

**2008 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination
Commonwealth of Virginia**

Nomination Category:
Government to Citizen

Title of Nomination:
GED ON DEMAND

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2008 Commonwealth of Virginia NASCIO Award Submission
Category: Government to Business

Project: Virginia GED On Demand

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth of Virginia is revolutionizing the way that citizens can prepare for the Tests of General Educational Development (GED®). Through an innovative partnership between the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Education's Office of Adult Education and Literacy, the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, Cox Communications, Comcast Cable, and Charter Communications, adult learners can now view the 39 GED Connection videos anytime through the on-demand programming channels that each company offers free to its digital cable customers.

The most common obstacles to receiving instruction that adult learners cite are transportation to and from classes, lack of availability or inability to pay for child care, and scheduling problems. The GED ON DEMAND initiative is helping adult learners overcome all three of these obstacles by offering quality GED preparation that can be accessed at times that fit their schedules and in the convenience of their own homes.

The GED ON DEMAND initiative has quickly grown into a statewide network of adult education providers and learners. By partnering with multiple cable companies, the Virginia Department of Education has expanded its local adult education programs' instructional reach exponentially.

The GED Connection videos are recognized as the premier video GED preparation product in the country, but previously these 39 videos were only available on a limited schedule on Virginia Public Broadcasting System channels, or on videotape or DVD, limiting the accessibility to the content. The 39 videos provide instruction and exercises in the five content areas tested on the GED – writing, reading, mathematics, social studies, and science.

With over one million adult Virginians lacking a high school diploma or GED certificate, broader access to quality preparatory materials was needed. As the penetration of these companies increases, infrastructure is expanded and digital cable becomes the norm, we anticipate that access will expand to well over three million households by 2010. As the initiative continues to expand and awareness of the option grows, the potential value added to Virginia's adult education program could easily exceed \$250,000 per year.

The program allows Virginia to facilitate a better educated citizenry at no cost to taxpayers. Achievement of this goal also facilitates economic development in the Commonwealth.

Description of the problem and solution

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The GED ON DEMAND program leverages television, a commonly used and widely accepted technology platform, to deliver its content. It allows digital cable subscribers to access an expanding selection of powerful GED preparation programs using their digital cable box and remote, just as they would any other television program.

To access the episodes, users navigate a series of on-screen menus to the specific GED-related program they want to watch. Each episode title is accompanied by a brief description of its thematic content. As they watch these programs, users can stop, rewind, or fast-forward at any point; if they stop watching before the program ends, the digital technology will bookmark their place in the episode and return them to the same point when they resume watching.

GED ON DEMAND provides access to these educational programs to the approximately two million households in the Commonwealth that can purchase digital cable service. The on-demand feature allows under-educated adults, who often work odd hours and multiple jobs, to prepare for the GED Tests when convenient for them. Moreover, with escalating fuel prices, adult education programs are reporting that their learners are having more and more trouble making it into the classroom. Consequently, referrals to GED ON DEMAND are increasing.

Any digital cable subscriber can access these educational programs and is not required to provide further identifying information in order to view them. In addition, most subscribers have access to these programs in their own homes, allowing these adults, who are often self-conscious about or feel stigmatized by their lack of a high school diploma, to prepare for the GED tests in private.

The GED ON DEMAND initiative has quickly grown into a statewide network of adult education providers and learners. By partnering with multiple cable companies, the Virginia Department of Education has expanded its local adult education programs' instructional reach exponentially.

Beginning the partnership with Cox and Comcast, the initiative provided access to the content to approximately one million households in Virginia. Since October 2007, this access has expanded to about two million households and has added another cable service partner, Charter Communications. As the penetration of these companies increases, infrastructure is expanded, and digital cable becomes the norm, we anticipate that access will expand to well over three million households by 2010.

Significance of the project to the improvement of the operation of government

The Commonwealth embarked on this endeavor following realization that while the existing GED initiatives are "working," there are still individuals that don't "fit" well into the current GED/educational system. Many have the desire to get the GED credentials, but the current system is not "enough" so creative ways to reach them were required.

Prior to the development of this project, the GED ON DEMAND content, for which the Commonwealth had a statewide broadcast license, was only available on a limited schedule on Virginia Public Broadcasting System channels, or on videotape or DVD, restricting the accessibility to the content. Furthermore, none of these broadcast formats—analogue television, videotape, and DVD--provided statistics about the number of viewers accessing these programs.

The deployment of this project has significantly expanded the potential audience for of these programs, and has also allowed viewers more convenient access to the content. Not only is this content now freely available to Comcast, Cox, and Charter digital cable subscribers, it has been made available at no cost to any of the project partners.

The program allows Virginia to facilitate a better educated citizenry at no cost to taxpayers. Achievement of this goal also facilitates economic development in the Commonwealth.

Benefits of the project

The most common obstacles to receiving instruction that adult learners cite are transportation to and from classes, lack of availability or inability to pay for child care, and scheduling problems. The GED ON DEMAND initiative is helping adult learners overcome all three of these obstacles by offering quality GED preparation that can be accessed at times that fit their schedules and in the convenience of their own homes.

The GED ON DEMAND project also has opened the door to using the format for even more training. English as a second language and other similar topics can be delivered through the same format; these new topics now are actively being pursued.

GED ON DEMAND provides proof of concept and therefore is the first in a series of programs that the Commonwealth will be launching to provide a "leg-up" to those who need non-traditional ways of obtaining the credentials they need/desire.

All of the content has been posted at no cost to the Commonwealth. All of the current providers have been eager to participate, and more are in the process of obtaining/posting the content.

Since the inception of the program and as of June 1, 2008, Cox and Comcast report a total of approximately six thousand orders for the 39 program videos.

No formal ROI study has been instituted for this initiative, as it has not involved any investment on the part of the Department of Education or the partners. However, if one considers the six thousand orders for the content that have been placed for these programs and equates each one of those to a conservative estimate of one-half hour of in-class instructional time, this initiative has added \$69,000 worth of instructional value to the Race to GED initiative, based on an average teacher pay rate of \$23 per hour.

As the initiative continues to expand and awareness of the option grows, the potential value added to Virginia's adult education program could easily exceed \$250,000 per year.