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Digital Inclusion Program

Digital Inclusion is a forward-thinking investment in the future of the City of Riverside. It is a comprehensive program developed with two primary objectives: to strengthen Riverside's position as an economically and technologically competitive city, and provide an enhanced quality of life for all Riverside residents. To achieve these sweeping goals, the Digital Inclusion Program is designed as an interrelated network of sub-programs creating a base of support that positively impacts the community on several levels.

At the core of the program is a system founded on a successful public, private and non-profit partnership providing free city-wide wireless internet access, combined with a community-based educational network that gives hardware, software and training to residents in need. The wireless system in turn has become an enhancement to public safety, a convenience for citizens, an economic incentive for business attraction, and the base for sustaining the growing educational network that it serves. Additionally, social service aspects of the program include a city recycling initiative that contributes to a greener, cleaner lifestyle winning the 2008 and 2009 Award for WRAP (Waste Reduction Awards Program), and a strong community outreach component that provides training and employment opportunities for at risk youth.

Combined into one carefully orchestrated program, the components of Digital Inclusion nurture a climate of economic growth, a more educated workforce, and a better quality of life in Riverside.

Digital Inclusion Project

Free Wi-Fi Access

Recognizing that a computer-literate workforce and access to the latest technology is critical for drawing and retaining technology businesses and the associated quality jobs, the Digital Inclusion Program began with an initiative created by the City of Riverside, in conjunction with SmartRiverside, a non-profit 501(c)3, to provide citywide wireless internet access.

From its inception in 2006, Digital Inclusion has benefited from solid community and corporate partnerships. Sustainability of the program is maintained through continued support from industry giants such as AT&T, Dell, Cisco and Microsoft, providing funding, and is subsidized by e-waste collection.



The City of Riverside unveiled the pilot phase of its wireless program in October 2006 and launched a Wi-Fi test area consisting of 33 blocks in the downtown area. Following the success of the test phase, the City initially worked with SmartRiverside and AT&T to roll out a Wi-Fi network that in 2010, covers 78 percent of the City of Riverside and provide residents and 50,000 students with free Wi-Fi access, thereby creating the largest free Wi-Fi network in the US to date. In 2010, Riverside Public Utilities assumed the WiFi service and provides the WiFi services free to its citizens and local businesses.

The system not only creates free access for business and residential usage, but enhances public safety by providing the City with the technological resources to monitor traffic signals, light ball fields and parks, and supply police and fire vehicles with in-car video to improve emergency response time.

Workforce Development/ Community Education

Any program, however, can only be as successful as its weakest component. At the beginning of 2006 it was estimated that as many as 30,000 households within the City of Riverside may have been without home computers and/or internet access, clearly indicating that the community was hampered by a digital divide: a socio-economic gap that separates those who have the advantages of a home computer, and a working knowledge of current technology, from those who do not. In response to this disparity, Digital Inclusion was designed as a community outreach solution, showing a genuine commitment to developing and supporting a strong, prepared, future workforce. Digital Inclusion strives to increase workforce capabilities by

investing in the educational development of the youth who have yet to enter the workforce, as well as providing valuable retraining and learning opportunities for citizens of every generation that seek to upgrade their employment qualifications. Providing access to the equipment and skills that give residents the ability to successfully compete in a quickly evolving, economic environment will help to ensure that Riverside has a workforce prepared to fill the jobs that the City is already beginning to attract.

The ambitious goal of this program is to provide 3000 PC's per year to needy households in Riverside over the next five years. It is built on a platform of reinforcement from public and private sector collaboration including Dell Computer, Microsoft, Cisco, Salvation Army, United Way, Riverside area school districts and county government. Through the efforts of these volunteers SmartRiverside is able to provide free computers, training and internet access to families with a total household income of \$45,000 per year or less and offer an array of discount options to assist moderate income



families that do not qualify for a free computer under the financial guidelines. In addition to sources already mentioned, Digital Inclusion's budget is supplemented through recycling e-waste, eBay sales and by fundraising efforts such as the SmartRiverside Annual Charity Golf Tournament and Inland Empire Technology Week, which also heighten awareness of the program within the local business community.

There are several components to the educational format:

- **Donation:** computers, monitors and other electronic equipment are donated by large local firms, educational institutions, government and the public.
- **Refurbishment:** Systems that meet the minimum criteria are refurbished by the Digital Inclusion staff. They wipe the hard drives and configure the systems with the windows 2000/XP Professional operating system and Microsoft Office Suite.
- **Education:** the program requires a minimum of 8 hours of basic computer literacy training. The City offers these sessions free of cost at any of 10 community centers, and has partnered with Riverside Unified School District, Alvord Unified School District, Salvation Army and the Riverside County Office of Education and Office on Aging to provide even greater training availability.
- **Providing Computers and Wireless Access:** Free computers are provided to families with a total household income of \$45,000 per year or

less, along with the necessary equipment to conveniently access the free wireless internet from home. There are also a variety of options to assist moderate income families that do not qualify for a free computer.

Environmental Sustainability

Another unique component of Digital Inclusion is an aggressive recycling and e-waste disposal program. Computer systems deemed unsuitable for refurbishment, as well as other kinds of e-waste, are collected at one of the City's advertised sites and disposed of through a partnership with a state approved e-waste recycling center. Not only does this meet the City's commitment to a greener, cleaner community by promoting the recycling of electronic waste in an environmentally sound manner, but the City of Riverside's agreement includes compensation for the tons of e-waste delivered which helps to subsidize the operational costs of the program.



Community Outreach



The refurbishment aspect of Digital Inclusion works in coordination with the City of Riverside's gang intervention program, Project Bridge. Under the guidance of a full-time professional management team, at risk youth receive valuable technical training in an apprenticeship-style atmosphere. Participants acquire marketable skills that make them eligible for A+ certification and an opportunity for employment that can help them avoid a return to gang life.

Program Achievements/ Ability to Replicate

The innovative nature of Digital Inclusion can be seen in the depth and breath of the program as well as in the strong partnerships that link and bolster each objective. Both the wireless access and community outreach components of Digital Inclusion provide useful insight into creative program development that can be replicated with positive results in other communities. In fact, staff involved in the Digital Inclusion Program, have been approached by representatives from other cities around the country expressing interest in pursuing similar models.

The Digital Inclusion Program's achievements were acknowledged by the Neighborhoods USA as finalist in the 2008 Best Neighborhood Program for Social Revitalization. In addition, the State of California EPA/California Integrated Waste Management Board also recognized Digital Inclusion for outstanding waste reduction efforts as 2008 Winner for WRAP (Waste Reduction Awards Program).

Although Digital Inclusion is a relatively new program, the strategy of assembling multiple level partnerships, engaging the community in self-investment, and utilizing local resources to create economic opportunities and a more tech-friendly business environment is producing substantial results. In the third year of operation, over 1,380 households were impacted by the receipt of free training, computers and WIFI Internet access. Since its inception, the Digital Inclusion Program has benefited over 4,000



households. The demographic break-down of people who have been through the program are as follows:

Male	38%
Female	62%

Seniors (Age 55 and over)	32%
K-12 (Age 18 and under)	31%
Parents and Adults (Ages 18 to 55)	37%

The Project Bridge connection is showing positive results as well. Although in its infancy, a total of 12 young men have worked part-time with the Digital Inclusion Program in the past year and one of those has already taken his new expertise beyond the program, through the classroom, and into the workforce; being hired by a local company as a computer technician.

Additionally, in 2009 over 200 tons of e-waste was recycled to subsidize operational costs. Donations of used computers, both of reusable quality and for recycling, have been collected from 11 separate public and private contributors.

As cities are confronted with the need to reconfigure economic development priorities and strategies in the face of a market downturn, it is more important than ever to develop and support programs that create long-term solutions and enhance a population's competitiveness for years to come. Digital Inclusion addresses this need in Riverside. It is a forward-thinking program that seeks to anticipate the future needs of the community based on population growth patterns, unique social needs, and long-range economic development trends. By focusing on this big-picture approach to municipal excellence, the City of Riverside will continue to move forward economically, educationally, and culturally as one of Southern California's fastest growing and business friendly cities.