BADGES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING COMPETITION WINNERS ANNOUNCED
Digital Badges Show Promise, Potential to Supercharge 21st Century Learning

March 1, 2012, San Francisco, California—The Badges for Lifelong Learning Competition winners were announced Thursday, March 1, at the Digital Media and Learning Conference. The Competition links designers, entrepreneurs, technologists and educators with leading business and industry organizations to build digital badge systems and explore the ways badges can be used to help people learn, demonstrate skills and knowledge, and unlock job, educational and civic opportunities. The Competition is held in collaboration with Mozilla and is part of the 4th Digital Media and Learning Competition supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and administered by HASTAC.

Learning happens everywhere and at every age. Traditional measures of achievement, like high school diplomas, GEDs and college degrees, do not adequately convey the full range of knowledge and skills that students and workers master. Badges are a simple, visible representation of accomplishment that can be earned through a variety of formal and informal learning environments. They can present a more nuanced picture of what an individual knows and can do. These competencies can then be demonstrated and marketed to employers, academic institutions and peer communities.

The winners—awarded grants ranging from $25,000 to $175,000—demonstrate the wide range of approaches to, and uses for, digital badges and badge systems. They illustrate the potential of new technologies to improve academic achievement, economic opportunity and civic engagement. Thirty winners (http://dmlcompetition.net/Competition/4/winners.php) were selected from a highly competitive pool of 91 finalists, including:

- The **Disney-Pixar Wilderness Explorers Badge System** engages youth in nature-based explorations, offering them a way to learn about and become advocates for wildlife and wild places.
- The **Manufacturing Institute's National Manufacturing Badge System** will recognize the wide range of skills, competencies and achievements that students and workers need to be competitive in today's Advanced Manufacturing workplace.
- **NASA's Robotics and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) System** will engage learners in exploring new STEM topics and will create a unique collection of digital badges for learners of all ages.
- The **Young Adult Library Services Association's Badge Program** will help librarians develop the skills and knowledge they need in order to meet the needs of 21st century teens.

 "The number, quality and vision of competition applicants demonstrate the potential of badges to help us reimagine learning," said Julia Stasch, vice president of U.S. Programs at the MacArthur Foundation. "Organizations from across an array of industries see great value in developing a system that recognizes skills and competencies achieved over a lifetime. Badges are simple, easy and, if done well, can change the way people share information about themselves, businesses make hiring decisions and organizations support the acquisition of skills important to their mission or to the larger society."

To accelerate and support the creation of a badge ecosystem, Mozilla is currently developing an open source platform that will offer a "digital badge backpack" for learners to collect and display their badge credentials from

youth through adulthood. The platform, called the Open Badge Infrastructure, was inaugurated in September 2011 to coincide with the Competition's launch.

"We believe digital badges have the power to unlock the full educational potential of the Web," said Mark Surman, executive director of Mozilla. "Our goal is to provide a free and open infrastructure that today's award winners—and any organization or learning community in the world—can use to easily issue and share badges across the Web. This will empower learners to take charge of their online identity and reputation, gathering badges from any site on the Internet and combining them into a single story about what they know and what they have achieved."

In conjunction with the Badges for Lifelong Learning Competition, Badges for Vets—sponsored jointly by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Departments of Education, Energy and Labor—awards were granted to three badge systems that aim to help veterans translate their military skills into civilian jobs or to receive advance credit in higher education. "We strive to support the men and women who served in uniform as they make their transitions to good jobs and advanced education," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, "Our Badges for Vets program will offer veterans a handy tool to demonstrate their experience to employers and educators."

Applicants were also invited to propose badging systems not only for learning content, but also for teacher learning and feedback. The four winners of the Teacher and Project Mastery Competitions, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, were granted awards of varying amounts to develop their proposed badging system. "We are thrilled to include teacher badge winners in this competition," said Carina Wong, deputy director of education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "Teachers, as much as students, need to be recognized for their achievements. Badging provides a potentially innovative and motivating way to acknowledge teachers' contributions to creating lifelong learners in schools."

"Digital badges have the potential to supercharge 21st century learning," said Dr. David Theo Goldberg, director of the University of California Humanities Research Institute and co-founder of HASTAC. "While we don't yet know everything there is to know about how a digital badge ecosystem will work in the real world, we know that digital technologies are changing the way we learn, play, socialize and participate in civic life. The badge systems in this year's Competition offer a promising platform to explore how we, as a society, can harness the power of digital media to advance learning in the U.S. and around the world."

This announcement concludes the final stage in the three-stage Competition. The badge systems awarded were judged on their overall technical and pedagogical quality, the effectiveness of the badges' assessment process, the system's aesthetic and design quality and the likelihood of acceptance and adoption by learners, institutions, employers and the general public. Winners will have one year to complete their work. Throughout the year, awardees and other applicants will receive ongoing support and training and will work together to form a robust community that will focus on developing and testing a thriving badge ecosystem.

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