



Accenture

Transforming Youth from the Streets to Geeks

“Many people suggest that programs like [Technology Service Corps] are becoming essential for young workers with few skills whose career opportunities have dwindled in the past few years. Viewed up close, the program shows it can create opportunities and sometimes even change lives.”

“Bridging a Digital Divide” by Kris Maher
Wall Street Journal, August 10, 2004

When Accenture had the opportunity to rethink its corporate philanthropy in New York, the leadership wanted to see if starting something new and radically different could have a greater impact. With that goal in mind, Accenture worked with others in the business and nonprofit communities to found NPower NY, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing the technological capacity of the nonprofit community. Accenture worked with NPower NY to use its professional expertise and innovation to create the Technology Services Corps (TSC). TSC is an innovative program that looks at an unskilled pool of young people and sees in them a solution to the nonprofit community’s technology gap. According to NPower NY, the mission of the TSC is “to transform youth ranging from 18 to 25 from the streets into successful geeks.”

Accenture collaborated with other TSC founders to develop the rigorous curriculum and plays an ongoing support role by providing leadership as well as professionals who volunteer their time to participate in the NPower NY/Accenture Professional Skills Initiative and serve as mentors to the students in the program. Most recently, Accenture started an internship program in which TSC graduates work in Accenture’s information technology (IT) department providing technology support.

■ Why Get Involved?

According to Chris Wearing, managing director of Accenture’s New York office and one of the founders of NPower NY, the company

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Technology Services Corps

wanted to ramp up its philanthropy and was looking for a way to contribute more than time and money. One of the early strategic decisions was to focus on leveraging the company’s technology expertise. As Wearing said, “Understanding the premium placed on technology skills, we wanted to create something that was more in line with our core competency in technical service while at the same time benefiting individuals and nonprofits.” In addition to using Accenture’s capacity in the technology sector, the focus on technology meant that Accenture employees also could make the most of their volunteer time.

Since 2002, more than 100 kids have graduated from TSC. Following completion of the training and apprenticeship program, NPower NY helps place them in jobs in which the average salary is about \$26,000, substantially more than the \$11,000 that alumni were earning prior to the TSC program. The classes are a cultural and racial mix — 38 percent of the students are Latino, and 46 percent are black — promoting diversity within the nonprofit technology field.

■ Why It Works

Accenture’s involvement with NPower NY and TSC is successful in part because the company has been able to leverage its substantial business and technology expertise

to help the community and the young people who go through the program. The initiative yields benefits to all the participants: Young people get a chance to develop skills that open up a new world of opportunity; the nonprofit community gets a cadre of highly skilled, yet affordable, consultants to support their work; Accenture employees lend expertise to a great cause and feel good about their good work; and Accenture management plays a leadership role in the community.

The success of this program also is due in part to the involvement from the beginning of senior Accenture executives, which has evolved to be a layered and long-term commitment at Accenture. The company supports the program financially from year to year and makes an even greater contribution in terms of the thousands of volunteer hours donated by Accenture employees. The early involvement also has meant that the company has been able to help shape the program so that the benefits to its employees also are substantial.

One of the most significant benefits for Accenture has been in the area of employee morale. Employees understand that they are able to give “the greatest bang for the

buck” in terms of their time by volunteering to teach TSC classes. They are able to build their own skills through volunteering, and the value of their volunteer time is validated by outside recognition of the value of NPower NY and TSC generally and Accenture’s support in particular.

Finally, the relationship between Accenture and NPower NY is successful because it continues to grow and evolve. Accenture and NPower NY remain innovative, constantly identifying new ways to deliver technology support for greater numbers of nonprofits. Most recently, the Accenture Foundation funded Accenture employees to develop the technology needed to launch a technology outsourcing program, IT Basic, to support nonprofits. TSC graduates are now working in and supporting the IT Basic Data Center in various capacities, creating jobs for the students and technological support for the nonprofits. Wearing is excited about this latest development because from a philanthropic perspective, the return on investment is substantial. In his words, “With a single donation, the Accenture Foundation has created the capacity to provide IT support to every nonprofit in the country.”

About the Technology Service Corps

www.npowerny.org

The NPower NY leadership team, including Accenture executives, understood that technology is a burgeoning area of the job market. They also recognized that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds rarely pursue a career in IT because they lack the skills needed to be successful. TSC provides rigorous IT support training to low-income students with only a high school diploma or GED so that they can pursue IT careers.

One of the key challenges for NPower NY is to identify students who are committed to making the most of the opportunity. NPower NY works with its nonprofit network to identify candidates who are most likely to thrive in the program.

Once the students are recruited, the short but intensive 16-week course includes all

manner of technical training, such as learning how to take apart and reassemble computers, configure a laptop, network computers, and develop Web sites, among many other high-tech skills. In addition, there is a concentrated focus on helping the students develop a range of soft skills, including professionalism and communication, and an improved sense of self-confidence.

During the last five weeks of the program, students serve as interns at a nonprofit. The students spend one day per week at NPower NY, where they share their experiences and get help resolving workplace and professional challenges. Accenture employees, along with NPower NY staff, help the interns solve difficult technical issues, build confidence and set clear expectations for professional work.

About Corporate Voices for Working Families

Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we improve the lives of working families by developing and advancing innovative policies that reflect collaboration among the private sector, government and other stakeholders.

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Publications, research studies and toolkits on a host of workforce readiness, flexibility, family economic stability, and work and family balance issues are available on the Corporate Voices Web site at www.corporatevoices.org.

1020 19th Street, NW
Suite 750
Washington, DC 20036

Phone: 202-467-8130
Fax: 202-467-8140

Blog: corporatevoices.wordpress.com
Twitter: @corporatevoices

www.corporatevoices.org