



# Tech-Savvy Volunteers Help Mexican Organizations Use New Technologies to Fight Poverty

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*Tech-savvy volunteers with the ProMexico Service Corps are working to help local organizations in the state of Oaxaca exploit the vast fund-raising and marketing potential that new technologies provide.*

PR9.NET November 18, 2005 - The cooperative Nueva Vida (New Life) is located in Teotitlan del Valle – a small town outside of Oaxaca – and comprised of poor Zapotec women dedicated to the art of carpet weaving. These women use natural dyes and weaving techniques dating back centuries to create carpets (or tapetes) of the finest quality. Despite the caliber of their product, the women at Nueva Vida have struggled to find a market for their craft—having to compete with larger producers or being paid a pittance by savvy middlemen.

ProMexico volunteer, Jay Kim, began working with the women of Nueva Vida in May of this year, teaching them some basic sales English and helping to create English-language marketing materials to help attract foreign tourists. He quickly realized that with a website these women could provide direct access to their products for consumers throughout the world.

Over the next few weeks Jay, working daily with the tech-novice Zapotec women, created [www.zapotecos.com](http://www.zapotecos.com). Not only can consumers now directly access the colorful rugs but they can read about the women who make them and their cooperative, the weaving process in general and the local history of Teotitlan del Valle and surrounding area. Consumers can also customize the design and color of their carpet and pay on line using Paypal. The carpets, when finished, are shipped directly to the consumer. The website, in effect, eliminates all of the middlemen that have previously skimmed profits off each rug and – by accessing the general public directly – provides cheap marketing for the capital-strapped cooperative.

Using the internet to access the general public has helped another organization in Oaxaca, Estancia Fraternidad A.C.—namely in the form of fund raising. The Estancia Fraternidad is a non-governmental organization working to support Oaxaca's public hospital, The Doctor Valdivieso—the only hospital in the state free to the public (serving 570 municipalities in 30 regions of Oaxaca). Because of the large demand and their limited resources, the hospital often has to turn away patients who aren't quite sick enough or who are deemed healthy enough to be discharged even if they are not yet healthy enough to make the long journey home. The Estancia provides these people and their families – some of Oaxaca's poorest – cheap accommodation and three meals a day while they remain in Oaxaca—often the only alternative from sleeping in the street. For 10 pesos a day (US\$.95) per person they provide a bunk and three hot meals to anyone who needs it. The Estancia also provides clothing and medication and psychological counseling for all of their boarders.

Because the per diem cost for supporting each person is about 50 pesos a day (US\$4.75), Estancia relies on funding from public and private sources for most of its costs. Much of this funding has come in the form of private donations, from generous people who believe in the organization's mission.

Jordan Hollander, a ProMexico volunteer in September of this year, realized that Estancia was struggling to get current information to its donors and to reach out to new potential donors. He recognized that by creating a new website he could help resolve both problems. Working with Estancia's directors he created [www.estanciafraternidad.com](http://www.estanciafraternidad.com). This website is in both English and Spanish, is simple to navigate and was set up in such a way so that it is easily updated and manipulated by the Oaxacan-based staff. People interested in learning about and supporting Estancia's efforts can now read about the project, current news and events, and even make donations directly using a credit card or Paypal account.

Direct access to consumers, cheap marketing and easier means to raising funds are just the tip of the iceberg for ways in which new technologies offer every day people and organizations means to better meet their needs and achieve their missions. Making locals better aware of the potential of these technologies and helping them exploit their potential could make a real impact on the fight against poverty in Southern Mexico.

"Tools like the internet are underappreciated," comments Jordan, "there seems to be a fear or apprehension toward their use." The ProMexico Service Corps and its tech-savvy volunteers are working to combat this fear and to help local organizations exploit the benefits of new technologies one organization at a time.

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## About ProWorld Service Corps

ProWorld Service Corps is a company specializing in study abroad and volunteer work service projects in Peru (ProPeru), Belize (ProBelize), Mexico (ProMexico), India (ProIndia), and Thailand (ProThailand). Founded in 1998, ProWorld provides enriching experiences for volunteers while striving to make a difference in cooperative communities.

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