The ACME Network Final Report

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Name of Project: ACME Arts and Animation
Grant Number: 1986209
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I. Financial Summary	

- Total Project Budget Spent: $2,426,548
- CETF Grant Amount: $680,000
- Additional Grant: N/A
- Percentage of Match Funds Raised against Goal ($4,094,783): $1,746,548 cash
- Cost Per Unit of Outcomes: $73.00

II. Project Description, Goals and Objectives, and Outcomes	

Project Description

The ACME Arts and Animation Project connected over 30,000 students in middle school, high school and college in eleven counties to a mentoring network of peers, advanced students, instructors and professional artists from studios such as DreamWorks, Disney, Sony and Pixar. The project also provided professional development for 238 teachers.

The ACME Network (ACME) is an online educational and mentoring community that connects learners in arts, media, technology and academic classes (middle school through college) with creative professionals from the entertainment industry to foster leadership, innovation and 21st century creative skills. ACME uses traditional and computer-generated animation and illustration art training as a vehicle to engage students in learning and instilling 21st century critical thinking and innovation skills that are vital to any career field. Besides providing proficiency in art, animation improves communication and presentation expertise, as well as team work, collaboration, time management skills. A key aspect the methodology used by ACME is its "pay it forward" approach to mentoring. Students offered constructive feedback to their peers in order to earn access to professional mentors. This system established a pattern of mutual support and collaboration where the highest standards of performance and professional behavior were embedded in the experience itself – and rewarded.

ACME Online is a participatory (social network style) web portal where students post creative projects (art, animation) for review, critique and feedback by peers, teachers and professional mentors, mastering the language and practice of collaboration, communication, revision and presentation. ACME On-Air is a regular series of live video-conference telecasts between professional mentors and students in school classrooms. Professionals critique work and provide expert guidance, tips/tricks and creative solutions. Students must learn to communicate, defend their work, and accept constructive criticism.

Through these two program components, professionals were able to conveniently interact with students on an ongoing basis over the school year without leaving their studio or home environments. ACME amplifies the concept of one-on-one mentoring. A professional's interactions with one student or several students are viewed by the entire ACME community, effectively scaling the reach and teaching impact of mentors.

Goals and Objectives Summary
All goals and objectives have been completed. The projected exceeded all targeted outcomes.

Project Outcomes Summary

Outcome Description	Actual	Goal	Percent Completed
Number of youth accepted to college.	459	400	113%
Number of youth that completed course work that prepares them for a job/career.	1,805	700	258%
Number of youth and adults that completing training via distance learning.	30,655	30,000	104%
Number of teachers trained.	238	150	159%
Completion of Accessibility Training	1	1	100%
Development of an Approved Accessibility Plan	1	1	100%

III.   Accomplishments and Challenges

Summary of Accomplishments and Impacts of Project

Assessment of Outcomes Achieved in Comparison to Grant Agreement

All of the outcomes outlined in the Grant Agreement were met and exceeded.

Delineation of Deliverables and Outcomes Not Achieved and Explanation

N/A

Discussion of Other Positive Results from Project

Over the past three years, ACME has produced many positive results including empirically-based research in order to demonstrate the impact of the program, such as increased complex communication skills and increased animation skills. In addition, the program established a relationship with student graduation rates, college matriculation, student enjoyment of school, and work or internship attainment. The following are some highlights and results from the three-year program:

- Middle school, high school and college students demonstrated significant growth with respect to complex communication skills and animation skills, which included National Technology Standards of creativity and innovation, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making, digital citizenship, research and information fluency, as well as technical operations and concepts.
- On average, 98% of high school seniors over the past three years were reported to have graduated high school.
- An average of 94% of high school students over three years indicated that they would be attending college.
- 90% of college students reported that ACME has increased their confidence and their preparation for a professional animation career or a career in a related field.
- Over a third of college students indicated that they had an internship, while another third reported that they had offers of employment while in school. (2009-10)
- 100% of all middle and high school teachers reported that their students' animation skills and complex communication skills had increased due to their students' participation with ACME. Students reported that they enjoyed school more due to ACME.

An unexpected outcome was the donation of over 500 computers by DreamWorks Animation, a long-time partner of ACME. These high-end workstations were distributed to ACME schools across California. The following is an excerpt from one of the thank you letters sent to DreamWorks.

> *"…Partnering with the ACME Network over the past five years, I have been thrilled to see hundreds of our students venture beyond our classroom walls and make strategic contact with college programs and industry leaders like DreamWorks through our mutual participation in the ACME teleconferences and website. This kind of direct access is a tremendous help in keeping our career and technical education program relevant and vibrant. Many of our students have subsequently made life-changing decisions and gained admission to art and animation programs at colleges like CalArts, Chapman University, Cal State Fullerton and BYU….I would like to see future students have more exposure to basic 3D operations as part of the introductory program. Your computer donation has moved us much closer to this becoming a possibility."* --- High School Visual Arts Instructor

Overview of Major Challenges to Achieving Planned Results

Identify Major Challenges to Successful Implementation

Due to organizational changes, and changes in the economic landscape of education departments and their funding, raising match funds and implementing the program was difficult. The outdated mentoring website was challenging as well in terms of student participation online. In spite of the mentioned challenges, ACME succeeded in providing services to students and teachers and met and exceeded all outcomes outlined in the Grant Agreement.

Discuss Efforts to Address Challenges and Resolve Problems

Efforts to re-structure internally have been successful providing the program with new and clear program leadership. The existing website was significantly updated and a new website has been designed and is in the process of being implemented.

IV. Lessons and Recommendations

Summary of Lessons Learned

<u>**Lesson #1:**</u> ACME conducted some school outreach at the start of the program but learned to frontload school outreach at the beginning of the grant to serve more students, expand the school fee-based services, and move toward greater financial sustainability.

<u>**Lesson #2:**</u> ACME learned to allocate more funds towards development and partnership outreach at the beginning of the grant to expand and strengthen its funding relationships and increase the grant match funds.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Expanding the Project in Region or Scaling Up Statewide

Throughout the three-year program, ACME has received recommendations from an independent evaluator. It was recommended that ACME continue to explore and define program elements in order measure student success and growth. In addition, it was recommended that ACME strive to continue to incorporate systematic process, where appropriate, in order to inform program, identify best practices, criteria as it relates to success and growth in students and teachers, and processes that will capture both quantitatively and qualitatively the success of the program. Finally, it was recommended that ACME continue to develop tracking procedures and collaborative processes to set the stage for a scalable program. Specifically, recommendations to ACME included:

- Development of a "Guide to Quality" that encompasses expectations for both teachers and students, criteria of quality for student work and comments, expected levels of participation, best practice and other extraneous elements that determine success. In addition, the guide should include clear defined processes from client intake to successful participation for teachers and students.
- Continued development of the tracking system. Develop systematic processes within the new website and determine a collaborative approach with respect to program and organization to design a system that works for informing program, evaluative, accountability with respect to client participation, quality, and the documentation of interventions in order to determine best practice. It is encouraged that the process includes program, staff and additional expertise in order to develop a comprehensive system.
- Development of the new website, which is critical for the sustainability of the program and should be the priority. Based on student and teacher feedback, many of them do not fully participate due to the outmoded website.
- Continued development and widening of the collaborative learning model utilizing teachers, students, staff, additional professionals and field related expertise in order to broaden the base in order to support and strengthen the foundation of the program.
- Exploration of mobile applications of ACME.

Based on these recommendations, ACME established criteria that examines adequate levels of participation with respect to comments and work uploads and communicating that criteria to teachers to establish guidelines with their students. In addition, a new website was completed and it exceeded above and beyond the recommendations of the evaluator. ACME developed and implemented the tracking system during the course of the grant and continues to be intertwined with the development of the new website in order to automate tracking processes. Efforts remain continuous in the development and widening of the collaborative learning model by engaging a diverse group of professionals, providing resources and training for teachers and obtaining feedback from members of the community. Finally, ACME is exploring mobile applications of the ACME program and continues to explore advances in technology and their applications to the ACME program, such as online conferencing and on-air telecasts.

Recommendations to CETF Regarding Grants Management

Recommendation 1: Modify and streamline the grants tracking documents. The grant reporting documents are much more complicated and time intensive than reports required by other funders.

Recommendation 2: Provide more preparation time for grantee when requesting additional documentation or information. Throughout the grant period numerous requests for information were received that required a "same day" response, which was not always possible to meet. Overall the CETF staff was extremely professional and responsive, especially our program monitor.

V. Grant Agreement Requirements

Purchased Equipment

No equipment was purchased with CETF grant.

CETF of Grant Funds

All of the CETF grant funds were expended.