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## AHC Inc., An Affordable Housing Corporation Open Source Option Case Study

*AHC Inc., An Affordable Housing Corporation, (AHC) engaged Community IT Innovators (CITI) to develop and implement an affordable solution for computer labs at community centers AHC sponsors at five of its rental properties.*

### Profile: AHC Inc., an Affordable Housing Corporation (AHC)

AHC is a developer of low- and moderate-income housing in the mid-Atlantic region. Founded in 1975, AHC owns and operates 27 rental properties and provides affordable housing to more than 6000 residents. Its Resident Services Program serves more than 1200 residents annually through a variety of programs at property community centers including pre-school and after-school programs for children and teens as well as adult classes and workshops.

### Project Context & Goal

AHC's Resident Services Program was unsatisfied with the computer labs existing in the community centers at five of its properties. Performance of computers was uneven at best, spyware infections were common, and the look and feel of desktop environments varied wildly depending on the history of each computer. AHC needed a low-cost lab solution, useful to residents -- both children and adults -- with stability so that maintenance costs could be minimized. Director of Resident Services, Jennifer Endo, led the project for AHC Resident Services, "We struggled with the lack of controls on the use of the internet. We struggled also with the equipment -- we are in the business of education and learning for children and young people. I would rather put money into staff for these purposes. On the other hand we need to have technology that works, but not necessarily the absolute latest."

### The Challenge

A traditional Microsoft Windows operating system approach presents inherent problems in a lab environment. Lab management tools can reduce these costs, but they can also be expensive and generally require technical expertise on the part of a lab administrator. The computers available at AHC Resident Services also no longer met the minimum recommendations for the latest Windows operating system.

### Our Approach

Community IT Innovators (CITI) recommended a Linux terminal server solution. CITI also identified four alternate infrastructure options (including Windows standalone as well as Windows terminal server solutions) with an analysis of the pros and cons of each. AHC was able to make an informed choice based on its assessment of the costs and benefits of each option.

CITI installed new Edubuntu Linux servers at each property and repurposed old workstation hardware as PXE booting Thin Clients. The cost, including both hardware/software and labor costs, was approximately \$3000 per lab. Community IT Innovators continues to maintain the Edubuntu labs at these five AHC property community centers and may roll out additional labs as AHC's Resident Services programming expands. Community IT Innovators also provides (Windows) infrastructure support to AHC Inc.'s main administrative office and property management offices.



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## Impact

Most importantly, staff and residents have found the Linux operating system meets their functional needs, and the computer labs have been a valuable resource to AHC Resident Services programs.

“We have been very happy with the web filter that Linux allows us to use”, Jennifer says. “And because the equipment sees a lot of use and abuse since many people are using it, we set the center up so it can handle the kind of wear it gets.” She also says there are still things to work out in using Thin Clients.

The terminal server model provides also a single point of maintenance. With remote access, CITI System Administrators can make most requested configuration changes quickly and without incurring travel costs. The operating system is stable and carries low risks for spyware and virus infections

To help save support costs, Jennifer is training staff (even though they are more “people” persons than interested in technology), to troubleshoot some problems. She also says staff are working with the expectations young people have. “We are educating the teens on what to expect. They have adjusted that while they aren’t able to download their favorite music, they can and do enjoy the educational games. This is the kind of learning that will help them be more successful in life.”

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Community IT Innovators (CITI) is an employee-owned company committed to helping socially responsible organizations. We provide objective consulting for software selection, end-to-end implementation services, online engagement strategies, relationship-driven technology support, website and database development and a complete range of network support solutions.