



## Welcome to Catalyst

As one of the Bay Area's top corporate philanthropists, Microsoft is frequently asked about our nonprofit partners and grantees. Which local organizations are truly extraordinary? Which are having the greatest impact? Which are serving as catalysts for change? In response to these questions, we launched Catalyst Magazine earlier this year. Each quarter, we highlight a different issue and explore the work of stellar Bay Area nonprofit organizations.

In this edition we look at education, with a focus on organizations that help students be successful, though not through traditional in-school approaches. Many of the programs improve learning in science, technology, engineering, and math. If successful, the students of today will become the professionals we will need to have a vibrant economy and a safe and healthy community.

Though diverse in their methods, all of these nonprofits help students achieve their full potential, ideally completing a college degree.

We applaud their important work and we are happy to feature it here.

*Sid Espinosa*

**Sid Espinosa**  
Director of Corporate Citizenship, Microsoft

**Microsoft**

# Turning dreams into reality

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Savings programs boost working poor's assets for education

**It's estimated that a single parent with two children living in the Bay Area needs \$65,000 per year to meet basic needs, yet someone working for 40 hours a week at minimum wage typically earns just \$16,640 annually. As a result, one in four Bay Area families has to make choices between paying rent, buying food, and staying healthy. For these members of our community, paying for a college education seems like an impossible dream, though one that could lead to a long-term escape from poverty.**

Opportunity Fund helps the working poor of the Bay Area improve their economic well-being through financial education, microfinance loans, matched savings accounts, and affordable housing financing. Thousands of low-income residents have benefited from the organization's Individual Development Account (IDA) savings program, which provides matching funds when clients make regular deposits toward an important goal. A donation from Microsoft is helping Opportunity Fund reach their goal of enrolling more than 300 new families in the IDA program this year.

Unlike in other parts of the country, where home ownership is the goal for most participating savers, 85 percent of Bay Area participants save for their education or that of their children. The potential for this to change a family's future is enormous, but the process for saving is simple.

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How it works: Participants can receive an additional \$4,000 in matching funds when they save \$2,000 over two to three years. Additionally, the savers must first complete a financial education course. Opportunity Fund has found that while the funding is important, receiving financial education and developing the habit of saving are even more critical to long-term success as participants build assets for themselves and future generations. "Our clients tell us over and over again: 'That was the part that really changed my life,'" says CEO Eric Weaver.

Growing up in Fresno and East Palo Alto, Miriam Torres attended 12 different schools and at one point her family lived in their car. But through it all, Miriam never lost her conviction to pursue a higher education.



Opportunity Fund helped Miriam Torres get her education and now she's one of the others.

When she first learned of Opportunity Fund's matched savings program, she knew it would help her realize her dream of graduating from college. She held down two part-time jobs while in school, and after two years Miriam had saved \$2,000 and received a \$4,000 match on her hard-earned savings. In June 2009, her dream came true as she graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She now works at California State University, East Bay, in a program that encourages at-risk youth to pursue higher education.

**If you'd like to contribute or volunteer, there are many opportunities, including the chance to sponsor specific individuals as they save toward their goals. Visit [opportunityfund.org](http://opportunityfund.org) for more details.**