

Refurbishing/Redistribution Programs

Hundreds of nonprofit organizations are collecting used PCs, refurbishing them, and then distributing them to people who need them. It's a plan that benefits greatly from the rapid turnover of high-tech equipment throughout industry, education, and government. While each program differs slightly, the methods and mission of the San Diego Futures Foundation typify how such programs are a win-win for all.

The San Diego Futures Foundation allows one person's trash literally to become another's treasure. Established in 1999, it's an example of how industry, local government, and community nonprofit organizations pool resources and talent to keep hardware in the community.

In the late 1990s, San Diego County began outsourcing its information technology providers, with the largest contract awarded to Northrup Grumman. The foundation was set up specifically to support the community by passing along to it as much of its recently updated equipment as possible.

The foundation collects more than 3,000 PCs and related hardware per year. Some units are refurbished and then redistributed to community members, specifically families with foster children and those in low-income housing. Some are used by residents living in subsidized housing, where on-site computer labs offer training and related technology services.

Through the Foundation's Education Program, students at the city's historic Hoover High School disassemble the units, learn about the components and the function of each, then reassemble them, creating custom-built computers they keep. Instructors teach them how to install open source software, the ins and outs of maintaining a virus-free computer, and how to use the basic programs. At the end of the program, each student makes a PowerPoint presentation describing the work, with autobiographical elements describing his or her own growth in technological expertise through the program. They also produce an updated resume outlining their experience and newly acquired skills.