FACTSHEET: Digital Youth Summer Jobs

In Chicago's low- and moderate income communities, even high schools students who excel at math and science can find it difficult to chart a path to a career in technology. Mentors and role models can be hard to find, and there are few opportunities to network and see first-hand what a high-tech job requires and what it offers. Yet these are exactly the kind of well-paying, in-demand jobs that hold great promise for the best and brightest youth in urban communities.

The Digital Youth Summer Jobs program introduces teens in the five Chicago Smart Communities to employment opportunities in technology, as well as enhancing their resumes and skill sets. The eight-week summer program provides a dozen high school students in each of the neighborhoods with a paid internship at a business, government agency or nonprofit organization, as well as a weekly class that covers topics like job readiness and digital citizenship.

Real-world experience
In each of the five communities, a local nonprofit organizes 20-hour-a-week internships for participants, who range in age from 14 to 17 years old. The students gain on-the-job training, increase their knowledge of technology career options and get new motivation to complete school and enroll in college.

In 2010, students interned at more than 30 different organizations, including website design firms in the Loop, local community development organizations and Columbia College. Some learned about digital photography, others built model skyscrapers, created databases, shot and edited video public-service announcements or tested websites for usability.

Classes and computers
Each Friday, the students participate in Common Sense Media trainings, a program designed to teach resume building, interviewing, conflict resolution and more. The program also provides each student who has perfect attendance for the eight weeks with a laptop computer, building the technological capacity of his or her family and creating another incentive to continue with his or her education.

In 2010, the inaugural class of 60 Digital Youth Summer Jobs students participated in the program. Employers and students are being recruited now for the 2011 summer program.

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For more information
The Digital Youth Summer Jobs program is operated by a local nonprofit in each of the Smart Communities. Contact the program lead for more information about a specific program.

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**Smart Communities**
The Digital Youth Summer Jobs program is part of the Smart Communities program, which works to ensure increased digital access and use for families, businesses and other institutions in five Chicago neighborhoods: Auburn Gresham, Chicago Lawn, Englewood, Humboldt Park and Pilsen. Funded through the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program and supported by LISC/Chicago, Smart Communities is part of the City of Chicago’s Digital Excellence Initiative and operated by key agencies in each of the communities.