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Taming Technology

The Library as a Hub for Digital Literacy

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Executive summary

In the last twenty years, public libraries have transformed to become “Digital Literacy” hubs where patrons can access free public computers, free wireless internet and get free training on using new technologies, and assistance with tech applications on a range of learning, work, health, and government services contexts. Digital literacy training meets people “where they are” and builds the skills needed to participate fully in today’s workforce, economy, health system, social services, and day-to-day living. (Bertot, 2015).

The Santa Barbara Public Library has a history of offering Adult Literacy tutoring, computer coaching and free access to public computers. We are proposing in this grant application, to establish a learning center within the Santa Barbara Public Library Central branch dedicated to helping adults improve their access to the online world of services and learning. Fulfillment strategies would include conducting small classes, one-to-one tutoring, and individual online learning. The desired outcomes of this Digital Literacy Center are to build digital literacy for adults 18 and over, and to enable successful navigation of online interfaces for attaining public services, vocational training, job searching, educational opportunities, financial services and basic information literacy. Thus enabled, the learners would have improved access to opportunities to attain further services, education and have better earning potential.

Similarly, the Library’s companion proposal, called ***One in Five***, would establish a dyslexia help center within our existing Adult Literacy program, a free service not currently available to many local adults. Neither of these proposed initiatives duplicate services provided by any other agency in the region. Instead they remove barriers and expand access to the education, services and opportunities offered by other agencies.

The Santa Barbara Public Library is a valuable community partner in promoting equal opportunity to education and employability and welcomes opportunities to partner with other agencies.

Program Goals

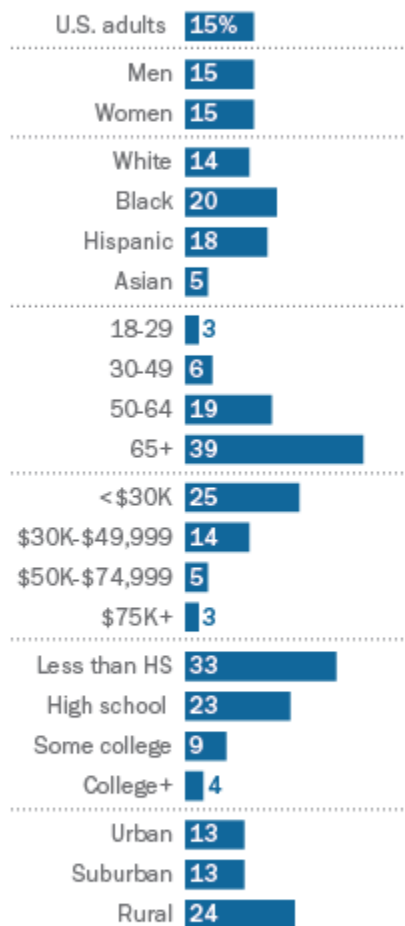
The overarching goal for this grant is to provide gateway technology skills for those who do not have access, capability, or means to access the internet using currently available technology, such as computers, tablets or smartphones. Specific goals for this first year are to work with the related partner agencies to identify and acquire the software assessment and training tools that will align with existing programs, to create a detailed project implementation plan, to acquire computers, books and additional online assessment and training resources, create new webpages as portals to learning materials, become a certified test center for the WorkKeys Readiness Indicator online tests promoted by the Workforce Resource Center, create an outreach and marketing plan, and establish a dedicated learning environment that is safe, supervised and configurable to small group and individual learning. Post set-up, the goal for the remainder of the first year would be to provide services targeting the under-prepared, technology-challenged job seeker.

Integration

Basic reading and digital literacy are essential basic skill sets for success in the occupations that are hiring and for success in school. Existing Santa Barbara Public Library online resources such as the free [Learning Express Library](#) and assistance by librarians and volunteers trained to provide one-to-one teaching already help individuals to reach their career goals. By adding the dyslexia help as described in the Library’s companion proposal and by adding specific training in digital literacy and free access to public computers, the Santa Barbara Public Library would be helping prepare under-prepared adults to transition into more advanced job readiness training and other educational opportunities. Part of the role of a public library is to help patrons find and fully utilize existing community services. The Santa

Who’s Not Online?

% of U.S. adults who do not use the internet



Note: Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Asians include only English speakers.
 Source: Pew Research Center surveys conducted March 17-April 12, May 28-31 and June 10-July 12, 2015.

Barbara Public Library would like to expand on community partnerships, building integrations where possible. For example, the Workforce Investment Board’s plan calls for establishing a system of increased access to the WorkKeys Job Skills Assessment System and the KeyTrain Interactive Career Readiness Training System. By establishing public access to the online version of the practice exams and becoming a certified test site, the Library could help the Workforce Investment Board in achieving this strategy.

Justification

Today’s higher education opportunities and all tiers of employment require at least a basic level of digital literacy. The delivery of instruction has changed in the traditional classroom and online access to course materials, lectures and required research has become essential. Increasingly, data entry via computer, tablet or smartphone is required in most jobs, even entry level jobs. Looking towards the future and anticipating even more technological advances, it is imperative that adult learners continue to adapt and embrace these changes in order to stay competitive and succeed in their lifelong learning goals. However, this is difficult to do if you do not have access to technology, never learned how to type or navigate on the internet, or if you have difficulty reading and/or have language barriers to learning. Enabling those left behind to bridge their particular skill gap in digital literacy is the goal of this proposal.

So who are left behind? A 2013 Pew Research survey offers some key reasons why some people do not use the internet: A third of non-internet users (34%) did not go online because they had no interest in doing so or did not think the internet was relevant to their lives. Another 32% of non-internet users said the internet was too difficult to use, including 8% of this group who said they were “too old to learn.” Cost was also a barrier for some adults who were offline – 19% cited the expense of internet service or owning a computer.

Internet use at libraries is well documented. The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project is an initiative of the Pew Research Center which provided the following information in the

2013 report, Library Services in the Digital Age (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Some 26% of Americans ages 16 and older say they used the computers there or the WiFi connection to go online. Here's what they did on that free internet access:

- *66% of those who used the internet at a library in the past 12 months did research for school or work.*
- *63% say they browsed the internet for fun or to pass the time.*
- *54% say they used email.*
- *47% say they got health information.*
- *41% say they visited government websites or got information about government services.*
- *36% say they looked for jobs or applied for jobs online.*
- *35% say they visited social networking sites.*
- *26% say they downloaded or watched online video.*
- *16% say they bought a product online.*
- *16% say they paid bills or did online banking.*
- *16% say they took an online class or completed an online certification program.*

Additionally, some 36% of those who had ever visited a library say the library staff had helped them use a computer or the internet at a library.

Although the digital divide is closing, demographic differences persist leaving distinct populations disadvantaged. Closing the gap between those who experience the social and economic benefits from Internet use, and those who do not, will require further efforts to reduce barriers to digital access and literacy.

The Santa Barbara Public Library is ready to step up its efforts. In Fiscal Year 2016 (July 2015 – June 2016) the Central branch had 520,820 physical visitors and of the total items checked out approximately 9% were downloaded or streamed onto a digital device. Public computer sessions during the year reached 12,335. Although digital literacy has not yet become an official program at the library, computer coaching by appointment and drop-in assistance hours were established over five years ago and service averages about 75 hours/month, much of which is provided by volunteers. However, services are by appointment and are not planned to provide specific training for adults who need to better their employability or readiness to take their GED or move on to other educational opportunities. Library staff has not had the time to create a comprehensive program plan to date. This grant would enable a program to be developed in collaboration with community partners and launched within this fiscal year rather than waiting for future funding.

Outreach & Marketing

In order to reach people who don't rely on print information or have internet access, other strategies will need to be emphasized. Outreach through community partners is one of the strongest ways to get information out; find out where your target audience already goes, or what they watch and listen to and get the message out there. Word of mouth really works in the south Santa Barbara region. Giving presentations to the staff of our local community employment and education organizations, and to participants at community meetings and events is very effective. Social media, radio and TV would be key components of the outreach effort. Flyers and print are secondary, but still useful with consideration for the audience.

Alignment

Patrons using the Digital Literacy Hub services for employment and education advancement would be asked to choose specific learning goals and to take the associated pre and posttests to document any improvements made along the continuum of digital literacy learning. Rather than re-inventing the wheel, Library staff would reach out to professionals and partner organizations to develop the curriculum offerings and pre and post assessment tools. By becoming a test center for WorkKeys, staff will become more aligned with the goals of the Workforce Investment Board.

NON-AEBG funding

The Santa Barbara Public Library has made a significant investment of public and grant funds in the last ten years to provide public access computers, computer, tablet and smartphone classes and tutoring (with staffing), and has established a Tech Lab as a teaching center for community education in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math). The Adult Literacy Center provides unlimited access for enrolled adult learners, with standalone touchscreen computers already set up with popular options for ease of use. Free skills tutoring, including help for licensing exams, GED, career entry exams, for all adults is available on a limited basis through Adult Literacy. The library pays annual fees for use of databases that promote employment as well as staff time devoted to reference referral to employment websites, employment skills sites, etc.

Sustainability plan

The Santa Barbara Public Library will be creating a Five-Year strategic plan this year in which alignment with regional goals will be a guiding force in its plan to transform its services to match the emerging informational needs of the community. The Santa Barbara Public Library provides spaces both physical and virtual in which self-learning can take place, patrons can have access to research assistance, instruction, and enlightening experiences. Public libraries should be pillars of equitable access to information and education.

With that commitment and the grant money to help establish the program, the Santa Barbara Public Library can carry the program forward with regular staff and volunteers.

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