Reassessment and Revision

Reassessment

The next step in the competencies cycle is reassessment—finding out where the employees are after receiving the training they need. The reassessment could take place after one training cycle, a full year, or more . . . it's really up to the competencies task force or the training coordinator to determine when a reassessment will give the library the best information. My general recommendation is that once training cycles have progressed to the point that all staff members should have received enough training to have all of the competencies, staff should be reassessed.

There is no need to wait until reassessment to let employees know how they're doing, though. Throughout the training cycles, feedback on how employees are improving (or not) should be continuous and directed to both the employee and the manager. One way to accomplish this is to have quarterly reviews on a departmental level to keep managers accountable for what their staff members are and aren't learning, due to either a lack of attendance or a lack of comprehension. The earlier that managers have this information, the earlier they can act on it and praise employees who are improving and help employees who are not to get back on track.

The library can choose to use the same method of assessment used in the first round or can move to a different method. The decision will depend on whether the first method of assessment was seen as successful. If the library opted for self-assessment the first time around and discovered that many staff members misreported their own skills, then a different, more objective form of assessment may be in order, such as an online test or a peer observation assessment. The library should also consider adding questions about staff members' confidence in their abilities and whether they feel different now than before the training. Remember to keep the results of this second round of assessments on file.

Just as with the original assessments, individual results should be discussed with employees and their supervisors, comparing the employee's initial assessment to the reassessment. How much improvement was made? Does the employee have all of the necessary competencies now? An overall view of the reassessments should also be taken. The training coordinator should look at the overall rate of improvement. How much has the competencies training program benefited the library so far? What training needs still remain? Training needs of individuals and recommended training sessions should be communicated back to employees and their supervisors.

Finally, the library should also determine a regular schedule for staff reassessment. Most libraries decide on a time frame between one and five years, many opting for one or two years in between assessments. The timing of reassessments can be tied to revisions of the competencies list; each time the competencies list is revised, staff should be reassessed twice—once initially as a baseline and again after training has been offered.

Revision

As time goes on, the technology competencies list will of course need to be revised. The definitive list of what your staff needs to know is a moving target—it likely changes every month or two as new technologies, resources, and services are introduced. The overall climate for what staff members need to know will be in constant fluctuation. My recommendation for dealing with this inevitability is to reconvene the competencies task force to review and

maintain the competencies list once a year, plus any time a significant new technology resource or service is introduced that will require new skills. Libraries that find their technology moving very slowly may want to opt for a bi-yearly revision schedule.

A new competencies list should be approved by the same process determined for the original competencies, going through various groups and individuals for final approval. When a new competencies list is ready for staff members to review, make sure to in some way highlight or mark which competency descriptions are new are so that employees can easily assess what's new. A reassessment should definitely take place when new competencies are introduced.

Parting Thoughts

So, now that you've read this issue, you're left wondering: what next? This is a lot to take in. What do I do?

Well, you have the necessary background now to complete a successful competencies training project. You've read more about technology competencies than 99 percent of the librarian population, and now you and I can have boring librarian discussions over dinner at the next library conference we both attend. But you've gained much more than dinner discourse—you have some new knowledge, new ways of looking at technology, training, and your own staff. Your next steps should be to go back to the steps and recommendations in each chapter and slowly work through them. This process can be done in a day—or in a month. Give your library time to adequately plan this project—jumping in headfirst and putting out a list of competencies without thought and planning is the worst thing you can do. Slow down, take some time, and share this issue and your ideas with others at staff meetings, over coffee, and in discussions with your supervisor. Celebrate all successes. See what you can do next to move your library in the right direction—to serve your users in the very best way that you can.