

Participating Library

Wayland Free Library
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Our Program

The e-Skills Shop began providing training in digital literacy on October 1, 2010, with the primary focus being to improve skills of underemployed people and to provide skills to the unemployed. In the beginning, there was no data to support either a need or demand for such services. Over the following 15 months, it became clear that the unemployed were not taking advantage of the services. Most of the people who came to the e-Skills Shop were either retired or gainfully employed and presented us with specific training needs.

At the beginning of the grant, we recognized that the people who came to the library seeking help with computer related issues had varying levels of skills. We also recognized that because of the nature of the rural community, sustainability was going to be a difficult attain. For these reasons, we focused on two efforts: one-on-one training and self-paced web-based training modules.

The one-on-one training would allow us to focus our efforts on a person's specific needs without delays due to lesser skilled participants or frustration because of more highly skilled participants. We addressed the specific objectives of the participant. Initially, we limited these session to one hour, not wanting to overwhelm the participant. We found that many had the capacity and the desire to lengthen the sessions to two hours and a few have extended as long as 5 hours.

The self-paced web-based training modules, while much more time consuming and expensive to produce, would live on well past the end of the grant with little maintenance. People both within the Library's service area and anywhere on the world wide web could access these modules in the comfort of their home using their personal computer. Alternately, they could request one-on-one training with a specific module serving as the point of interest. These self-paced modules were immediately picked up by the other PCCs in the Southern Tier Library System and used in their training programs.

At the start we developed a short survey for one-on-one tutoring to help us determine if we were meeting their objectives. In addition to determining skill levels and their objective, the survey asked three Yes/No questions: Did we help you today? Would you come back? Would you recommend the program to a friend? After a dozen surveys came back with "Yes" to every question, we abandoned the survey as a waste of time, providing no useful data beyond participants saying we did a good job.

In January 2011, we began offering formal training sessions on topics that were the most requests in one-on-one training. Initial response to these training sessions was good but not overwhelming. We tried different days, different times, but found only one time that seemed to draw the biggest crowds: Saturday at noon. (A crowd in a rural area can be defined as: “where two or more gather...”)

By the end of 2011, we had conducted 1060 one-on-one tutoring sessions providing over 1500 hours of patron training. Contrast that with 144 attendees at our formal training classes extending a total of 298 training hours. These statistics validate the model chosen by the e-Skills Shop.

Our Target Audience

During the development of the grant document, we determined that the population of our local school district (Wayland-Cohocton Central School District) would be the primary target population. In addition, because local newspapers were actually distributed to a broader geographic region, we included a neighboring town and village (Dansville) in our target population estimates. The total geographic region encompass 209 square miles with a population of 24,500. The greatest population density occurred within a 6 mile radius centered at the Wayland Free Library, 9150 people and included both Wayland and Dansville.

The primary industry is agriculture, but few are employed in that field. Two school districts, a hospital, and a division of Hon Industries are the largest employers. Most of the employed population works either north toward Rochester or south toward Corning. Unemployment figures of the individual communities vary from 7.7% in Dansville to 9.3% in both Wayland and Cohocton. Approximately 15% of the population is impoverished according to US Census records.

Another consideration resulting from the rural nature of our service area is the lack of internet service to many parts of the community. While this intuitively might inflate the target population, in fact it actually deflated our target numbers because those living in the low service areas generally do not participate in training activities.

Finally, instead of targeting the number of people we could serve based on the largest number of sessions we could offer times the number of attendees per session, we chose to base our target population on our estimate of how many people might attend any training we offered. (A spreadsheet of those calculations is available.)

OBE Results

As reported in the OBE Summary Report, the e-Skills Shop training has for the most part met and exceeded the goals established for each workshop. In the analysis of why some areas fell

short of the goals we found that some trainees either neglected to answer some of the survey questions or chose no response over a negative one.

The worst session was the “Photo Cards with MS Word.” A couple of participants in the workshop were disruptive and lacked sufficient skills to properly participate in that workshop. Since our policy has been to turn no one away from the training, we are pleased that only one session fell victim to those circumstances.

With regard to the lack of measurement for our one-on-one training, many of the participants in one-on-one tutoring were first encountered during our workshops. They came back for more targeted or personalized training. The instructor can tell right away if the person is getting the skill being taught and take corrective action immediately to ensure the success of the session. That is meeting the goal always.

One might ask: “How is that possible given the wide variety of subject matter to consider?” The answer is simple, if we don’t have any experience or expertise in a subject, we don’t schedule a session or we delay a session until we can study and prepare that subject. Thus, we often spend many hours learning new skills ourselves or running tests on equipment or devices to gain a working knowledge.

Additionally, all three trainers can schedule another trainer who they believe or has demonstrated greater expertise in the patrons particular needs, thus bolstering the probability of success in that session.

The bottom line in one-on-one tutoring is that they are always a success, the patrons are always satisfied, and more often than not come back, sometimes months later, with other needs.

Observations

Success is extremely subjective and hard to characterize. However, when you see people with little confidence and few digital skills when they first come to us, managing e-mails, creating documents, spreadsheets and slide presentation, you know that they have grown as a result of the attention they received from our trainers. When your students show you the project they just finished at work which used some of the skills they learned from you, you know that you have succeeded.

The patrons of the Wayland Library and the e-Skills Shop are delighted with the training opportunities that this grant provides. Many are amazed that they don’t have to pay a fee for the service. More than a few have wondered what will happen when the grant ends.

As trainers, we have grown technical, teaching, and personal skills that were never imagined at the beginning of the grant. The range of inquiries we field at this point in the grant is far wider than when the grant began. And while we cannot hold ourselves out as experts in every field of

computer training, the level of expertise we provide to our community is invaluable way beyond numbers served.

If we had any true disappointment in this grant, it is that few people ask us for help in seeking work or fashioning resumes and cover letters. We have seen more referrals from agencies for some skill enhancements in the last three months. That trend may continue as the economic trickle-down affects more small businesses in our area. We have already been surprised by some businesses that have laid off workers or reported their worst sales year in many years.

