

HP PIONEERS MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR MICRO ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PART I

Since the development of corporate community investment, the Holy Grail has long been the effective monitoring and evaluation of the real value of the contribution – to both the community concerned and the investing organization.

Given its history of innovation and commitment to corporate social responsibility, it probably comes as little surprise then that HP has broken new ground with a comprehensive and systematic new program to monitor and evaluate its Micro-Enterprise Development initiative in Asia Pacific.

In collaboration with Dr Marina Martin Curran who holds a PHD in CSR reporting, HP have pioneered the monitoring and evaluation program, positioning them at the cutting edge of accountability in community investment programs – an area which very few organizations currently address. The project design was completed after various meetings between HP and Dr Martin Curran, identifying from the outset all stakeholders and their specific needs, project objectives and tangible outcomes – all which were then built into the final design of the core program.

The final evaluation will be based on extensive research which will be carried out by post graduate students from the Australian National University (ANU), which will provide a range of quantitative and economic data, as well as case studies and best practices about the impact of HP's Micro Enterprise Development Grants. ANU were selected following an extensive process to find the organization with the most progressive and flexible approach to this type of Monitoring and Evaluation exercise. In particular, ANU's expertise in international community development demonstrated a keen sensitivity and understanding of the various drivers of the corporate, academic and community environments that the program needed to take into consideration.

The benefits of this approach are many and varied. Firstly, the study will enable HP to accurately report both the positive and areas for improvement of the program to internal and external stakeholders, as well as the beneficiaries of the initiative – something which all companies are under increasing pressure to deliver. Specifically, this detailed analysis will enable HP to measure the economic rates of return of the program, including how its investment translates into economic benefits for the beneficiaries and the overall value of the social impact for the relevant communities.

Secondly, the detailed level of assessment will provide a considered base for HP to ensure that the program's objectives are being met and the investment is providing maximum benefit to the communities involved. Any changes that may be required to improve the program can easily be identified and implemented.

Researchers will travel to the various recipient sites of HP's Micro Enterprise Development initiative throughout the region to gain first-hand data and understanding of the various projects, including a "before" and "after" study, evaluating the economic status of the micro entrepreneurs. HP mobility solutions will be utilized to help facilitate the process, including HP iPAQs, which will be used to collect data with pre configured questionnaires, which will then be submitted to a central server. iPAQs will also be

utilised for functions such as recording interviews and providing qualitative report templates.

HP recruited the help of Australia-based software developer, Grabba to build a user-friendly software application for the HP iPAQs, specifically to meet the unique needs of the project. The result is a custom written application which enables answers to the monitoring and evaluation surveys to be electronically compiled for easy generation of reports and statistics. According to the developers, a deliberate focus of the software has been to keep functionality simple, enabling an easy to use tool for researchers on site.

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This isn't the first pioneering initiative for HP Asia Pacific and Japan, which has an ongoing commitment to the effective measurement of its community investment programs. The team is the first Asia Pacific member of the London Benchmarking Group (LBG) which provides a model for capturing the inputs, outputs and impacts of social investments and measures these against the goals of the company and benchmarks them against industry peers.

With these combined initiatives, HP Asia Pacific looks likely to be the first multi national corporation to carry out a comprehensive assessment of its community investment programs in the region.

In the second part of this series, we will cover the process as the first site visits commence, including the preparation and training of evaluators and some of the initial observations. Final evaluation will also be made available, once all the research and analysis has been completed.

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