

# Transforming Public Library Patron Technology Training

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## Abstract

*In pursuit of community digital literacy, patron technology training at public libraries is no longer an optional service. While this absolute can be seen as a challenge for many libraries, this chapter of The Transforming Public Library Technology Infrastructure provides an extensive portfolio of resources and recommendations to guide libraries in the development of relevant, diverse, and purposeful technology training programs.*

## Overview

Libraries are community centers, touching the hearts and minds of our residents. We now support the vital need for digital literacy, often being the only place with free public computer and Internet access and, moreover, free technology training. It's not an optional service anymore; libraries have computers, patrons need to use them and have questions related to that use. Whether the training is one-on-one or in a more formalized workshop setting, technology training is happening in every library across the country. The need for technology proficiency is found in every segment of our society and is required to function successfully in work, education, government, politics, cultural, and social arenas. Providing library technology training may appear to be a role shift; however, technology training supports a fundamental library purpose of connecting people and knowledge.

There are four key elements necessary to circumvent current struggles and fully complete the transformation of the library into a digital literacy oasis. To flourish we must:

1. Create purposeful comprehensive training plans and individual workshop plans.
2. Empower library training staff through professional development and support.
3. Cultivate partnerships, volunteer relationships, and material sharing.
4. Advocate and communicate the value of library technology training.

## Creating Purposeful Training and Workshop Plans

There is a Buddhist saying, “We have very little time; therefore, we must proceed very slowly.” This is an important lesson in relation to library technology training. Thoughtful planning and support of the resources needed for quality training are important foundational elements. Often technology training has developed out of necessity and is not seen as an independent core service. Taking the opportunity to plan how your library provides technology training can save time, create a more balanced program, provide a better service to community members, and, in fact, position the library for success.

Training program plans will vary according to the individual library and the needs of staff and community members. Basic elements of common training plans include:

- training mission or purpose statement
- needs assessments
- goals and objectives
- needed resources
- evaluation
- policies and procedures

The library's vision and strategic plan should be the foundation for technology training plans that will

help guide the purpose behind the training program. A training plan should identify who needs training, who will lead the training, topics that will be covered, a training budget, and a schedule for training. What needs to be done to get from where you are now to where you need to be, and how will you evaluate to measure success? Basic policies and procedures will help alleviate confusion and create order.

Investigate the current planning in place by your local government to see if the library can support any of the goals through technology training. This can help your library with community support and local funding.

### Training Needs Assessments

Conduct a needs assessment to determine the training topics and content areas your community members most need to develop their skills and knowledge. You can interview a few key community leaders, facilitate focus groups, distribute questionnaires, ask questions on training evaluation forms, and track requests for information (reference questions). There are free online survey tools (Zoomerang, SurveyMonkey, forms in Google Docs) to e-mail survey links or embed in a webpage with easily tabulated results available for download.

*Zoomerang*

[www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com)

*SurveyMonkey*

[www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)

Examine what is going on in your community and think about what people need to know to be relevant in the job market, succeed in the educational arena, master the basics, and keep up with the new technologies. Do people need jobs and need to know how to find jobs online, create resumes, and submit online applications? Do teens need activities and a safe place to complete homework? What knowledge do people need for digital literacy? Do families need to be able to contact loved ones deployed in the military?

### When to Offer Training

It is best if you can schedule training at different times throughout the day to accommodate different work schedules and lifestyles. Think about the possibilities of offering training:

- before or after the library opens
- evenings (to reach students, traditional workers)
- daytime (stay-at-home parents, retired, business

people, unemployed)

- 30-minute quick sessions throughout the day or during lunchtime
- appointments for one-on-one training (using teens or senior volunteer trainers)
- periodically on a rotating basis

### Types of Training and Locations

Technology training in the library doesn't always take place in a classroom or formal setting. Learning may happen as a result of answering a few questions or sharing tips.

- Offer computer lab workshops and open lab free time.
- Offer individual appointments or "learning partners"—teen/senior, senior/senior, etc.
- Offer self-paced online tutorials or lesson plans.
- Create a learning blog or wiki (can be separate for staff and public).
- Provide bibliographies with how-to books and quick guides or tips and tricks.
- Share a website or database of the week.
- Borrow a mobile lab or laptops from a state library, regional system, or local organization.
- Use contests or learning games.
- Conduct training outside of the library.
- Have participants bring their own laptops.

### Topics

Many libraries have been offering technology training for over ten years, yet the most requested topics have not deviated from the basics. General computer topics, including word processing, e-mail, and Internet use, remain the leading classes. Libraries are still teaching people how to use the mouse and how to search on the Internet. While the basics are still important and needed, new community needs are being met through classes that focus on job-related training, homework help, educational resources, online government information, and by offering services as testing sites for educational and civil service exams. Some libraries also offer classes on social networking, online safety, e-books, and digital photography.

A number of libraries offer training on a rotating basis, such as e-mail basics every three months. Another trend is offering classes in a series, for instance, Word Processing (Parts 1–3). Subject-specific classes keep topics fresh and interesting for both the patrons and the trainers, for example, focusing on online gardening sites, eBay for beginners, or online hobby-related sites. Another successful idea is a weekly course focused on free websites or social technologies.

There are excellent examples of library training programs that can serve as models for designing

innovative workshops and planning training. Some of these were devised for staff training but could be easily adapted for public training, or vice versa.

### *Staff and Public Technology Training Programs*

<http://techsoupforlibraries.org/blog/staff-and-public-technology-training-programs>

## Planning Technology Workshops

Designing a workshop need not be complicated. An outline is needed to determine how the workshop should flow—how the main concepts logically fit together and combine for the big picture. Training scripts aren't needed as they can often be limiting (and boring!). Identifying learning objectives and breaking content into modules through the use of a workshop plan helps ensure participants have an optimal learning experience.

### Workshop Plans

A workshop plan helps prioritize and organize training. Workshop plans should be flexible as every training experience should vary based on the specific people present. Once learning objectives are selected, determine the best techniques to use and estimate timing to best achieve the intended outcomes. An example plan that I created for an "Accidental Technology Trainer" workshop is available for download.

### *The Accidental Technology Trainer workshop plan template*

[www.techsoupforlibraries.org/files/WorkshopPlanTemplateTATT.pdf](http://www.techsoupforlibraries.org/files/WorkshopPlanTemplateTATT.pdf)

Some libraries include sufficient details so that library trainers can share workshop plans. A standardized curriculum isn't really needed, as all trainers incorporate their own strengths, knowledge, and skills, but sharing outlines and materials is a great way to learn and save time creating resources from scratch.

### Learning Objectives

The most important step in designing a workshop is establishing learning objectives. Good learning objectives assist in planning, focusing the content, organizing the modules, estimating the length of the workshop, and evaluating whether results were achieved. Creating objectives is as easy as determining the top

three things participants should learn during the training. Think about the knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, or attitudes participants should acquire or change in the workshop. For example, if you are teaching a one-hour introduction to the Internet, do you want participants to walk away knowing how to type a URL in the address bar and perform a Google search? Then plan activities and instruction around accomplishing those tasks. There is always more to be taught than can be covered, and learning objectives help focus on what is most important.

Learning objectives are also helpful for marketing the workshops. The participants then know the expectations and they can self-select if there are different levels of classes offered. Technology training can be a lot like a reference interview in that often the participants are not sure what they need when they sign up for a class or ask a seemingly simple question. They don't know what they don't know. The objectives should be reviewed at the beginning of the workshop and trainers should get input from the participants to see if there is anything really important that should also be included.

### Modules

By segmenting workshop time into manageable sections, trainers can organize the time available and also increase flexibility and learning. Psychological principles attest that learning occurs most effectively when instruction is delivered in small segments, with time to process and practice; when links are made between new ideas and previous experience; and when students are actively engaged with the material and with each other. To accomplish technology training in support of these objectives:

- set small goals
- develop small portions of content (modules)
- use participant-centered activities
- include as many hands-on and experiential opportunities as possible
- be flexible and allow participants to achieve their own goals

A series of fifteen-to-twenty-minute modules that include participant-centered exercises for deeper processing of new content will result in more opportunities for better learning, especially better recall and retention. Participants learn more when offered smaller amounts of material thoroughly.

Each module should be designed based on the learning objectives, incorporating appropriate learning materials and methods. Each module should be a separate component that can be taught, measured and evaluated, or interchanged with other modules to accommodate specific learners. Focusing on one concept at

a time and including opportunities for participants to analyze and apply the concept will ensure success.

### Tips to Increase Learning

Creating a learning environment and implementing interactive training strategies allows participants to be actively engaged and results in successful learning experiences and retention. It is important to develop an open, friendly, and low-stress atmosphere and to encourage participants to learn and explore, asking questions and practicing on their own.

To keep attention, vary class pace and use different types of exercises. Each module of fifteen-to-twenty-minute segments can add different experiences, such as a question-and-answer portion, a practice exercise, a group activity, or a guided demonstration and time for independent work. This not only provides variability, but also accommodates different learning styles.

If a training experience is personalized, it will be more memorable. Find out particular interests in the topic by using a beginning activity to discover the learners' personal motivations. By incorporating those motives into the workshop, their specific needs are addressed, and you tap into their motivations for learning.

Then help participants see the relevance of the topic to their work, their interests, and their goals. Provide compelling, personally motivating reasons for using the technology. What are the benefits of the technology? Will the training help them on their jobs or in their personal lives? Will it make their work easier, more effective or efficient? Will it solve a problem or provide opportunities for them? Stories and real-life examples help learners understand how they will apply what they learn to their own needs. Let them see immediate benefits by sharing applicable experiences.

Incorporating learning games, activities, or even a fun theme can help raise learners' enthusiasm—and the trainer's! The best way to learn is by doing. If participants are able to demonstrate what they've learned in their own words or by doing it themselves, it is much more likely to be retained in long-term memory. Activities can transform training, increasing the odds of success for participants. Opening activities or icebreakers can

- alleviate tension and break preoccupation
- let everyone speak (which makes it easier to speak again)
- set a tone of engagement and begin group connections
- introduce topical concepts

After the icebreaker, participants might work individually or in small groups for brief periods of time to

answer questions, fill in steps from a handout, complete exercises, or brainstorm questions about the material just covered. Some of my favorite activities are described in a blog post on TechSoup.org (including: Pair Share, Action Plans, Snowball Fight, World Café, Polling, Quotations, and Chocolate Hugs and Kisses). By having independence during training, participants are empowered and are able to develop themselves while promoting a sense of achievement and confidence.

### *Workshop Activities to Increase Learning and Retention*

<http://techsoupforlibraries.org/blog/workshop-activities-to-increase-learning-and-retention-part-1>

### Evaluation

Effective evaluation begins before the training even starts, as part of library training plans and as part of planning individual training sessions. Five reasons for evaluating training are to

- improve the training
- promote personal growth and self-evaluation (of both trainer and learner)
- assess the degree of demonstrated achievement
- determine future learning needs
- prove whether the service is of value.

There are quantitative outcomes such as the number of people trained, cost, and the number of training hours delivered, and there are qualitative outcomes, such as outcome-based evaluation, which focuses on whether participants learned what they needed to learn, whether there was a change in a participant's knowledge, skill, attitude, behavior, or life condition.

If the workshop is not successful, don't automatically jump to conclusions. Some libraries determine that lack of success was due to the topic or the trainer when it might be the time of day, not enough publicity, or some other factor. The only person who can really know if someone learned something is the learner. And what if the person already knew it? Sometimes the only fault in the training is in the evaluation itself.

### Marketing

No matter how well a workshop is planned, if no one knows about it, no one will show up! Creating interest through promotion and marketing is crucial to training success. Here are some ideas for where to publicize training:

- library website/blog, online event calendar
- library newsletter

- local newspapers, community weeklies, neighborhood associations
- direct mail (Some public utilities will include notices for free with bills.)
- posters in public areas, such as restaurants, churches, community centers
- flyers given at store checkouts
- schools
- press releases and public service announcements
- signs on the library book shelves and flyers placed in books at checkout

A great marketing idea was implemented at a rural library in Parker, Arizona. The director received a grant for a wireless laptop lab to provide computer training to the public. She asked the local café owners if the library could provide their normal paper place-mats. On 11 × 17 paper, she printed the class calendar and listed the workshop descriptions every month, creating a low-cost way to get the word out to the entire community, including many people who don't regularly use the library.

## Empowering Library Training Staff

Library technology training is often just one duty of library staff, who also have other responsibilities, such as reference work or technical support. Many library technology trainers find themselves in their role accidentally and are perplexed at how to get started performing this important service. Often they have no background in training and the only models they rely on stem from traditional educational lecture-based methods. Giving trainers a foundation in adult learning and basic instructional methods can be a time saver and confidence booster.

All library staff who perform training duties should have access to some type of foundational training. Provide them with time to learn the basics, whether through self-study, shadowing experienced library staff members at their own library or nearby libraries, attending conferences, or webinars or other online courses. It will save time in the long run to make this initial investment and ensure that new trainers aren't spending time reinventing the wheel without knowing of free resources available, such as lesson plans and handouts. Connecting with other trainers is empowering and necessary for development.

Some of the knowledge areas that should be covered for training trainers include basic public speaking skills; how people learn best, including learning principles and learning styles; the importance of incorporating interactive training techniques; basic technology competencies; methods for organizing, designing, and planning training; and learning how to be a training guide instead of an academic lecturer.

Successful technology training has less to do with technical knowledge than with other abilities, such as patience, listening skills, enthusiasm, and empathy toward learners struggling with new technologies. Knowing how to train, and how to keep the training easy to understand and relevant, is more important than just having technical expertise.

There are great sources available for technology training competencies, including these two, which focus on the skills needed to teach technology in a library setting:

- The Colorado State Library developed a set of competencies for technology trainers as a part of the Colorado Public Computer Centers program (funded by the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program).
- WebJunction.org created the Public Access Computing Technology Competencies. WebJunction's competencies are divided into three sections—two of which address technical skills and knowledge and a third that addresses the management of public-access computing programs.

### *Colorado State Library Technology Trainer Competencies*

<http://coloradovirtuallibrary.org/btop/content/technology-trainer-competencies>

### *Broadband Technology Opportunity Program*

<http://www2.ntia.doc.gov>

### *Public Access Computing Technology Competencies*

[www.webjunction.org/competencies/-/articles/content/446662](http://www.webjunction.org/competencies/-/articles/content/446662)

Many new trainers struggle with how to deal with challenging people and difficult training situations. Knowing easy methods for addressing specific behaviors often seen in technology training classes can be helpful. Sometimes people seem challenging, but they might just need attention or to have a certain issue addressed. Often they just need their expertise acknowledged or their energy redirected.

## Cultivating Partnerships, Volunteer Relationships, and Material Sharing

While some libraries have designated technology trainers, many more have found great success in using volunteers. Whether the volunteers serve as the primary trainers or are a support to library staff, they are an extremely useful resource. Partnering with

organizations and individuals strengthens training programs and develops library advocates at the same time.

Contacting community members, businesses, and nonprofits in your area is a great method to develop partnerships and opportunities for library technology workshops. Find out their needs and the services they provide to see if you can create win-win relationships through technology training. For example, genealogy groups can provide help with online resources, accountants can provide information on online tax filing, and the county employment office can give advice on online job hunting, while also making their own services known. Here are some examples of where libraries find partners and volunteers for technology training:

- high school students (who may have a community service component to fulfill)
- community college, university, or vo-tech students, interns, faculty, any type of teacher or professional trainer
- local electronics/computer vendor to showcase new technologies (Best Buy, Radio Shack, and Computer City all offer free programs in libraries.)
- chambers of commerce, economic development departments, small business development centers, community recreation department or other city departments
- current and new volunteers (Nationalservice.org, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, SCORE)
- nearby libraries that can trade trainers and topics
- employment assistance programs or other job-training programs
- literacy councils, women's clubs, neighborhood associations, senior centers
- service organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary, Junior League, Lions, Salvation Army, United Way)

*Nationalservice.org*  
www.nationalservice.org

*AmeriCorps*  
www.americorps.gov

*Senior Corps*  
www.seniorcorps.org

*SCORE*  
www.score.org

With any partnership or volunteer relationship, use a letter of agreement or Memorandum of Understanding to put into writing the agreed upon responsibilities, benefits and obligations of both parties and any dates and events scheduled. This ensures that everyone is on the same page.

## Free Lesson Plans and Workshop Materials

A number of libraries and organizations have developed noteworthy technology training programs for the public, and their materials are available to other libraries and nonprofits through their websites.

In technology training, handouts are an important tool. You don't need exact instructions that take hours to design. But you may need to provide basic information that learners can refer to later. Otherwise some learners will struggle to write down all the instructions and will fall behind. Knowing they have a guide for future use makes them more comfortable. And if they are visual learners, they can read the instructions later and get information through charts, screen captures, and other visuals. Examples of free sites for materials are listed in the gray box.

### Sites for Free Materials

*WebJunction*  
www.webjunction.org/technology-training

*TechSoup for Libraries*  
http://techsoupforlibraries.org/blog/fabulous-free-public-technology-training-materials

*Alliance Library System (ALS)—Illinois*  
http://technologytrainingwheels.pbworks.com

*Hennepin County Library—Minnesota*  
http://ow.ly/5sqRp

*Milwaukee Public Library—Wisconsin*  
www.mpl.org/file/computer\_curriculums.htm

*Community Technology Network*  
www.ctnbayarea.org/resources

*Infopeople—California State Library*  
www.infopeople.org

*Common Craft Videos*  
www.commoncraft.com

*Custom Guide*  
www.customguide.com

## Advocating and Communicating the Value of Free Public Library Training Programs

Garnering support for funding library technology training is often still an issue. In any public library,

it is assured that there are many people in the community who greatly benefit from the provision of public-access computers and other technology services. We know that library staff enhance the technology by providing support and training, but sometimes it is difficult to demonstrate this impact with funders, the media, and local decision makers. Now more than ever, we need to advocate for our libraries and make sure that everyone knows the difference libraries make in the lives of our community members.

The University of Washington Information School, with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, conducted the US IMPACT Study, the first national research study targeted at documenting, describing, and analyzing the use and results of technology in libraries. The first report from the study, *Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries*, was released in 2010.

#### *Opportunity for All*

[http://tascha.washington.edu/usimpact/documents/OPP4ALL\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://tascha.washington.edu/usimpact/documents/OPP4ALL_FinalReport.pdf)

This project created many tools to easily communicate library value in providing technology-related services. The Public Library Toolbox contains information about the research and sample documents that can be customized to communicate the need for library funding and support to your local community and to show the role libraries play in making technology available to all people. In addition to an overview of the research (perfect for sharing with funders), there is a sample op-ed, letters to the editors, article templates, handouts, and a downloadable PowerPoint presentation (with a script!) to customize with your own local stories for presentations to library boards, policy makers, and funders.

#### *Public Library Toolbox*

<http://cis.washington.edu/usimpact/toolbox.html>

Another great resource is Turning the Page 2.0, a free public library advocacy training course developed and presented by the Public Library Association (PLA) with generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In this six-week, facilitated online course, library staff and supporters learn how to create and tell their library's story, deliver effective presentations, develop a compelling case for library support with a focus on technology, and build and sustain partnerships along the way. Participants are encouraged to come with a specific, self-determined advocacy goal for their library and develop an advocacy work plan to guide their efforts. It is interactive and personalized and makes advocacy training an enjoyable experience. Board members, volunteers, other library supporters, and all levels of library staff can participate through 2012. The online course dates are on the registration page.

#### *Turning the Page 2.0*

[www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/pla/education/turningthepage/index.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/pla/education/turningthepage/index.cfm)

## Conclusion

Our libraries can each truly become a digital literacy oasis through planning, empowering our staff, creating partnerships, and continuously advocating the value of library technology training. An oasis provides sustenance, visibility, and security. Libraries are a refuge for learning, upholding the traditions of the past while supporting future learning needs. Technology has changed our expectations of what an educated person must know and be able to do in order to effectively participate in society. By providing quality technology training, we can sustain our place as vital community centers while ensuring that we are visible to our funders and supporters and are providing security to our twenty-first-century visitors as they advance their technological literacy.