

\$1.2 million dollar grant expands digital skills, access

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For 13 years, the Community Technology Empowerment Project (CTEP) AmeriCorps program, a project of the St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN), has provided technology instruction to underserved individuals with low technology skills across the Twin Cities.

Earlier this month, CTEP received a \$1.2 million grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to continue the program for the next three years, while expanding from 30 to 35 members.

CTEP AmeriCorps members serve the Twin Cities metro area and target diverse communities who are underemployed or unemployed and are low-income, new American, or have disabilities. Over the next three years, 35 full-time members will be placed in public computer centers annually, at organizations like the Saint Paul Public Library, the Latino Economic Development Center, and the Hmong American Partnership. From September 2013 to August 2014, CTEP will serve 2,100 participants, helping them become certified in basic computer skills and obtain jobs. At the same time, members will strengthen the capacity of these community agencies, mobilizing 675 volunteers who will provide 5,700 hours of additional technology instruction.

Through intensive mentoring, along with providing the Northstar Digital Literacy assessments, members are able to offer benefits to participants.

"Participants job placements increased by 23 percent last year. Due to the fact that we have not changed programming in any other ways, we correlate this increase to our addition of the certifications for our job seekers (since offering Northstar certification)," said Liberty Mickelson, site supervisor for CTEP at the Employment Action Center.

In a conference call earlier this month, Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) said, "National service is a critical and cost-effective approach to solving problems."

CTEP is a program of SPNN, a non-profit, 501(c)(3) community media center serving St. Paul and the Twin Cities metro area. SPNN's mission is to empower people to use media and communications to better lives, use authentic voice and build common understanding.

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For more information on the program, contact CTEP Co-Director Desiree Culpitt at 651-556-1389.