centers (PCC) within their facilities. The partnership model capitalizes on each organization's strengths, making efficient use of resources. PCCs serve a pre-established community group to make a deep and immediate impact, increasing the effectiveness of partner organizations with updated computer equipment. Over 1,800 computers have been placed at sites across Texas.

Through its expansive infrastructure, TXC2 deployed 34 Program Specialists across 96 PCC sites to teach Texans the skills and knowledge they need to use computers independently, proficiently and effectively. Program Specialists are the project's educators, working with each PCC to provide on-site IT support, as well as training to better meet the needs of the population they serve. Some classes are traditional courses in which students attend on a schedule and complete tests, while other courses progress naturally with students attending on an as-need basis and working one-on-one with trainers to develop their skills.

Execution of the BTOP grant has demonstrated that the Texas Connects Coalition is a critical resource in communities across Texas. Demand for the Texas Connects Coalition has grown 10% each quarter, on average. To date, Texans have used TXC2 computers more than 1.9 million times and participated in over 3.6 million hours of computer skills training. In December of 2013, BTOP grant funding reached its scheduled end.

Communities across the state of Texas depend on this training and access to computers with broadband Internet access, provided by the Texas Connects Coalition, for employment opportunities. Their ability to use these tools allows them to advance in their careers and to accomplish basic tasks in their lives.

On behalf of the Texas Connects Coalition, we would like to thank you for entrusting us to serve Texas.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2009, Technology For All and the Austin, Texas-based Austin Free Net (AFN) formed the Texas Connects Coalition (TXC2) to create a collaborative plan of action to provide broadband technology and computer literacy training to underserved communities across Texas.

In 2010, Technology For All received a three-year, $9.6 million BTOP grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to fund the Texas Connects Coalition.

As a result of the grant award, Technology For All and Austin Free-Net expanded their services across Houston, Austin Rural Texas and San Antonio. Libraries, workforce development centers and other organizations across 17 counties, from south to northeast Texas, partnered with TFA and AFN to develop or enhance 96 public computer centers, offer free digital literacy classes and lab sessions. These Public Computer Centers serve areas that experience limited access to broadband Internet due to geography and availability.

Additionally, the programming offered by TFA and AFN lessens the burden for these partnering organizations, allowing them to focus on their direct program services. The impact has been a statewide footprint where low income, underserved and under-resourced communities have been provided with free access to technology tools, education and training to better lives and make a difference.

Throughout the project, our management team, our program specialists (computer skills trainers), and our Public Computer Center directors have collected usage and equipment data which is detailed in this report through the completion of the project on Dec. 31, 2013.

Sometimes... it's convincing our clients that they are able to learn – that they are not helpless – that makes the biggest difference in their lives."

Bridging the Digital Divide Requires More Than Just Technology   www.austinfree.net

"I did it!!"

Retiree Learns Tech Skills for Job Search www.austinfree.net

"I... never took a computer class until now. But now I feel confident if someone needs me to do something on the computer, I can do it.
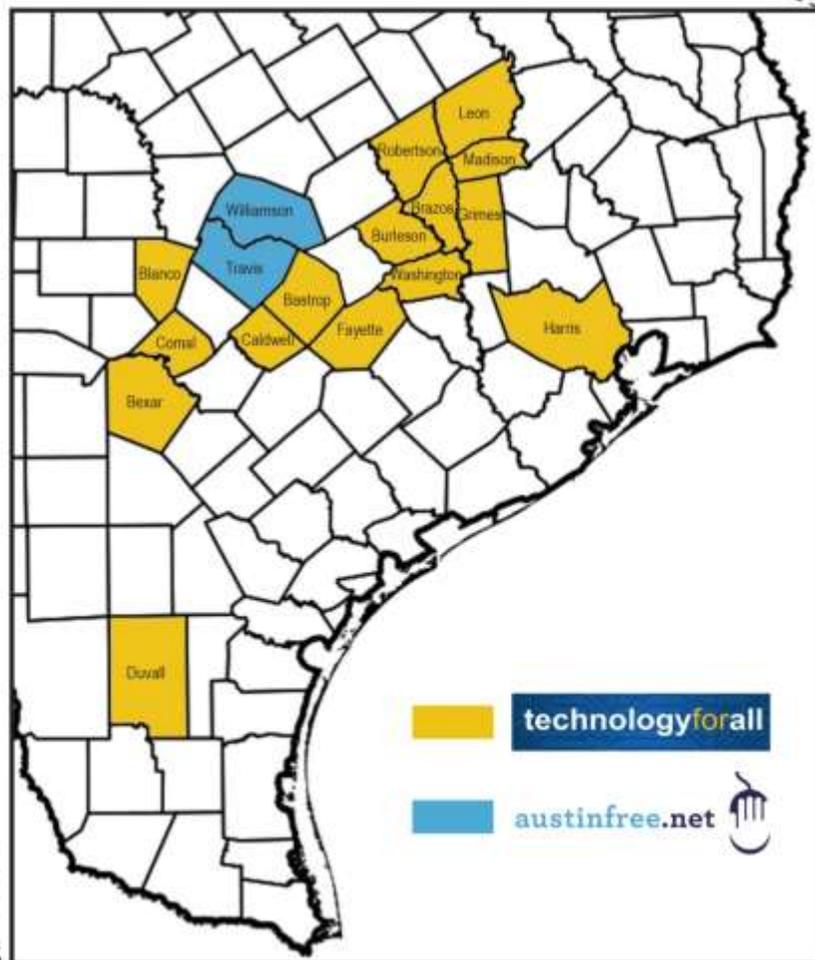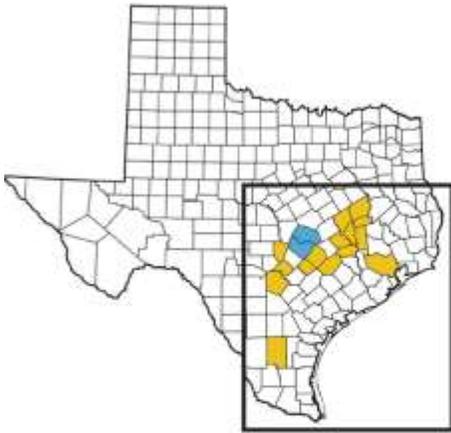
Tim turns his life around   www.techforall.org

"The light I saw at the end of the tunnel was not an oncoming train, but a brighter future in computer proficiency."

Learning the Language   www.techforall.org

COUNTY FOOTPRINT

The 96 TXC2 public computer centers can be found in 17 counties in South and East Texas. We provided computers and other hardware, software and computer skills training at each of the centers.

Coverage Area of Public Computer Centers and Training

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ACHIEVEMENTS

By Dec. 31, 2013, the Texas Connects Coalition had a presence in 96 community centers, libraries and workforce centers across 17 counties in Texas. Our demographics include under-resourced and low income communities in Houston, Austin, San Antonio and rural areas in Central and East Texas.

The TXC2 project has supplied free computer skills training at public computer sites across the state, amounting to 3,635,180 hours of training (1157% of our goal, which was met in September 2011) for over 233,060 training participants (147% of goal). Courses taught include the Microsoft Office suite and practical applications, job searching and resume writing, connecting families and friends with social media, and safe Internet practices and email use.

Our classrooms saw people all ages, races, and handicap levels wishing for better access to technology and the tools that make life easier in today's world.

The project also provided broadband technology to each site. These sites now have more than 1,815 computers freely and publicly available to 1,978,818 users and counting. The centers see an average of 21,847 computer users each week, not including personal laptop or mobile phone uses of our free wireless access points.

Public access to touchscreen technology in rural Texas has seen an increase, thanks to TXC2. More than 60 iPads and tablets were distributed to public computer centers for use in educational and programming purposes.

TXC2's finest achievement is in the widespread satisfaction of its users and students. Every person visiting our public computer centers had a unique and interesting story to tell. Many were thrilled to learn how to use computers and the programs that were foreign to them. Their stories can be found on the following websites as articles "Voices from the Lab."

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AT A GLANCE

2 nonprofits
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in 1 TEXAS CONNECTS COALITION coalition
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with 34 program specialists

teaching more than

3.6 million hours in computer skills training

to more than

1.97 million users

at 96 locations

across 17 counties...

as of December 31, 2013

...and counting
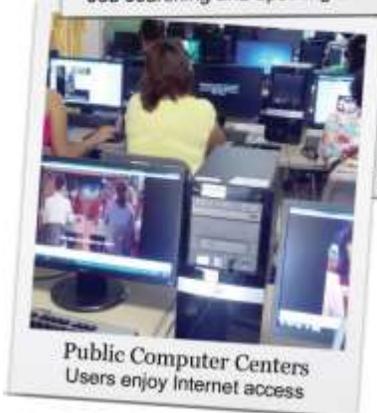
SUCCESS STORY SNAPSHOTS

Our successes were many and varied. Below is a fraction of the people we served. For the full articles on our programs, see our websites.

Internet Cafes
Mobile labs help people connect

Found her dream job!
Job Searching and Updating Skills

Digital Inclusion Conference
Sharing the model of our success

Overcoming past with new skills

Seniors learn new skills
Generation gap is filled with training

Computer Centers
Partnering with sites for public access

Creating a better life
Job searching and updating skills

IT Hands-On Training
Refurbish and earn your own computer

Internet job hunt a success!

Public Computer Centers
Users enjoy Internet access

Citizenship needs met
Better job with skills & resume

TXC2 IMPACT STUDY

TXC2 participated in a nine-month Impact Study with the University of Texas, in which the program was extensively reviewed by graduate students under the guidance of UT professors Dr. Sharon Strover and Dr. Kenneth Flamm at the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

After studying the statistics, reports and interviews generated by the impact study, students rated TXC2 positively based on its effectiveness and reach. Public Computer Center directors, TXC2 staff and our users were interviewed.

Students presented their portion of the report at the 2013 Digital Inclusion Conference in Austin.

DIGITAL INCLUSION CONFERENCE

Hosted by The University of Texas at Austin and the LBJ School of Public Affairs, the two day Digital Inclusion Conference in April 2013 provided a forum for providers, decision makers, and persons interested in best practices to discuss the public policy of digital inclusion. The event was held in the LBJ Auditorium.

The featured seminar was the presentation on the nine-month study by UT students on the impact of TXC2 to the communities it served.   Both TFA and AFN executive directors shared how TXC2 was making a difference in participating communities and the models of operation.

Other topics included "The Future of Public Internet Access," "The Impacts of Public Computer Centers,"

Graduate students give their reports to a full auditorium.

"Collaborating to Achieve Digital Literacy for Texas," "Federal Policies and their Impacts on Access to Broadband Internet Connections," and an informal discussion of Google Fiber which announced its introduction to Austin.

Sponsors of the event included Technology For All, Austin Free-Net, Connected Texas, Technology and Public Policy Program of LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT Austin, Telecommunications and Information Policy Institute at UT Austin, and the City of Austin.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Austin Free-Net and Technology For All have provided additional services to the community through special events and projects:

- **Broadband Across Texas Week** was conceived in 2012 to highlight the benefits of broadband access, and to raise awareness about the services available at our Public Computer Centers. Broadband Across Texas Week was filled with online activities to showcase and celebrate daily Internet use in our lives and teach new computer skills, at open houses hosted by the Public Computer Centers. In the second year, the El Paso Libraries, State Library and Connected Texas also participated.

Shown above right is a picture taken during a computer skills class being taught at the Jewett Public Library.

- **The Global Information System (GIS) Mapping Project** is another way the partners in the TXC2 project assisted in training higher level computer skills. Technology For All taught students at Smithville High School to use GIS tools to create map projects displaying information about the local area, such as location of local businesses and art installations and the effect of wildfire on property taxes. Two more school projects are planned at Cedar Creek and Bastrop high schools.

- **Internet Cafés**, organized by staff and volunteers from AFN and TFA, were present at multiple events throughout the area. These Internet cafés served as temporary Internet access sites which included high speed broadband access and computers for use.

One notable TFA Internet café, left, has been located at the BP MS150 two years in a row, providing services to riders, their supporters and families at the overnight stop in La Grange's Fayette County Fairgrounds. The café has been so successful that in 2014 TFA will host three separate cafés on the grounds during this charitable event.

- **Disaster Preparedness** in under-privileged communities has improved dramatically because of the computers and broadband technology provided by TXC2 to Public Computer Centers.

The Bastrop Complex Wildfire of 2011 serves as a major example of the usefulness of publicly available computers, as many displaced families relied upon the Internet access provided at sites in the area for information and assistance during and after the fires.

Partnering with May Day Houston, an emergency preparedness event in May 2013, TFA taught the practice of scanning and saving important documents, so digital copies can be retrieved easily in case of emergency.

FINANCIALS

As of December 31, 2013, the Texas Connects Coalition (TXC2) project had expended $9,490,254 in federal dollars through a Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce. Microsoft provided a generous donation of $1,794,053 in software. Local match investments of cash, in-kind services, volunteer time, Internet access and space from our public computer centers and communities in the TXC2 project have provided additional value amounting to $6,669,503 for a total match of $8,463,556 which is over 89% of the federal dollars provided.

In dollars, the value of the Texas Connects Coalition project amounts to almost $17 million expended to help over 230,000 Texans gain the skills they need to fully participate in today's digital world.

October 2010 through December 2013

Revenue - All Sources		
Dept. of Commerce, Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grant	$	9,490,254
Microsoft Corporation	$	1,794,053
Local Match - Cash, In-kind, Volunteers, Space, etc.	$	6,669,503
	$	17,953,810
Expense		
Personnel (including trainers and value of volunteers)	$	6,637,418
Fringe Benefits	$	913,258
Travel	$	64,721
Equipment	$	78,250
Supplies (including computer workstations and software)	$	3,683,415
Contractual	$	470,046
Other (including sub-grantee Austin Free-Net)	$	6,106,702
	$	17,953,810

FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

BTOP funding for the Texas Connects Coalition project ended on Dec. 31, 2013; however, the computer equipment will stay with each of our 96 partners at the Public Computer Centers for continued high speed Internet access for the community in which it resides. Lasting benefits will continue as our partnering sites have agreed to keep each of the 1,815 computers available for public use for a lasting, positive impact on the individuals in their communities. In some locations, the sites have plans to continue the popular computer skills training.

We continue to reach out to communities, foundations and individuals to support the cause of digital inclusion through a new model of sustainability. We are also primed to work with corporations and community partners to provide training through fee-for-service programs in rural and urban settings.

We plan to continue many of our special projects, to assist our communities and increase awareness of the need for readily accessible broadband networks and computer training. Both Austin Free-Net and Technology For All welcome supporters and partners in these efforts.

As education, employment and empowerment move to an increasingly digitized medium, these under-resourced communities are left even further behind. When TXC2 provides education, training and access to broadband technology, we provide more than a computer and education – we provide opportunities to Texans.

ABOUT THE COALITION PARTNERS

Austin Free-Net was formed in 1995 when it became clear that lack of access would prevent many in the Austin community from enjoying the opportunities of a new technology: the Internet. Today, Austin Free-Net is one of the nation's premier providers of technology education to low-income and underserved communities.

Technology for All was created in 1997 in response to the nation's growing technology gap, especially in lower-income and underserved communities. TFA's programs empower men, women, children and seniors, and the communities in which they live through broadband Internet access, technology tools, training and education. Technology For All is teaching skills for the digital age.

96 PARTNERING CENTERS

For the project to reach the public in each community, AFN and TFA partnered with trusted community organizations.

Denver Harbor Learning Center
Mission Milby Community Development Center
Houston Read Commission - Magnolia
Houston Read Commission - Sharpstown
MD Anderson Family YMCA
Yvette Scales Learning Center
Haverstock Hills Apartment
New Mt. Carmel Baptist Church
Impact Youth Development Center
East Side University Village Community Learning Center
Bethel's Place Community Empowerment Center
S.H.A.P.E. Community Center
Sharpstown Garden Apartments
Centro Familiar Esperanza / Elevation Station
Spring Branch Family Development Center
South Union Community Development Center
Madison County Library
Trinity Center
Oak Springs Villas
Telecommunity Resource Center
Ventana Del Soul Café and Cultural Center
Buffalo Public Library
ARCH (Austin Resource Center for the Homeless)
Casa Marianella
Albert Benavides Learning Center
Bob and Jean Billa Community Initiatives Learning Center
Café College
Victor Ferrari Family Learning Center
Frank Garrett Community Center
St. Mary's Family Learning Center
Willie Velasquez Family Learning Center
Bastrop Workforce Center
Haven for Hope
Clara B. Mounce Public Library
Bastrop Public Library
Brenham Workforce Center
Bryan Workforce Center
Caldwell Workforce Center
Centerville Workforce Center
Madisonville Workforce Center
Navasota Workforce Center
Benavides Public Library
DeWitty Center IBM Training Lab
DeWitty East Austin Community Network Lab
Freer Public Library
Duval County San Diego Library
Hart's Chapel
Lyons Gardens
Carnegie Center History Library
Larry J. Ringer Library
Ward Memorial Library
Hearne Workforce Center
Navasota Public Library
Blackland Neighborhood Center

East Austin Neighborhood Center
Rosewood Zaragosa Neighborhood Center
South Austin Neighborhood Center
St. John's Community Center
Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center
Dewitty Job Training and Employment Center
Smithville Technology For All Office
Smith-Welch Memorial Library
Smithville Community Network – Recreation Center
Nancy Carol Roberts Memorial Library
Bulverde/Spring Branch Library
Johnson City Library
Blanco Library
Lockhart Technology Center
Blinn A.W. Hodde Jr. Technical Education Center
Robertson County Carnegie Library
Fayette Public Library
Dr. Eugene Clark Library
Inspired for Excellence Academy West
Foundation Communities-M Station
Foundation Communities-Spring Terrace
Cedar Creek United Methodist Church
Digital Workforce Academy Inc.
Champion CLC
Emerald Bay CLC
Shadow Ridge Apartments
Sweetwater Point CLC
Villas on Winkler Senior Living
Communities for Recovery
Project Recovery
Independence Hall Apartments
Child Inc.
Goodwill Georgetown Job Help Center
Goodwill Community Center
Goodwill Rosewood Job Help Center
Goodwill Round Rock Job Help Center
Goodwill South Lamar Job Help Center
Crossroads
Marquez Public Library
Jewett Public Library
Flatonia Public Library
Schulenburg Public Library
Palm Square Community Center
Queen of Peace
Urban League