

ACCESS Tech Donations: Communicating to Increase Local Accessibility of Technology

SUSTAIN 3S03: Implementing Sustainable Change



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Pallets of donated and refurbished technology ready to be distributed to McMaster students and alumni at the ACCESS Tech giveaway event on October 27th, 2023.

Photo Credit: Hiba Syed.

Overview

In today's world, where digital access is a fundamental need, bridging the digital divide is more pressing than ever. This is particularly true for marginalized communities, as Canada's Annual Report on the Sustainable Development Goals underscored. [1] McMaster's ACCESS Tech initiative, launched in 2019, addresses the digital divide in Hamilton. Its mission is to collect, refurbish, and redistribute technology to those in need through a partnership with a local charity, Empowerment Squared. [2] This initiative also reduces electronic waste, addressing environmental sustainability. In 2018, Canada produced 10.8 million tonnes of e-waste, highlighting the significance of this effort. [3] The goal of our project was to increase donations of used technology from McMaster and to local communities in need.

Objectives

1. Create and disseminate various forms of communications
2. Host a donation drive and collect 250 lbs of technology
3. Host a giveaway event and upcycle technology to 70 students

Reporting

To achieve our first objective, we promoted both the donation drive and giveaway event via McMaster Daily News, McMaster newsletters, emails, posters, and Instagram to raise awareness. Our Instagram posts alone reached over 2000 accounts within two weeks. To increase participation in the donation drive, we advertised 40 free donuts for donors.

To achieve our second objective, we hosted a donation drive on October 20th, 2023. Despite inclement weather, we collected over 350 lbs of technology. Of this amount, 330 lbs of technology was reusable. The technology donated included 19 PC towers, 17 phones, over 15 monitors, 6 keyboards, 3 mice, 2 printers, 1 projector, and dozens of cables.

To achieve our third objective, we hosted a giveaway event for McMaster students and alumni on October 27th, 2023. Technology from the October 20th donation drive was upcycled. Despite more inclement weather, we had over 140 people attend, and 124 people were able to obtain an item for upcycling. This included over 30 monitors, 19 PC towers, over 20 keyboards, 6 SSD drives, 1 printer, 1 projector, dozens of cables, and more.

We focused on communications throughout this project, using reminder posts and introducing event attendees to the ACCESS Tech social media to increase participation in future events. After the communications and events, there was a 12.3% increase in Instagram followers, signaling potential engagement in future events. We created thank you posts with updates on the technology collected and the next event date to ensure sustained participation and interest in donations.

Collaborators

We thank our Community Project Champions, Sanya Sharma and Gregory Iaruso, for their tremendous guidance throughout our project; Dr. Kate Whalen and Nathan Butterworth from McMaster's Academic Sustainability Programs Office for supporting us in reaching our goals; staff from McMaster's University Technology Services and Facilities Services for their collaborative leadership and ongoing support for ACCESS Tech; Green Tech for helping us responsibly recycle unclaimed electronics; McMaster student clubs for reposting our social media posts; Empowerment Squared for the ongoing partnership and distributing items to communities in need; and the donors and up-cyclers who helped make the events successful.

References

1 Government of Canada. (2022, August 19). Taking Action Together – Canada’s 2021 Annual Report on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/agenda-2030/taking-action-together.html#sdg9>

2 ACCESS Tech: It Collection, Reuse, and Donation. (2023, November 22). Facility Services. Retrieved November 29, 2023, from <https://facilities.mcmaster.ca/sustainability/accesstech/>

3 Statistics Canada. (2022, February 15). Unravelling the story about household textile and e-waste disposal in Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2022015-eng.htm>