

Broward County's *Employee Computer Literacy Access Program*

ABSTRACT OF THE PROGRAM

Broward County's *Employee Computer Literacy Access Program* provides employees the opportunity to purchase affordable computers for home use and to access County-provided skill development training for career growth. Its purpose is to support computer accessibility and usage among Broward County employees. An interagency partnership of Broward County's Purchasing, Employee Development and Information Technology agencies created this program.

The County's Purchasing Division regularly sells surplus County PCs through its Surplus Warehouse. At these warehouse sales, employees purchase surplus County computer equipment at low cost for home use. The training and development sections of the Division of Human Resources and Office Information Technology provide self-paced PC-based training programs, accessible by employees via a compact disc (CD) or home Internet delivery. The County offers behavioral, professional and information technology skill development courses in an uninterrupted and private home learning environment.

The *Employee Computer Literacy Access Program* enables employees to overcome barriers to computer ownership, computer literacy, and self-paced skill development, thus increasing the knowledge, effectiveness and service ability of the Broward County workforce in today's technological workplace.

THE PROBLEM/NEED FOR THE PROGRAM

One of Broward County's ongoing objectives is to empower employees to embrace electronic technology to improve their productivity in the workplace, to enhance their career development opportunities, and to enable them to function effectively in an increasing "e-enabled" world. An obstacle to this objective is the "Digital Divide" between the people with computers and the people without them. The "divide" is even wider when it includes those without the skills to apply computer technology to life in the 21st century successfully. The County's workforce was typically displaying only a basic level of computer desktop application skills, thus affecting quality and productivity of work production. The partner agencies recognized the deficit was partly attributable to economic barriers to personal PC ownership, which denied opportunity for personal usage and familiarization, and created difficulty accessing training to develop necessary workforce development.

The agency partnership crafted the *Employee Computer Literacy Access Program* to increase computer and behavioral workforce skills among employees in the workplace and at home by enabling easy purchase of equipment and easy access to training.

The program faced the following challenges:

- A potential program audience of 7,400 employees spread across the large geographic area of Broward County;
- County agencies operating on a 24-hour, 7 days a week basis;
- More than 3,000 employees without access to a PC at their job site or in their home;
- More than 3,000 employees with limited or no computer skills, including those with access to a PC at the worksite;

THE PROBLEM/NEED FOR THE PROGRAM (Continued)

- Economic inability to purchase personal computer equipment by substantial numbers of employees and particularly by those in entry level positions seeking advancement through the organization.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

The *Employee Computer Literacy Access Program* offers employees the opportunity to access free workplace development and technical computer skill training at work or in their homes via personal computers purchased at low cost through county-sponsored computer sales. To accomplish this, the agency partnership identified several objectives:

- Provide affordable, easy access to computer hardware purchase;
- Provide free, interactive, self-paced and instructor-led training on desired computer and workforce skills, thus providing skill development and practice in an uninterrupted, comfortable home-learning environment;
- Support and broaden access to skill development, enabling enhanced career ladder opportunities for employees;
- Cost-effective resource management of surplus computer hardware and training materials.

The Human Resources and Purchasing Divisions crafted the Cash Out of Annual Leave for Computer Purchase Policy. This policy enables employees to cash out up to \$2,000 of their accrued annual leave each calendar year for purchase of computer hardware, software and peripherals. During calendar year 2001, the cash out policy enabled 360 Broward County employees to convert accrued annual leave into cash for computer purchases, inclusive of recycled computer purchases from the County Surplus Warehouse sales.

The County Surplus Warehouse Sales for Employees offered refurbished Pentium II machines, with cleaned, reconfigured hard drives, monitors and keyboards, repackaged into computer cartons. Purchasing scheduled private sales for employees wishing to participate, with more than 400 employees purchasing equipment at nominal fees ranging from \$50 to \$175 per unit. Purchasing's Surplus Warehouse sells those machines not purchased by employees to the public or donates them to 501(c)(3) charities, resulting in few, if any, machines being sent to the landfill. Surplus computer sales enable the Computer Surplus Warehouse to be self-funded.

Training on demand via 24-hour, 7 day a week home computer access was provided by the Division of Human Resources and the Office of Information Technology (OIT). OIT contracted for provision of 700 computer skill training courses via the vendor's website, providing both desktop and advanced computer certification skills. The Division of Human Resources contracted for provision of twenty comprehensive behavioral skill courses delivered via the vendor's website or via CD. Employees may choose between checking out CDs for home computer use or using the vendor's website. Those employees who choose to study at home can develop skills at their leisure, based upon individual interests and career goals, and are not bound by work interruptions or job-relevancy considerations.

The County implemented both training programs and made them available to employees beginning January, 2001. The training continues to be advertised to employees through various media, including training calendars, County newsletters, e-mails, intranet promotion sites and flyers.