Program Description

Program Description: What activities will you be doing to achieve the desired program outcomes? How many people will be served?

Most Digital Navigator programs concentrate, at least initially, on providing information about low-cost internet access, devices, and tech support. However, there is an opportunity to use the model to provide foundational digital literacy skills and warm referrals to adult education and upskilling programs. The extent to which these additional supports are provided, and the strategies used to do so, will impact a program's ability to build digital resilience in our communities[10].

Digital resilience signifies having the awareness, skills, agility, and confidence to be empowered users of new technologies and adapt to changing digital skill demands. Digital resilience improves capacity to problem-solve and upskill, navigate digital transformations, and be active participants in society and the economy

Who will you serve?

Will Digital Navigators can provide services to seniors, people with disabilities, learner-workers, residents of a specific zip code or neighborhood, youth, unemployed, underemployed, and dislocated people, immigrants, young women? Or is your program open to anyone calling your line?

It is important to define the group of people for whom you are designing the program. Identifying your target population will help you with recruitment, ensure services meet the needs, and help with retention efforts.

"At a library, Digital Navigators could be serving both general and specific audiences, sometimes at the same time. It just depends on their community and who asks for help, or if the library determines on its own to help a target group or offer programs to the general public." Heidi Ziemer at Western New York Library Resources Council.

→ Demographic Characteristics

What demographic characteristics define the population you serve? What is the size, or how large is your target population? How many people in the category/categories identified will need your services? This informs the need for your program. The target demographic will also influence the kind of support requested, and as a result, the services and information digital navigators need, in order to help learner-workers achieve their goals.

→ Degree of Reach

How many people are you looking to serve? Realistically, what percentage of that population will your program be able to reach given available resources? This tells us why your program is important and how many people will be served.

→ Assets: Participants Strengths and Capacities

We tend to look at target populations from a deficit perspective. We often think of "them" as people lacking or not having something. However, it is important to identify and recognize the internal and external strengths of the people we work with. Internal assets can be things like commitment to learning and growth mindset, motivation, or positive attitudes about technology. External assets can be peer or family support systems, community bonds, etc.

→ Challenges

Just as important as identifying the assets is thinking about the challenges in reaching and retaining people in your program. For example, in working with homeless people, you can assume that they will have difficulties keeping an address or securing reliable contact information. Working with seniors may mean providing support to mitigate memory, eyesight and dexterity issues. In general, working with people who lack internet access and technology could mean a lack of exposure and unfamiliarity with jargon and terms commonly used by those who are more familiar with the technology. Thinking about the risks or barriers allows you to create strategies to counteract the challenges the target community faces and help you be more strategic and proactive about partnerships with agencies and organizations that can provide support or wrap-around services.

→ Program eligibility and other requirements

This goes hand in hand with the target population you identified. For example, you may restrict services to people that belong to a determined program (public housing development, etc.), age bracket, or geographic area (of the city, urban or rural areas, etc.) Other categories may include unemployed, attending an adult education program, single parents, returning citizens, etc.). Are there additional requirements for your program? (benefit recipients, legal status, etc.).

The Nebraska Library Commission developed a target audience guide that can be helpful to identify Audience & Assess Resources.

What specific services or activities will you provide?

What services will Digital Navigators provide:

1. information about low-cost internet access options
2. information about free, low cost or refurbished devices
3. tech support
4. referrals to digital literacy programs
5. supports for developing basic digital literacy skills
6. referrals to job training or online education options
7. upskilling | job readiness program
8. all of the above
9. other (telehealth, etc.)

Digital Navigators can be the first step to get internet access, equipment or receive quick technical assistance. They can also be a one-stop service center making referrals to programs and facilitating enrollment in virtual digital literacy classes, workshops, and upskilling opportunities.

→ How often and how frequently will services be offered?

Planning needs should be driven by exploration or reflection that covers the following questions:

a. How often are these activities/services being provided?
    i. For how long?
b. Would your program exist after the pandemic is over?
    i. Will you add an in-person component?
    ii. At what intensity?
c. Are there expectations about following up with callers?
d. If Digital Navigators are expected to schedule small group coaching or teaching for other digital needs like downloading apps, or how to use them; offer support for learning digital or other skills in online programs; how often would workshops be scheduled?
    i. How many sessions will you offer?
    ii. Will it be drop-in or scheduled?

→ What are your service hours?

The answer to this question may depend on the number of trained staff or volunteers you have, the needs of the population you seek to serve, and the number of phone lines and equipment available. All of these will impact the service you can offer.

Learner-Worker centered approach

The goal of the digital navigator is not only to provide accurate information about equipment, connectivity or foundational education options but to offer support that addresses the particular needs and goals of learner-workers receiving the service.

To effectively address learner-worker needs, digital navigators need to be familiar with technology, be willing to learn new tools, have up to date information about connectivity and equipment, be familiar with resources available in the community, and need to be culturally competent. Being culturally competent means having the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures and who may follow different norms and traditions, perceive, think, interact, behave, speak, have physical conditions different from your own.

→ Support for people with disabilities

Assistive technology (AT) is equipment or software used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities. Digital Navigators should be familiar with basic tools to enhance communication and access and have available resources at hand with information to provide learner-workers. Helpful information is provided by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, also helpful are these guides created by Temple Institute on Disabilities.

→ Language access services

Language access allows English Language Learners (ELL) individuals access to a wide range of services. An ELL person does not speak English as their primary language and is yet developing proficiency with reading, speaking, writing, or understanding English. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 21 percent of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English. Of that percentage, more than 40 percent speak English less than "very well."

"Technology can provide a platform for deeper inclusion and engagement of those who remain on the periphery of social, economic, and political life. However, digital services that fail to incorporate language translation risk rendering these platforms inaccessible for marginalized groups, such as immigrants[11]."

Newly arrived immigrants are some of the most vulnerable in society and often need support settling in and connecting to information about local services and jobs. However, these groups are often thought to be digitally, linguistically, and culturally excluded, and the move by governments and agencies to online platforms could exacerbate existing barriers

to accessing public services. Furthermore, these groups may lack the necessary digital skills and host-country language ability to take full advantage of digital services available[12].

Planning needs should be driven by exploration or reflection that covers the following questions:

a. What languages, besides English, are spoken in your community?
b. What percentage of the population you intend to serve speaks English "less than very well"?
c. How can you provide and secure services for these communities?
d. How would you let these communities know they are welcome to call your line and that services will be provided in their first language?
e. Would you need to translate printed materials?
f. Would you need to recruit bilingual volunteers?
g. Would you partner with other immigrant-serving organizations?

Creating a Language Access Plan

What protocols will you set in place to identify and redirect these calls to bilingual interpreters?

Your plan should address and set procedures for:

- Assessing client language needs
- Identifying staff language capacity
- Training staff and volunteers who interact with clients

- Using interpreters (Consider recruiting bilingual volunteers)
- Serving clients with limited English proficiency through outreach (consider translating flyers and providing information in different languages on your website)[13].
- Continuing to evaluate language access policies and procedures

The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles' Language Access Procedure Manual [14] has practical instructions for staff that work with clients. It includes step-by-step processes for walk-ins, call-ins, and verbal and written communications. For more information and resources, go here[15]

→ Plain Language

Also important is to acknowledge that those seeking services may have low literacy skills. This means that any printed material should use plain language[16] to ensure people can access this information.

"Research with refugees suggested that focused instruction on the vocabulary of technology terms supported success on Northstar Digital Literacy tests and supported learner engagement because it gave them language they could use to ask questions and understand instructions. " - Jen Vanek[17]

In sharing information about technology, you should also be aware of jargon. Avoiding jargon altogether in digital navigation can be difficult. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that using technical terms may be a barrier to effective navigation. You can find more information and tips to avoid jargon at plainlanguage.gov.

How would you let people know you exist and the services you offer?

One of the challenges you may face is reaching out to those that need this service the most. In general, these are the people that do not have internet access or equipment, and as a result, traditional online channels may not reach them. The pandemic also restricts face-to-face interaction. Thinking about ways to ensure the communities that need it most know about your services is key.[18-19]

In general, campaigns must communicate "why I should participate," "where I can get trained," "how will this help my family," and "how can these tools help me at work and in my life[20]"

What communication channels do you have available, or which do you need to create? What communication channels are currently used and trusted in the community? **Relying on social media may not give the results you seek**, especially if you are trying to reach emergent users of technology who are not yet users of social media**.**

Reaching out to schools, youth organizations, food pantries may be a better way to reach the target population. Create partnerships with local community groups, churches, etc. who can help get the word out -even through text if they have contact info for people. Also, studying media sources used by the target population -like the local convenience store, tv, radio, or their local newspaper, as well as local barbershops- is advisable. For "hard-to-reach" communities, a strategy worth considering is engaging *community outreach advisors* or *community outreach ambassadors*. They are members of the target community, and as such have valuable social networks and are trusted messengers in the community.

Planning needs should be driven by exploration or reflection that covers the following questions:

a. For those who have access to the internet, would you have a form that learners can complete online to request services?
b. Would you like learner-workers to reach you via phone?
c. Would you have an available landline with a message? Or would you use a Google phone?
d. How soon would you respond to messages?
e. What other ways of contact would you promote?
  i. Who would manage those, and how often would those requests be answered?

For examples of what organizations are doing visit: Community Learning Center[21], Drexel ExCITe Program[22], SEAMAAC[23], Chicago Public Schools[24] and Connect Arizona[25]; or use this template to help you create a communications strategy to guide your outreach for new students[26].

What are your program principles?

These are the fundamental norms, rules, and values that guide the program (e.g., being inclusive, client-focused, etc.). These principles should be part of the training of Digital Navigators and be embedded in your program's activities from the way calls are answered to the way services are offered, and the way referrals are made.

The way you interact with callers can be an important recruitment and retention tool. Most times, callers satisfied with the experience, will tell friends and family to contact you to get assistance. The experience also influences the likelihood of participants to seek more services, participate in other training activities, complete training, and achieve goals. **Don't underestimate the importance of quality service in attracting new learner-workers to your program and to further engage in services.**

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[10]Digital US: "Building On-Ramps to Digital Resilience"

[11]*Immigrants in the Smart City: The Potential of City Digital Strategies to Facilitate Immigrant Integration*

[12]Migration Policy: "Immigrants in the Smart City: The Potential of City Digital Strategies to Facilitate Immigrant Integration"

[13]Legal Services Corporation: "Language Access & Cultural Sensitivity"

[14]The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles: "Policy and Procedures on Providing Legal Services to Limited English Proficient Clients".

[15]Limited English Proficiency.gov

[16]United States Government: Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

[17]Vanek, J. (2017). Second Language Proficiency, Academic Language, and Digital Literacy for LESLLA. In J. Sacklin & D. McParland (Eds.), Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) (p. 136). Portland.https://edtechbooks.org/-wXms

[18]See the Right Question Institute for suggested ways to help people self-answer why they should participate: https://rightquestion.org/

[19]"Digital Inclusion Imperatives Offer Municipalities New Social and Economic Opportunities" white paper by Maria E. Wynne and Lane F. Cooper Sponsored by Microsoft Corporation, Office of Economic Development and Innovation, U.S. Public Sector.

[20] https://rightquestion.org/

[21]Community Learning Center Digital Navigators

[22]Drexel University: ExCITe Center Digital Navigators

[23]SEAMAAC Digital Navigators

[24]Chicago Public Schools Parent Tech Support Center

[25]Connect Arizona Tech Access Phone Line

[26]https://edtech.worlded.org/mlearning_resource/communications-planning-template/