Planning for Technology Training

M uch has been written about technology training, and specifically technology training in libraries. Authors like Michael Stephens, Brenda Hough, and D. Scott Brandt are the go-to dream team for technology-training advice. As a tech trainer myself—and because tech training is a core part of developing and establishing the competencies process—I felt it would be remiss not to include at least a few pointers and tips. If you wish to learn more about technology training in general, I encourage you to read Stephens, Hough, and Brandt.

Budgeting for Training

What do you need in order to successfully launch a training program? Krissoff and Konrad state: "Successful staff and user training programs must be constructed on a foundation of time, patience, commitment, money, and expertise. In the absence of any of these five components, training programs will crumble."[1]

If you were to guess which of these five components libraries tend to skimp on, which would it be? *Money* of course—money to pay for extra help to relieve regular staff so that they can go to training, money to pay for equipment, money to pay for expert trainers, money to pay for an on-staff training coordinator. Libraries are always short of money—this isn't likely to change dramatically anytime in my lifetime. So, let's re-evaluate our priorities and realize that training is *not* a luxury, it is a *necessity*—and allocate our resources accordingly.

In the previous section, I touched on the need to think about budgeting and staffing for training. Library managers need to dedicate ample time and funding for staff training. Let me speak now to just the managers in the audience for a moment. If you're looking at how much to budget for next year, don't just double your current budget—triple it. Quadruple it. Put what you think is *too much* into the training budget, and see if your staff will rise to the occasion and use all that time and money. I'm willing to bet they will. If there's one thing I've heard consistently as I travel throughout the country, training librarians in urban and remote areas, it is that they are all starved for training. They are grateful for every new thing they can learn, every new skill they can obtain, every new tip they find that will help them help their users . . . your users. Help them help your organization. Help them help your public. Let them learn. Budgeting adequately for staff training is not a luxury but a necessity. As Marion Paris wrote, "It is time to 'fess up: good continuing education costs money. Will you choose to pay? Either way you will pay."[3]

Training should be viewed as a necessity, not a luxury; as mandatory, not voluntary; and as comprehensive, not superficial. Training should be both theoretical and practical. The consequence of poor training will be that our users will lose confidence in librarians: They will think that librarians have joined the ranks of others that have fallen under the weight of emerging technologies, and they will see libraries as another institution that is threatened with extinction as the 21st century approaches.
A. Krissoff and L. Konrad, "Computer Training for Staff and Patrons"[2]

When budgeting for training, consider the following factors:

1. on-staff trainer time to design and develop materials
2. someone's time to handle registration and track attendance

3. trainer time to deliver instruction
4. staff time to attend and travel to and from training locations
5. equipment required to deliver training (projector, laptop, MP3 players, PDAs, etc.)
6. hiring outside trainers for various topics
7. registration costs for staff to attend outside conferences and trainings

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Training, like so many other management tools, has become a library spending imperative. It is one of the library director's sharpest tools for directing shifts in institutional culture and speeding changes in work and customer service. . . . Training, after all, is the principal tool for changing institutional culture. Training prepares staff for change. Training helps workers and work units learn new ways of doing their work. Training sets the tone of customer service. How can any modern library not make training a budget priority?

Glen E. Holt, "Training, a Library Imperative," *Library Training for Staff and Customers*[4]

Another important element in "budgeting" for training is consideration of the workload for staff members who will be attending the training sessions. Staff workload must be altered in some way to provide sufficient time to learn without feeling overburdened in other areas. This may mean hiring more substitutes to provide staff members with more off-desk time to learn. It may mean ceasing a "for-the-public" activity like Internet classes or book clubs while staff members redirect that time toward learning. Each library's situation is different, so how staff workload is dealt with will vary from place to place. The important thing is to consider this factor in your planning.

Training Cycles

The best single piece of advice I can give regarding training from technology competencies is to create what I think of as training cycles. Each training cycle should consist of two to three months' worth of classes. How many classes the library can offer in that time period will vary based on budget, staffing, and availability of students, class space, and instructors.

Start with the basic courses and move on to the more advanced ones. Review the skills that staff members lack, and provide training for those areas with the most basic help first. Then work your way down the list by priority. The training sessions should end up being offered sequentially—the basic topics introduced first, with the intermedi-

ate and advanced topics following, building on previously established skills. Rinse, then repeat, offering each class at least twice in each cycle. The number of times you offer each class should be based roughly on the number of staff identified as needing training on that topic. Always figure that a few who need it won't come, and a few who don't really need it will want to come anyway.

Trainers may need to work one-on-one with certain staff members who need very basic help in things like simple mouse skills or how to open a file—*and this is okay*. Don't think of it as a waste or inefficient use of time. Establishing those essential competencies in *all* staff first is essential; otherwise, any other classes you're offering will be beyond their current ability level, and thereby essentially unavailable to them permanently.

Allow a month's break time between training cycles, both for the students to take a break and perhaps move into self-learning mode, and for the training coordinator to get a chance to catch up on basic responsibilities, create and revise class materials, and pause to reconsider where next to move with the next cycle.

For the first training cycle after the initial competencies assessments, I can give several recommendations that I have come by the hard way—by actually doing things the other (read: wrong) way and realizing my mistakes afterwards. I hope that readers can benefit from my mistakes.

- **First, take to heart the above recommendation to offer classes sequentially**. Offer plenty of sessions on the basic topics first, and then move on to the more advanced topics.
- **Consider starting with one-on-one or separate training for managers, if at all possible.** Managers who do not have the core competencies (and in my experience, it is usually the mangers who have the fewest competencies) will likely be embarrassed by this. When faced with the prospect of sitting in a class with employees they supervise, admitting that they too do not know how to do task X or do not have skill Y, many managers choose instead simply not to attend training. The result is that managers won't attend the training and the training coordinator is placed in the awkward position of telling the director that a whole set of managers (perhaps including the director) won't attend the training sessions they need. The best approach is to start with managers who may not have the core competencies for the basic skills, much less those required by management positions, and to be as patient, confidential, and empathetic as you can be as a trainer.
- **Hold an entire class on coping with change.** There are very few people who thrive in an atmosphere of change. I happen to be one the self-described "freaks" who does, and I find that many of my fellow freaks are also in technology fields. I don't think that is coincidence. But what to do about all the

staff members who do not thrive with change, and who may even fear change? Being honest and open about every change as it takes place is a good place to start. Another is by addressing those very real fears through an actual class on coping with change. For example, the Infopeople Project in California (an organization dedicated to training library staff on all sorts of topics) is continuously offering classes on coping with change with titles such as Effective Change Management for Libraries, Managing Change in a Library Setting, Living with Change: Coping and Stress Reduction in the Library Workplace, and Building Leadership Skills: Leading Change. See if a similar class is available in your area, or contact Infopeople to see if the project's instructors would be willing to contract with your library.

- **Provide ongoing support lines for staff members who need brush-ups.** Even with the greatest trainer and training materials, staff will still need help and reminders on the fly between training sessions. This will mean involving technical support, training coordinators, any in-house technical experts at each location—anyone who would be able to give that level of one-on-one help on the fly on the topics of the competencies training sessions.

Different Types of Training

There are four main factors in the matrix of learning and training mechanisms: scheduled and unscheduled learning, conducted both in person and electronically. Each has its strengths, and a combination of the four proves to be the strongest for any organization.

Scheduled Learning

There are many forms of scheduled learning, including, but not limited to the following:

- large centralized location group training (lecture, demonstration, or hands-on)
- location-by-location core training for common and essential topics and skills (lecture, demonstration, or hands-on)
- one-on-one training, particularly for the more basic topics and skills
- peer training (train-the-trainer)
- webcasts
- teleconferences

A central question to answer is: Who does the scheduled training? Who prepares the materials? Who gives the actual sessions? The library management can choose to use in-house trainers (either the training coordinator or a train-the-trainer model can be used) or consultants, or

can choose to send people off-site to locally offered classes. Is it more important to have a subject expert (your IT staff) training, or someone who is a professional trainer? Trainers can, in theory, train on anything. Experts have the knowledge—but are they the best people for training learners, adult learners, and possibly reticent learners?

Providing training in-house, if you are lucky enough to have a robust training coordinator or a strong train-the-trainer program, is the easiest solution for most libraries. Having one trainer from among the staff provide all training gives staff members a sense of continuity and a single person to follow up with questions or concerns before and after the training sessions. However, if there are subject experts among the staff who are logical choices to train on particular topics, use them. Not only will they benefit from the experience of setting up a training session, but their peers will also benefit from being taught by "one of their own."

Rachel Singer Gordon writes, "Training by peers can also increase the comfort level of less technologically skilled participants in your general staff-training sessions. They may feel more comfortable asking questions when the trainer is a fellow employee, and the use of library staff members to train each other provides a level of built-in "technical support" when questions arise after a training session."[5]

Here are three effective methods by Stone and Sachs to encourage staff to train each other:

1. Networks—joining trade associations to take advantage of trainings offered.
2. Buddy System—one employee training another (seasoned pro training new hire—or the other way around).
3. Pair and Share—forming teams or partnerships and working together regularly.[6]

Of these three, the buddy system is the most commonly adopted for technology training in libraries, though "pair and share" often happens informally through committees, staff meetings, and impromptu one-on-one interactions. A buddy system allows staff members to work together to develop and test their skills together and gives them an ongoing resource to tap in the future when help is needed. Lesley Farmer supports pairing up a veteran staff member with a younger, more tech-savvy staff member as a way to benefit both parties—teaching technology skills to the veteran and teaching training skills to the younger staff member.[7]

I, however, support a more even pairing of skill levels in order to avoid a one-way flow of information that leaves the information giver exhausted and feeling as though he or she has gained nothing from the process. Try to pair people up who work in the same location so that they can interact regularly.

There is a fascinating article by Patricia Wallace in *Computers in Libraries*, "Hurtling through Cyberspace: Tackling Technology Training," in which she talks about how the Enoch Pratt Free Library (Baltimore, MD) made massive technology transitions in 1998, moving from a largely dumb-terminal environment to a PC environment, moving from DOS to Windows, moving to a high speed network, and changing ILS vendors–all at once![8] Crazy, you say? Yes, I say. But somehow they made it through.

One huge contributing factor was this library's use of core competencies and a "train-the-trainer" model that effectively disseminated the needed skills out to branch locations. In a "staff readiness survey," they asked users to answer a series of questions that would rank them in one of four categories: mouseaphobic, mouseable, mouseloving, or mousemaster. Other surveys were given as well about familiarity with Windows and whether the knowledgeable among the staff would be willing to teach others. The result was a Master Trainer series where librarians, pages, and others were trained to be the Master Trainers for their locations. This led to some funky turnarounds of authority: "A certain table-turning of class level and psyche occurred, as it was sometimes the department page who was deciding whether the department manager passed or not." She also notes that there were some early retirements, and students sometimes had to take the same class multiple times before being able to establish competency in a certain area. The end result was a staff that was trained and ready for the changes coming their way–something for any organization to aspire to.

If the library lacks adequate in-house staff to train everyone on some or all of the competencies required (as it most likely will), consider an outside trainer or specialist on each topic, or contract with one trainer to provide all the necessary training. Consider sending people to local schools for training. If you're lucky enough to have a library school nearby, promote courses to staff. Even if you don't, scour the community colleges, technical schools, and community centers for class offerings–more and more these organizations are offering technical classes that anyone in the community can take. Organizations like WebJunction, Infopeople, OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries), SirsiDynix Institutes, and others are providing online-training opportunities for library personnel on an ongoing basis on a wide range of topics. Be aware of what's coming up from each of these groups and advertise the opportunities to staff.

Creating training in-house guarantees that you can set the agenda specifically to meet the exact competencies that your staff needs to have, whereas if you send staff to an outside class, some of what you require may be covered while some may not–or they may get much, much more information than is required. Still, there is a happy balance to be reached in every organization between internal and external training. Again, I must stress the need for an adequate budget for professional development to address these costs. Let staff upgrade their skills beyond the bare minimum competencies to the level that they want to have. Help people learn what they need to learn to do their jobs well.

> *WebJunction Course Catalog*
> http://webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=442
>
> *OCLC*
> www.oclc.org
>
> *OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries)*
> www.opal-online.org
>
> *SirsiDynix Institutes*
> www.sirsidynixinstitute.com

Unscheduled Learning

We in libraries like schedules, rules, and lines to color within. For many of us, the concept of unscheduled learning is totally foreign. Unscheduled learning is, however, how many of us learn most of the things we know. Unscheduled learning can take many forms, but it is always learning on your own schedule and at your own pace.

To this end, encourage staff to study and learn in an unstructured environment as well. In a well-known blog post on Stephen's Lighthouse, Stephen Abram encourages management to give staff fifteen minutes a day to learn. Abram writes:

> I've seen a lot of excitement about my idea that libraries can vastly increase their capacity for adopting new technology and implementing new, creative or innovative stuff if the staff invests 15 minutes a day (or every second day) in learning. If all staff participate you don't end up with isolated sole contributors. You have an army of people who understand Flickr, Blogs, Squidoo, etc. The capacity of the library system for innovation and change is exponentially increased. It also sends a positive message from the library leadership team about the value they place on staff, interaction, learning and relating to their communities and learning.[9]

Think for a moment about what fifteen minutes a day, or *even* fifteen minutes a week, would do for each of your staff members. Now, multiply that by the total number of staff members–how much learning is this!?! How much do you believe that much learning can affect the service your

users receive? Let staff play. It's hard to learn how to use a new piece of equipment for the first time when a patron or student is asking you how to use it. It's much easier to learn how to use the equipment at a time when no one is using the scanner for live service, and staff can instead casually play with it–much as we learn new technologies at home.

Unscheduled learning can greatly help staff move toward meeting the library's technology competency requirements. Much of what is likely to be included in the technology competencies is best learned through unscheduled learning means. Here are some of the ways staff can take advantage of all that unscheduled learning has to offer:

- reading a book, article, electronic-discussion list messages, or blog post
- attending a conference to take advantage of specific sessions, the exhibits, and networking
- seeing what other nearby libraries are doing via their physical or virtual sites
- viewing recorded and archived Webcasts, etc
- completing online tutorials
- preparing a talk or training for others
- taking self-study courses
- listening to podcasts
- viewing screencasts or vidcasts
- taking asynchronous online courses (taught through lessons pushed to the user through e-mail or RSS, Web pages, discussion boards, individual tutorials or readings, etc.)

Note that many of these options are forms of e-learning. Various types of unscheduled e-learning have great potential for effective training, especially in areas where it is difficult to bring staff together in one place for a coordinated real-time training. The trainee can choose when to access the training module, fitting it into his or her busy schedule. Slower and faster learners can progress through the training at their own pace, alleviating the "how fast do I go?" question that trainers encounter in face-to-face group sessions. Trainers will not encounter the same seat limits that you have in computer lab situations for face-to-face trainings. E-learning eliminates travel time move from learners' worksite to the site of the training. If you want to make staff unhappy, tell them that they have to drive 45 minutes from their regular worksite to a different location for a one-hour training session. See how many smiling faces you have after their trip home. Time on the road can be better spent in so many ways. When training on technology, it only makes sense to use the self-same technology to deliver that training!

One excellent source to tap for online training any time is WebJunction's online courses. Its entire course catalog is available at http://webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=442. Class topics range greatly, from

Microsoft PowerPoint and Word, to customer service and dealing with difficult people, project management and retirement planning, SQL Server Admin and Photoshop, to Spanish language outreach. Some of the classes are free, others cost between $10 (for their monthly special) and $50. WebJunction also offers bulk course package purchases, so a staff member can take the whole series in a particular subject area (Basic Computing and Applications, Networking, Unix and Linux, or Web Development) for a much discounted price. Anyone coordinating a training program should be aware of these offerings and consider them as an option for students needing training on these topics.

MPLIC Tech Train
http://mplictechtrain.blogspot.com

Computer HELP!
http://memphiscomputers.blogspot.com

Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County's Learning 2.0 Blog
http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com

*Missouri River Regional Library's Learning *Library* 2.0—Lessons*
http://mrrl1.blogspot.com/index.html

Another option is to establish a learning blog for the library to which one or more staff members post regular tips, tricks, updates, and news about the technologies used in the library. One great example of this is the MPLIC Tech Train from Kevin Dixon, technical trainer for the Memphis Public Library and Information Center. The blog is a one-stop shop for all tech-training information for MPLIC staff, including upcoming technology events, quick links to public computer policies and class schedules, online tutorials, information about the staff development department (they have a whole department!), Ask the Tech Trainer, not to mention the blog posts themselves, which are full of technology news, resources, services, upcoming classes, and tips and tricks. Each post is indexed (tagged) with general and detailed keywords. MPLIC also has a second blog, Computer HELP!, which is an FAQ of customer questions about technology. Each answer is actually a full-blown tutorial, with room for comments and questions from staff. Other library training blogs to study include the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County's Learning 2.0 Blog and the Missouri River Regional Library's Learning *Library* 2.0–Lessons. If you want to know how to do ongoing online technology training for staff members *right*, check out these libraries' successes.

Other Factors to Consider in Planning for Training

One person should be placed in charge of coordinating the training that is taking place. The following are issues that this person should consider when planning for staff training.

Tracking Student Progress

There must exist some way to manage and track staff completion of various programs or sessions—whether that is an "enter your e-mail address here" as the last step in an online class, a quiz, or simply taking attendance at each in-person session, it's up to the coordinator to determine which measure will benefit the staff and institution the most. Grids, spreadsheets, and simple databases can work well. If you are tracking on a unit or departmental basis, keep a separate spreadsheet for each unit or department to enable quick access to that group's training record. Remember to account for all the various ways that staff will be learning—scheduled and unscheduled. Another option is to let staff members chart their own progress levels. Have a simple graphical representation for each staff member to place at his or her desk (either in or out of view of other staff members) showing those skills already achieved and (once trained and later tested) those now trained upon and met. Use a system that emphasizes the training, not necessarily emphasizing and rewarding those who already have all the skills. Encouraging the training is what the exercise is all about, so rewarding those who have successfully undergone the most training or made the most progress is the direction you want to take. In the previous chapter we talked about the responsibility for recommending or requiring that staff take classes on the topics in which they showed weaknesses in the assessment. If certain classes are required of staff, a spreadsheet or database will need to be kept of who has completed which of the classes that were required of them.

> A library system that makes training a low priority disrespects the staff who work there. Staff have a right to expect regular and substantial training so they can do their jobs better. Ignoring training sends a clear message: The staff isn't worth it! No training or token training is "dissing" the staff.
>
> Glen E. Holt, "Training, a Library Imperative"[10]

Determining Who Can Attend Training

Another question often overlooked is: who can attend the trainings? Question your training approval process. Does the library require employees to get managerial approval to attend training? Why? If it's beyond the reason of scheduling, then find out why. Does the library have an open policy that any employee can take any training offered? If not, again, ask why. If a library assistant (LA) wants to take a class on handy reference Web sites, would a supervisor in your library likely say no? Why? Because the LA does not technically need this information for his or her position? What about the users this person could then potentially help when reference staff members are busy or absent? These are all important scenarios to consider and questions to answer because the message sent when the library doesn't allow all employees to attend all types of training is twofold: the employee isn't worth it, and the users (the public, the students, the internal customers) aren't worth it either. And that's a message that no library wants to put out to its constituents.

Class Facilities

Hands-on teaching in labs, one-on-one sessions at individual computers, demonstrations in meeting rooms, etc.—finding the appropriate facilities for training is something that is often unappreciated and usually not considered at all. The number of seats, the roominess of the room, the lighting, the quality of chairs, the setup (square table, reconfigurable tables, conference-room style setup, etc.) are all factors. For example, will the students have to turn their heads ninety degrees to look at your demonstration screen? If they need to work in small groups or with partners, can the seating and tables be rearranged easily to accommodate that? Is it quiet? In a busy area? Is there adequate and easy parking? Convenient bathroom facilities? Enough computers? Enough bandwidth to support classwide online activities? If you are teaching in a public library lab where the staff and public networks are shared, are there peak times of the day when a network slowdown is noticeable? If so, perhaps that isn't the best time for a class. Make sure that the facilities match the needs of the instructor and the students. Teach away from the day-to-day environment in an actual classroom if at all possible.

When to Hold Live Classes

When do you hold the training sessions? Survey staff to find out convenient dates and times. Work your schedule around them. You are one person—the trainer. Don't make everyone come to you for your own comfort. Go where the most staff is—this saves the organization time, and the students will notice that you've made the sacrifice. Trust me. One repeated suggestion from staff is always to hold training sessions before or after scheduled meetings; since everyone is all together in one spot already, why not take advantage of it? Also, mornings seem to work better for most types of training—people are more awake and absorb more information. Finally, consider offering a multiday "Library Academy" with a variety of classes that people

can choose to sign up for throughout the day, allowing staff to dedicate a day to learning instead of spreading it out over weeks or months. The downside to this approach, however, is that students might become overloaded with too much information and not retain as much as they would had the training been more spread out.

Registration Process

What are the procedures for individuals to register for classes? Do they need permission from their supervisors (oral or written)? Do they need to register with the trainer ahead of time (by phone, e-mail, or an online form)? Do they simply show up? Make the registration process clear to staff, keeping in mind that registration processes will differ for classes offered internally versus those offered externally.

Class Size

Should the number of attendees in various classes be limited? Most classes will be limited simply by space—the number of chairs or computers available in the training facility. However, I also recommend that for each class the instructor consider whether or not to limit the class size even further, especially for the more basic classes, where people are likely to need more one-on-one attention and have more questions.

Class Length

How long should a class be? The answer, my friends, is blowing in the . . . oh sorry. I'm back now. The answer depends on what's being taught. My general rule is to try to keep every class under two hours, and to overestimate the amount of time I think the class will take. No one minds getting out early; most people mind getting out late.

Training Promotion

Don't forget to promote the training sessions and to do so in a number of different ways. Include brief announcements in your staff's newsletter or blog with a pointer to a Web page on the intranet with more information about each class, whether taught in-house or not. Send printed flyers with information about each week or month's offerings for each location's staff room. Recommend certain classes verbally to certain staff groups—committees, particular employees, managers, etc. Make fun "tickets" for attendees to print out ahead of time in order to attend (an online concert ticket generator from Says-It.com can be found at www.says-it.com/concertticket). Continuously advertise the training opportunities. The more venues and the more times staff are presented with the information, the more likely they are to absorb it. In all the training promotions, be very clear about any prerequisites—in the initial training advertisements, in the registration confirmation e-mail, and in the class reminders.

Send out Reminders

Send out e-mail reminders a week before the class and then again the day before the class, requesting responses if attendees are no longer able to attend. Trust me and every other technology trainer I've ever spoken with: if you do not do this, you will see your absentee count rise. Incidentally, if anyone can tell me of a way to automate this process with a calendar system based on the training date and some rules, I would be ever so grateful.

Notes

1. A. Krissof and L Konrad, "Computer Training for Staff and Patrons," *Computers in Libraries* 18, no. 1 (January 1998).
2. Ibid.
3. Marion Paris, "Beyond Competencies: A Trendspotter's Guide to Library Education." *Information Outlook* 3, no. 12 (December 1999): 31.
4. Glen E. Holt, "Training, a Library Imperative" in Andy Barnett, *Libraries, Community, and Technology* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002).
5. Rachel Singer Gordon, *Teaching the Internet in Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2001), 19.
6. Florence Stone and Randi T. Sachs, *The High-Value Manager: Developing the Core Competencies Your Organization Demands* (New York: AMACOM, 1995), 53–4.
7. Lesley S. J. Farmer, "Teaching Veteran Librarians Technology," *Library Talk* 14 (2001): 8–9.
8. Patricia Wallace, "Hurtling through Cyberspace: Tackling Technology Training," *Computers in Libraries* 19, no. 2 (February 1999): 21.
9. Stephen Abram, "Very Cool Library Learning 2.0," Stephen's Lighthouse, Aug. 4, 2006, http://stephenslighthouse.sirsi.com/archives/2006/08/very_cool_libra.html (accessed January 12, 2007).
10. Holt, "Training, a Library Imperative," 80.
11. Abram, "Very Cool Library Learning 2.0."
12. Sarah Houghton-Jan, "IL 2006: Public Library 2.0: Emerging Technologies and Changing Roles," LibrarianInBlack.net, October 23, 2006, http://librarianinblack.typepad.com/librarianinblack/2006/10/il_2006_public_.html (accessed January 17, 2007).

Case Study: PLCMC Information Technology Core Competencies & Learning 2.0 Initiative

The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County (PLCMC) created an innovative self-directed learning and training program upon which I believe many future training programs will be based: Information Technology Core Competencies (companion blog at http://plcmc-core.blogspot.com) and the Learning 2.0 Initiative (companion blog at: http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com).

The core competencies are broken into a four-tiered pyramid, Cores I–IV, with I being the most basic and needed before progressing to the subsequent tiers. All staff are expected to meet Core I; any staff members who assist the public are expected to meet Core II; Core III covers specific technologies that are in use only at specific locations; and Core IV are "suggested for all managers, supervisors, Information Specialists, and for other staff as identified by their supervisor." The competencies blog is written by staff member Lori Reed, PLCMC's training specialist. It includes progress on the competencies, training offerings, tips and tricks, contests, trivia, and technology news and stories.

The second prong of attack, their Learning 2.0 Initiative, is based loosely on Stephen Abram's ideas about utilizing the Web site 43 Things (www.43things.com) as a way for staff to "track personal professional development."[11] Designed by Helene Blowers, the library's technology director, the program was designed to "encourage staff to experiment and learn about the new and emerging technologies that are reshaping the context of information on the Internet today."

The program listed three main initiatives:

1. encourage exploration of Web 2.0 and new technologies by PLCMC staff
2. provide staff with new tools (that are freely available on the Internet) to better support PLCMC's mission: Expanding minds, Empowering individuals and Enriching our community
3. reward staff for taking the initiative to complete 23 self-discovery exercises

Learning 2.0 was based entirely around a blog (http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com) created free through Blogger and used other free Web 2.0 tools like Flickr, Odeo, YouTube, PBWiki, and Bloglines. Staff members were assigned to learn 23 things in a nine-week period. Each "thing" got its own blog post with instructions, supporting information and resources. For example, here are the first two week's worth of "things."

- Week 1: Read this blog & find out about the program, Discover a few pointers from lifelong learners and learn how to nurture your own learning process.
- Week 2: Set up your own blog & add your first post, Register your blog on PLCMC Central and begin your Learning 2.0 journey.

Staff recorded their progress through an online tracking log and through their own blogs that they set up during the second week.

In a session at Internet Librarian 2006, Helene Blowers discussed the program. She emphasized that they wanted staff to take responsibility for their own learning and to reward them for doing just that. She also said again and again that the entire project was not a training program. There were no workshops, tutorial sessions, handouts, or cheat-sheets. Everything was done via the blog and by the employee by himself or herself. Blowers also stressed that the majority of staff participated because they wanted to learn about new technologies—few reported that it was being required by a manager or that the MP3 player swayed them, though I'm fairly sure it didn't hurt either. For anyone embarking on a similar program, Blowers had several pieces of advice: build the program for late bloomers, allow participants to blog anonymously, communicate weekly using 1.9 methods like e-mail, encourage staff to use each other's knowledge and work together, and continually encourage staff to play, learn, grow, and evolve.[12]

All staff members who completed the program received an MP3 player, and anyone who completed the program by particular dates were also entered into drawings to win a PDA and a laptop. The winner of the laptop was announced via a YouTube video (in true Library 2.0 fashion) in a post on the Learning 2.0 blog (http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com/2006/11/plcmc-learning-20-finale-or-winner-is.html).

Out of 542 staff members, 362 (67 percent of all staff, including full- and part-time staff in all positions) participated in the program, and 222 of the participants (61 percent of participants) finished the program in its entirety. You can read all about this innovative program on the Learning 2.0 "About Page" at http://plcmcl2-about.blogspot.com.