



Unlocking Hidden Talent: Digital Literacy Training in the Fox Valley

Situation

Fox Valley Literacy, a 501©(3) nonprofit based in Appleton, Wisconsin, faced a significant challenge: how to enhance digital literacy among both English language learners and native speakers to improve their workforce participation and community engagement. With a small team of six employees, the organization aimed to serve a broad area, including Waupaca, northern Winnebago, and Outagamie counties. The primary focus was on helping individuals achieve sustainable wages and better integrate into their communities.

Response

In collaboration with the Bay Area Workforce Development Board and New North, Fox Valley Literacy launched a digital literacy training program. This initiative targeted fluent English speakers, including both native and non-native speakers, to address workforce issues and uncover hidden talent. The program involved:

- Partnering with cultural community organizations like Casa Hispana.
- Setting up a referral system to streamline participant intake.
- Developing messaging to convey the value of the program and build trust within new communities.
- Hosting training sessions at a central, accessible location in downtown Appleton.
- Employing former digital literacy students as trainers to create a supportive learning environment.

The team initially faced challenges in marketing and outreach, realizing the importance of being thoughtful about who they were talking to and why. They learned to see the opportunity from the participants' perspective, understanding that many might feel hesitant to ask for help. The messaging was refined to emphasize the value of community assets and the collective benefit of building people up.

Outcomes

Over an 8 to 10-month period, the program successfully trained 48 students, resulting in over 100 certificates earned. This achievement demonstrated the program's effectiveness and justified continued funding. The initiative also led to an increase in native English speakers seeking services, marking the highest count in recent years. Participants gained valuable skills that improved their employability and community involvement, contributing to a positive ripple effect in the broader community.

Lessons Learned

1. **Building Trust Takes Time:** Establishing trust with new communities required persistent effort and trial-and-error in messaging and outreach. The team had to navigate the challenge of getting people to see the value of the service and feel comfortable asking for help.
2. **Central Location Matters:** Hosting the program in a central, easily accessible location significantly increased participation. Being near the transit center made it convenient for participants to attend.
3. **Peer Trainers Enhance Learning:** Using former students with lived experience as trainers helped create a relatable and encouraging learning environment. This approach helped balance the power dynamics and made participants feel more at ease.
4. **Sustainable Impact:** The program's success in earning certificates and improving employability highlighted the importance of aligning training with real-world needs and employer expectations. The goal was not just to teach digital skills but to ensure these skills translated into better job opportunities.
5. **Continued Adaptation:** Ongoing adjustments and responsiveness to community feedback were crucial in maintaining and growing the program's impact. The team learned to be flexible and adapt their strategies based on what worked and what didn't.
6. **Thoughtful Marketing:** Being deliberate and thoughtful in marketing efforts, understanding the audience's perspective, and clearly communicating the value and accessibility of the program were essential in attracting participants. The team realized the importance of seeing the opportunity from the participants' lens and addressing their concerns.



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7. **Community Value:** Emphasizing the program's role in valuing and building up community assets helped participants see the broader benefits and feel more comfortable seeking help. The messaging focused on the collective benefit of building people up, which resonated with the community.
8. **Trial and Error:** The process involved a lot of trial and error, especially in figuring out the right messaging and approach to draw people in. The team had to be patient and persistent, learning from each attempt and refining their strategies accordingly.
9. **Ease of Use:** Making the program approachable and simple was key. The team worked to ensure that the training environment was not intimidating and that participants felt supported and encouraged throughout the process.

Learn More

This case study underscores the importance of targeted digital literacy training in empowering individuals and strengthening community ties. By focusing on thoughtful marketing, building trust, and creating a supportive learning environment, Fox Valley Literacy was able to make a significant impact on the lives of its participants and the broader community.

Case Study contact information to come!

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