



Oklahoma City employers have free way to donate used laptops to support community groups

by: Jeremy Hegle

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Lead Community Development Advisor Steve Shepelwich (top right) delivered seven laptops to the Perkins Public Library in Perkins, Oklahoma.

If you are an employer in Oklahoma City with laptops you aren't using, now is the perfect time to donate them. A campaign led by the Inasmuch Foundation, the Oklahoma City Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and a computer refurbishing company makes it safe, easy and free to donate. When you accept the Employer Laptop Challenge, you support Oklahoma City nonprofits and their clients.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of having a computer and the skills to use it.

Chad Wilkerson, branch executive, vice president and economist at the Kansas City Fed's Oklahoma City Branch, said closing the digital divide was important before COVID-19, but has become even more critical over the past year.

"Computers and internet provide a vital connection for essential services and learning, and those without could fall behind," Wilkerson said. "The Employer Laptop Challenge encourages organizations to join the Fed in refurbishing and donating used laptops to community members in need."

The Kansas City Fed launched [the Employer Laptop Challenge](#) in April 2020 as part of its work to narrow the digital divide. The campaign generated national attention and resulted in more than 5,000 devices donated in just eight months.

Most of those donations came from just a few large cities. That's because few cities have both a well-developed pipeline of employers that donate used computers and a credentialed nonprofit computer refurbisher. 501tech has supported the local nonprofit community since 2012, however, a lack of awareness has limited supply from employers. The Oklahoma City Branch of the KC Fed wants to build awareness and a larger supply of devices through the OKC Employer Laptop Challenge.

An ongoing pipeline can make a big difference to employers and residents of Oklahoma City. A new computer easily can exceed \$1,000, and essential software costs several hundred dollars more. At the same time, employers typically replace

company computers every three to five years. Old computers often are warehoused indefinitely, sold for pennies on the dollar, or sent to the landfill. This new pipeline will allow employers to donate these computers, giving them a second life.



Donated laptops restore people to the community

The refurbished computers will take on a new life at area nonprofits such as Goodwill, ReMerge and Sunbeam, providing digital literacy and job skills to area residents. At ReMerge, for example, when women move from supervised housing to a sober living situation, they also start computer classes, look for jobs and generally gain more independence. ReMerge plans to assign a donated computer to each woman that they can keep until graduation.

“Access to laptops not only helps ReMerge participants build digital skills, it also restores them to our community,” said Jenna Morey, the nonprofit’s executive director. “It connects them to educational and employment opportunities, links them to online communities, improves their virtual programming experience, and increases their access to health and public services that are vital to the well-being of their families. Digital inclusion expands the bounds of possibility for ReMerge participants.”

Got used computers? Here’s how you can donate

Employers, all it takes is first, donate your used computers; second, spread the word.

- 1 Identify laptops to donate. Computers should be no more than six years old.
- 2 Contact 501tech at info@501tech.net to schedule a pick-up. 501tech will safely destroy all data, using Department of Defense protocols, and refurbish the computers with new hard drives and software at no cost to participating employers.

3 Share photos of your donation on Twitter and Instagram using the hashtags #OKC and #LaptopHero.

About 501tech

A nonprofit organization with offices in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, 501tech provides other Oklahoma nonprofits with the technology and expertise needed to extend their social impact, such as used, rebuilt computers.

For more information about the OKC Employer Laptop Challenge, contact Steven Shepelwich, lead community development advisor, at steven.shepelwich@kc.frb.org. For information on how to be a #LaptopHero outside of Oklahoma, or on how to start your own computer donation campaign, contact Jeremy Hegle, community development advisor, at jeremy.hegle@kc.frb.org.

Author



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Jeremy Hegle is assistant vice president and Community Affairs Officer (CAO). In this role, Hegle leads the Tenth District's [Community Development department](#) with responsibility for leading and executing the Bank's districtwide community and economic development initiatives, which address challenging issues affecting lower-income individuals, underserved communities and small businesses' access to credit. He also represents the Kansas City Fed on the Federal Reserve System's CAO subcommittee and will manage the Bank's [Community Development Advisory Council](#). Prior to being named CAO in 2023, Hegle led the Bank's digital equity efforts. In 2019 Hegle co-authored [Disconnected: Seven lessons on fixing the digital divide](#), a layperson's overview of the digital divide. He led efforts to narrow the digital divide using three strategies: Expanding access to affordable home broadband. [Collaborating with state broadband directors](#), federal agencies, and local government on broadband deployment strategies and increased access through [affordable internet programs](#). Increasing the supply of low-cost computers by encouraging employers to [donate their used computers](#) to nonprofit refurbishers, schools and community organizations. [Informing banks](#), foundations, government and policymakers of the complex factors that cause the digital divide, the latest research on the topic, and creative solutions to fix it. Hegle joined the Kansas City Fed in 2015. Previously, he served in the Army National Guard and later helped launch KCSOURCELINK, a small-business support organization that links thousands of entrepreneurs with resources to start, grow and accelerate their businesses. Hegle has a bachelor's in business administration and an M.B.A. from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

About the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City is one of 12 regional Reserve Banks that, along with the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., make up our nation's central bank. We work in the public's interest by supporting economic and financial stability. The Kansas City Fed's territory includes Colorado, Kansas, western Missouri, Nebraska, northern New Mexico, Oklahoma and Wyoming. Our headquarters is in Kansas City, with branch offices in Denver, Omaha and Oklahoma City. The Kansas City Fed Community Development Department promotes economic development and public understanding that leads to progress for lower-income individuals and communities. Our focus areas include community development investments, digital inclusion, small business / entrepreneurship, and workforce development.