

# Skills-Based Volunteerism Case Study



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## CISCO Leadership Fellows Program (LFP):

### Fighting Poverty and Restoring Dignity Through Skilled Volunteerism

#### CISCO Facts

Cisco was founded in 1984 by a group of computer scientists from Stanford University. Since the company's inception, Cisco engineers have been prominent in advancing the development of IP, the basic language used to communicate over the Internet and in private networks. Today, with more than 67,000 employees worldwide, this tradition of innovation continues with industry-leading products and solutions in the company's core development areas of routing and switching, as well as in advanced technologies. Cisco's corporate social responsibility practices are tightly integrated into its culture and business and fall into four key areas: how to treat employees, environmental impact, investments in global communities and governance practices. Cisco provides resources to help nonprofits and NGOs improve their capabilities.

#### PROJECT DIMENSIONS:

##### Resources:

Loaned Executive

##### Engagement Model:

Long term

##### Types of Skills:

Finances, Business Strategy,  
Management

##### Geography:

Local with  
international impact



Si White in the middle of a kids' discussion.

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## The Need

Grameen Foundation's mission is to enable the poor, especially the poorest, to create a world without poverty through access to micro-finance and information technology. Proclaiming that "bold thinking and new ideas are critical if we are to win the fight against global poverty," Grameen Foundation is a leader in advancing innovative solutions to make microfinance and technology work better and help more of the billions of poor people escape the cycle of poverty.

Using microfinance and technology, Grameen Foundation works with local poverty-focused organizations and global allies to help them reach and serve more of the world's poorest people more effectively. Their goal is to use their resources, knowledge and innovation to identify large-scale solutions and strategies that really do move people out of poverty. Grameen Foundation also works to share that knowledge widely. The Foundation supports 57

microfinance institutions in 23 countries through services provided in six key areas: funding access, talent management consulting, technical services, performance management measurement, knowledge sharing and social business development.



A palm oil business start-up owner and her team, thanks to a microfinance loan.

## The Model

Ensuring that Cisco's leaders have a clear understanding of the community is an important part of the company's development process. Cisco integrates awareness of community issues into a leadership skill-development program called the Leadership Fellows program by providing opportunities for current and future leaders to learn about, engage in and have an impact on the global community in which they live. The mission of the Leadership Fellows program is to leverage the intellectual assets of Cisco's employees while enhancing their leadership skills by helping the nonprofit community increase productivity and impact. The goal is to achieve

impactful, measurable, strategic engagements that optimize the community's effectiveness by leveraging the technology. The typical Leadership Fellow is sponsored by a senior level executive and is assigned for a six- to 12-month period to a nonprofit organization that impacts the areas of healthcare, basic human needs or education. The Fellow is committed to working on a strategic, pre-defined project with clear deliverables and serves as the leader of the project. Outcomes for such projects are repeatable, sustainable and scalable. An initiative is taken into consideration only if clear metrics for success are defined, as well as a realistic timeline for execution.

Si White, a Cisco finance executive, was approved for the Leadership Fellows program and joined the Grameen Foundation as a Leadership Fellow for a one-year period, initially to participate in the development of a new strategic plan and streamline financial processes. When a leadership change occurred just a few weeks into his Fellowship, White's role quickly changed to the CFO of Grameen, and Cisco extended his Fellowship commitment to 18 months. While the new role added significant responsibilities, White maintained focus on the strategic plan to help Grameen have a bigger impact on the poor.

## Client & Community Impact

During his fellowship, White completed his original goals of assisting with the new strategic plan, automating several internal processes and updating the organization's financial reporting processes. As the CFO, he also worked on the sustainability analysis, the spin-off of a business unit, the development of a new entity to perform consulting work in Africa, negotiations and due diligence of a possible merger, as well as the annual plan and audit. White's dedication to developing the new CFO and his involvement with an innovative Growth Guarantee program are two

additional contributions he made that will have lasting impact for the organization. The development plan resulted in a seamless transition when he returned to Cisco and allowed the promotion of an internal candidate, as opposed to hiring from the outside. Through a partnership with Schwab Charitable, the pilot of the Growth Guarantee program is expected to generate \$60 to \$75 million in loans to the poor, positively impacting both individual recipients and the broader micro financing sector.

## Participant Stories

White came into the Leadership Fellows program with more than 20 years of "for-profit" financial experience with multinational companies. While he had a general understanding of microfinance, he had no direct "nonprofit" experience. The learning curve was steep for him in the beginning from being at the new organization and taking over the CFO role. White quickly learned more about global poverty, microfinance, how to make the organization more productive and where his skills would provide the most value. During the course of the fellowship, he expanded his finance skills in the areas of treasury, banking, insurance and real estate. He also built upon his previous leadership and influencing skills by working across the entire organization, mentoring staff, providing confidence to the board and senior management and by remaining focused on the ultimate goal of moving people out of poverty. Although White began the fellowship with minimal knowledge of the nonprofit sector and microfinance, he became a valuable member of the organization and was

elected to the Grameen Board of Directors at the end of his fellowship due to his passion and hard work. As White shared with us: "After my 18 months with Grameen, and seeing the positive impact that micro finance can have on the poor, I wouldn't change the experience I had for anything. I'm grateful to Cisco for allowing me to have this opportunity to give back. I look forward to using the skills I developed during my fellowship when I return to Cisco and continue my volunteer work."

Alex Counts, CEO of Grameen Foundation, has been truly impressed by the result of the Leadership Fellows program. Counts said: "White brought unique insights and valuable expertise to Grameen Foundation and made a profound imprint on the organization. He helped us address several operational challenges and roll out a new strategic plan - all the while mentoring several emerging leaders within the organization."

## Chaibia Sabil's Story

Chaibia is a client of Foundation Zakoura, a Grameen Foundation Growth Guarantee recipient. Her story of the impact of micro financing is a perfect example of the program's power:



*"Before moving to Oujda, Morocco, I learned my mother's business of trading merchandise. Several times I lost all of my merchandise at custom checks, which left me vulnerable to risk. I had many financial problems, since the salary of my husband was not sufficient to cover the costs of raising our three children. One day I heard about Foundation Zakoura through women in my neighborhood. The staff was very welcoming and after telling them about my business we agreed on a loan of 1000Dh (US \$125) to begin a small project to buy and resell wholesale clothing.*

*Not long after, I was approved for a second loan of 5000 Dh, which went entirely toward my business. The profits that I made helped solve my personal and family problems. I was even able to help my oldest son, Abderahman, with his marriage.*

*Now he is following the family business of reselling clothing. Foundation Zakoura recently began lending to men, and my son has just been approved to take out a loan to buy more merchandise.*

*Since receiving my first loan from Foundation Zakoura, I have become one of the most active women at my branch. I take advantage of other activities that they offer, like theater and environmental awareness training. I also read Zakoura's weekly newspaper, which is written in clear and simple language for women like me with only a primary education."*

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**For more information on CISCO Leadership Fellows Program, please contact:**

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