

TRAINING RESOURCES: Training at Your Organization

Assessing and Selecting the Best Technology Training Methods for Your Organization

Why Training?

Training is essential to using technology effectively. New and old technologies alike go to waste when staffs do not know how to use them.

Money is going to waste. Estimate the number of hours you and other staff lose every week trying to figure things out and making unnecessary mistakes. Calculate the cost to of this wasted time.

A large part of technology spending should go to training and support. Money spent on concrete technology products like new computers and programs is necessary; however, it will not lead to effective uses of technology. Before buying any hardware or software make sure you have time and money allotted for training on the new equipment.

Training is necessary for staff to do their jobs. Relate the skill you need to learn directly to your productivity. Assess what new capacity it will bring to the organization.

Assess Your Training Needs

There are numerous ways to access training for your organization. Understanding what your group needs is an important step to ensuring people receive the training they need and can make their new skills part of their daily practice.

Before you start calling your network of organizers and zipping through web sites, ask yourself the following questions.

Staff /Skill Profile

- Who is the target audience? What are their skills and motivation level?
- What training has staff and members requested?
- What observable data indicates training is needed? Are folks asking the same questions about a program?

How Are Trainings Done at Your Organization?

- How have trainings been delivered at your organization?
- On a scale of 1-5, how successful would you say past training has been?
- What is your budget for training?
- What methods of effective training have you used?
- How does your staff learn best?
- Does training of staff typically happen off-site? (i.e. at workshops, in classes, independently)
- What training has proven successful in the past? (i.e. learners were able to apply what was taught immediately)? What training has NOT proven successful?

Training Objectives

- What technology skills does staff need to develop?
- What do you want to be included/covered in the training?
- If training were successful, what would be the outcome?
- What is the main problem/need to be addressed through training?

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Training Logistics

- Do you have time allocated for organized technology training for your staff?
- By what date do you want staff to be able to use software, systems, etc.?
- Do you have someone on staff that could deliver training?
- Do you know of other nonprofits or grassroots groups that could recommend a trainer or a class?

Deciding What Type of Training is Best for You & Others?

Things to Consider:

Learning Style. How do you learn best? Think about which past educational experiences have worked best for you in the past. What types have not worked as well? Do you like to learn independently, or with other students? How much do homework, deadlines and tests help you learn? Do you need someone to sit down with you at your computer and talk you through something new? Do you learn best by reading, or by listening, or by talking?

Level of Expertise. Are you new to computers and want a basic introduction to Windows, the Internet or Word Processing? If technology is stressful and intimidating to you, you might want to consider getting an individual tutor or taking a class where you will get encouragement and support from the teacher and other students. An introductory class with a nonprofit technical assistance provider, a local Community Technology Center or a corporate training center might serve you well. There are also many good introductory books, CDs and videos, as well as some excellent online tutorials in Internet skills for beginners. If you are more advanced, with more specialized training needs, you might find that you can get what you need out of an online class. You may want to look through local training classes carefully to see whether you can find the specific class you need at a community college, trade school, nonprofit technical assistance provider or corporate training center.

Time and Flexibility. How much time do you have to devote to training? Can you commit to a regular, ongoing class at a training center? Would you rather spend one or two full days in training? Or would you rather work completely on your own schedule, following a CD, book, or video, or online class?

Budget. What is your training budget? Can you afford to bring in a consultant as a trainer? Can you find courses in your price range? Training should be an integrated part of your technology budget. A large part of your technology spending should go to support and training.

Access to classes. If you live in a big metropolitan area, chances are you have more access to technology training courses for nonprofits, as well as to corporate technology training centers (CompUSA). If you live in an area with fewer training centers, you may want to look more seriously at books, videos and CDs, as well as online classes, Community Technology Centers and Distance Learning opportunities. You may also be able to pay for a trainer's travel expenses and organize a customized training for your whole organization. Another option is to partner with other groups in your area and hire a trainer to offer core courses for several organizations on one trip, sharing the travel expenses over several organizations.

Internet access. If you already have email and web access at work, and are reasonably comfortable using the Internet, you may be able to take advantage of an online class.