



Project name: We Love I.T. Too-Conquering the Digital Divide

The Project:

The purpose of our project is to wage war on the “Digital Divide.”

In today’s world — there is a myriad of technologies; everything from computers to mobile devices. These information technologies (IT) let us gather information, download a podcast of our favourite radio show and listen to it while walking to work. They let us use the same device to take photos, watch videos on YouTube, post updates on Twitter, call or text our friends and family, and organize our schedule — digital media and content are a huge part of the Canadian’s way of life. There is however a big but...

This world of information is not accessible to all Canadians. Canadians who fall into what is known as the “Digital Divide” are not able to enhance their lives with IT. The reasons for this are varied it may be because a low income makes acquiring the devices out of reach, it may be because high speed internet is not available in their community, or it may be because they have been unable to access IT training suitable to their learning style. Whatever the reason, not having the knowledge or the tools to access these resources makes often already vulnerable Canadians even more so. In a time where the majority of information we access and share is through digital media, including the internet, it is increasingly apparent that the growing digital divide must be diminished. We can empower people through the knowledge that the internet offers. The internet presents an opportunity for all members of society to access information, resources, government services, social services, social networks, employment and hiring opportunities, and alternative communication mediums, the list goes on and on.

As stated the purpose of our project is to wage war on the digital divide. To do so we will implement a Six Phase project.

- 1. Phase One: Participant Selection**

Time Frame for Phase One: September 01, 2010-September 30, 2010

- a. Consult with our community serving organizations. We, the Manitoba E-Association (MB E) have, through the Community Access Program (CAP) and the Community Access Program –Youth Initiative (CAP-YI) created strong relationships with over 400 community serving organizations in Manitoba. Through these relationships we will be able to access geographic communities and communities of interest. This will encompass a wide range of Canadians including but not limited to seniors, youth, fixed income families and persons with disabilities. It will also represent urban neighbourhoods as well as rural and remote geographic communities in the province of Manitoba.
- b. Based on the consultation process select up to 4 urban groups, 4 rural groups and 1 remote group. Each being representative of :
 - i. Individuals with fixed incomes,
 - ii. Persons with physical disabilities
 - iii. Persons with intellectual disabilities
 - iv. Seniors
 - v. Youth

Community Partners For Phase One: the 400 plus community serving organizations we currently work with; the Manitoba Education Research Learning Information Network (MERLIN) our provincial government partner in the delivery of CAP and Function Four our IT research company who has developed the E-Index which we will use as the basis for the assessment.

2. Phase Two: Conduct an Assessment

Time Frame for Phase Two: October 01, 2010-November 30, 2010

- a. In phase Two MB E will assess the IT requirements which meaningfully enhance the lives of the selected individuals. This assessment will be a revision of the E-Index currently used and developed by our partners at Function Four. Through this assessment we will be able to pinpoint all the areas of an individual's life that could be enhanced by using different forms of technology. This version of the E-Index will consider:
 - i. That technology encompasses a much wider spectrum than most realize. When we speak of technology we refer to more than just a computer or cell phone. Adaptive technology for instance constitutes an array of technological options from electronic communication devices, remote controls, automatic door openers, lifting devices, elevators and computer accessibility software. Even a hand held device can be an adaptive piece of technology if you know what you are looking for. The assessment will determine the individual's knowledge of and ability to utilize the full range of technology that would enhance their lifestyle.

- ii. That in this day and age high-speed internet access is no longer luxury, but a necessary resource that all Canadians should have. The assessment will also determine the infrastructure in place within an individual's and or a community's geographic location will support their technology requirements.

Community Partners for Phase Two: the community serving organizations that support the individuals selected to be part of the project; MERLIN our provincial government partner and, Function Four our IT research company who developed the E-Index which we will use as the basis for the assessment.

3. **Phase Three: Develop Resource Pool**

Time Frame for Phase Three: December 01, 2010-December 31, 2010

Once the assessment has been completed we can move on to obtaining and/or revising existing tools and resources which will serve as the assets needed to create an enhanced lifestyle. To do this MB E will:

- a. Create a database that can be accessed through project consultants as well as the Manitoba E-Association website. Through this database community members will be able to access descriptions of all forms of technology, pricing, locations where they can be purchased and funding sources to cover costs of equipment when applicable. Accessibility consultants will work with community members to attain the technology that is needed to create accessible environments. This may be but is not limited to individual community members, businesses and service providers.
- b. Adapt the user-friendly curriculum, which Manitoba E created. The content of the curriculum is available in interactive form uses plain language and is easily adaptable to alternative formats for different learning styles. Curriculum content consists of basic computer knowledge of hardware and software, emailing, internet browsing, internet research, use of social networking sites and online services as well as internet safety.

Community Partners for Phase Three: the community serving organizations that support marginalized Canadians and have knowledge of accessible IT resources, MERLIN our provincial government partner.

4. **Phase Four: Mobilise the Classroom**

Time Frame for Phase Four: January 1, 2011-June 30, 2011

Manitoba E-Association will offer what we will refer to as the mobile classroom. We recognise:

- a. That once the tools and resources are obtained and/or revised we will have the assets needed to create an enhanced environment but... without knowledge these assets will not be utilized to their full potential by individuals or communities affected by the digital divide. This Phase therefore will, educate those experiencing the digital divide.
- b. That we will need to provide instruction in a format that is understandable and uses plain language instead of “techno speak”.
- c. That a mobile classroom that can come to an accessible location of the individual’s or their supporting community serving organization’s choice will allow those who experience the digital divide to access technology and instruction in the form and location that fits their lifestyle and utilizes assets specific to their requirements.
- d. That those who have a higher level of interest in information technology, may require additional tools and resources. For them the project will offer a secondary course on web development using a community based website offered through the Community Information Management Network (CIMNet). This website will allow students to learn the basics of web development using the CIMNet’s user-friendly tools. As their first project, participants will help in the development of the re-construction of the site, working with a Manitoba E-Association Consultant to choose the background and format of the Disability Community Resource Network (DCRN) CIMNet website. Participants will be given edit privileges for the DCRN website and taught how to add content. Students will have to use the skills they have learned from the first session of their course to find content for the website. Once the course is completed, if students would like to continue with their web development skills they will be invited to continue with the upkeep of the DCRN website on a volunteer basis. Through CIMNet, Manitoba E-Association is connected to a number of geographic and point of interest community websites. Students will be referred to a community site that better fits their interest if they do not want to pursue the DCRN website further.

Community Partners for Phase Four: the community serving organizations that support the individuals selected to be part of the project; MERLIN our provincial government partner and, Function Four our IT research company who developed the CIMNet tools.

5. **Phase Five:** Technology Distribution

Time Frame for Phase Five: July 01, 2011 – July 31, 2011

Following the delivery of the individualized training offered through the Mobile Classroom and upon successful completion of the course best suited to their requirements students will be supported in acquiring the technology which best enhances their lifestyle. This may include:

- a. Being given a refurbished computer or laptop (type dependant on their ability), a wireless router and security software to enable them to participate in the online realm.
- b. Access to a community website they can contribute to and participate in.
- c. Access to resources, information and/or contacts that will assist them in acquiring technology MB E has no access to.
- d. Access MB E's toll free Help Desk.

Community Partners for Phase Five: the community serving organizations that support the individuals selected to be part of the project; MERLIN our provincial government partner and, Computers for Schools and Libraries (CFSL) our partner that refurbishes donated computers.

6. **Phase Six:** Follow Up

Time Frame for Phase Six: July 01, 2011 – August 31, 2011

MB E will conduct a follow up interview with each participant to determine their level of satisfaction with the IT solutions provided to them and to determine if further training or assistance is required.

Community Partners for Phase Six: the community serving organizations that support the individuals selected to be part of the project and MERLIN our provincial government partner

Who we are and why we believe we can do this.

The Manitoba E-Association is a not for profit organization which facilitates the adoption and utilization of innovative e-solutions by collaborating with organizations and/or communities to build e-capacity within the community and with individual citizens within those communities. We are particularly interested in facilitating practical (people friendly) applications of technology, which empower and strengthen individuals and communities through grassroots participatory processes.

MB E has played a Key role in:

- The Community Access Program (CAP) that aims to ensure that Canadians in rural and urban areas have affordable access to the Internet with assistance from CAP - Youth Initiative (CAP-YI) that provides unique employment opportunities for Manitoba youth.
- We have also delivered the WEB-4-ALL-YI project that made assistive technology available to people with disabilities or literacy challenges, as well as seniors and new Canadians.
- MB E also provides I.T. support to CAP sites through its toll free Help Desk.
- MBE provides Project Management Services for broadband roll out projects,

which are delivered through partnership arrangements with communities, IT service providers, governments, and community organizations to create broadband internet access to Manitoba communities.

- In addition, through the Office of Learning Technology project MB E delivered in Canupawakpa, an IT curriculum was developed which will form the basis of the curriculum used in this project.
- In 2005 MB E was also a successful applicant for a Microsoft Unlimited Potential Grant. Through this project MB E delivered youth IT training sessions and internships to about 76 youth in the province of Manitoba. The project resulted in MB E being one of twelve organizations worldwide to receive a “Microsoft Unlimited Potential Award for Outstanding Contribution to Microsoft Community Affairs and the Unlimited Potential Program” this included participation in Microsoft’s strategic planning event for the Community Affairs Program.
- MB E also currently delivers the Small Business Internship Program in Manitoba. This program helps businesses to utilize IT and participate in the global economy by hiring youth interns who complete projects aimed at increasing the host business’s e-commerce ability.