

Alameda County Social Service Agency's E-Studio: Virtual Learning is Here to Stay

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an effort to provide Monterey County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) continuity in training, the usage of NEOGOV LEARN is the Learning Management System (LMS) used across the agency. NEOGOV LEARN allows staff to enroll, track, and request ongoing training. MCDSS Family and Children's Services (FCS) also receives training from the Bay Area Academy (BAA) and other local agencies who provide caseworkers with the

tools, training, and up-to-date information needed to support their work. During the COVID-19 crisis, training was offered via video communication as staff were primarily teleworking. This case study examines and records observations of the Alameda County Social Service Agency (SSA) E-Studio and makes recommendations for staffing and implementing a specific virtual learning team for MCDSS FCS.

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Introduction

Monterey County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) has historically used a hybrid model of training for staff: traditional in-person training and web-based online training. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, MCDSS became a telework agency and moved towards live online learning modules. The rise of telework made the use of eLearning imperative to ensure that training is accessible to all staff.

The MCDSS Family and Children's Services (FCS) branch currently has one Social Work Supervisor (SWS) Trainer to provide the training for two programs. Training provided by the SWS is based on a hybrid model of in-person and online live learning modules, and leaves no time to create web-based training that is available whenever needed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the FCS branch within the learning environment and staff responsibilities. Additionally, staff turnover rates are at an all-time high. It has been noted that although staff are receiving eLearning training, the need to develop pre-recorded, job-specific, program training would reduce turnover, burnout, and the amount of supervision required to ensure job requirements are consistently met. The motivation to visit Alameda County Social Service Agency (SSA) E-Studio stemmed from their ongoing success in creating and offering virtual and job specific eLearnings to their staff and how it has benefitted their county.

Background

The Alameda County SSA Development and Training Department hosts the Training and Consulting Team (TACT). TACT is within the human resources department and provides comprehensive learning and

professional development opportunities to SSA staff within the county department and community partners. The vision for TACT is "a learning organization that delivers dynamic, responsive, and outstanding services to all families, neighborhoods, and communities." Their mission is "to develop human service professionals to best serve our communities and to strengthen those who lead them" (S. Algazzali, personal communication, May 22, 2023). TACT's values are collaboration, excellence, inclusion, innovation, and training. TACT provides training to approximately 2,500 staff and is the creator of the E-Studio.

The launch and creation of the E-studio took place in 2014. The E-Studio was created to provide modernized virtual learning formats that would be accessible to all staff. The E-Studio team consists of three staff, which includes two E-Studio Instructional Design Trainers and one Staff Development Specialist. The three trainers work collectively, along with subject matter experts (SME) and stakeholders, to develop virtual learning videos, instructional video projects, and courses for SSA staff.

E-Studio Video Production Process

When a need arises, a training request must be completed by a program manager or above. The training request form is very specific as to whether or not a training must be online, in-person, or eLearning. The E-Studio team then conducts a thorough analysis of the learning needs, outcomes, and target audience. The team also identifies any knowledge and/or skills gaps and determines how to address the gaps effectively.

The E-Studio team may suggest other staff or the SME write the content or script for the training video. The E-Studio staff lead a table read with SME and staff members,

who review the narration, and plan for filming. The production staff then plan for location, rooms, and equipment needed to create the video. All staff members participating in any filming must sign a Media Release Form before being filmed. Once filmed, the video is edited and shared with staff through the Learning Management System (LMS).

E-Studio Key Roles and Responsibilities

The E-Studio team plays an impactful role within staff's learning and has multiple responsibilities. The team is responsible for analyzing learning needs, project objectives and the audience the video will serve. In addition to developing the curriculum and training programs, the team ensures the content, sequence, and delivery methods are in sync with the learning objective and the training requested.

The E-Studio team is responsible for creating instructional content in an eLearning model. This includes designing the content and organizing the text, visuals, multimedia, and interactive activities that will facilitate learning. In addition, the team focuses on creating meaningful learning experiences for staff. They focus on real-world scenarios to enhance learning effectiveness and knowledge retention.

Understanding technology and how to use it to create effective eLearning is essential for TACT staff members. Video editing, sound editing, and storyboarding are just a few technology skills required for their positions. The team explores and integrates technology and digital tools to enhance the learning experience. This may include understanding the capabilities of LMS, programing tools, multimedia software, and virtual or augmented reality platforms. Within the training videos the team also develops quizzes, tests and/or assessments to measure

the effectiveness of the training and to evaluate the need for improvement. The team closely collaborates with SME, trainers, and project managers to gather content, clarify learning objectives, and to ensure that the content meets standards. Lastly, they continuously evaluate and improve training by receiving feedback, reviewing assessment results, and staying up to date with project and content design.

E-Studio Essential Computer Hardware, Software and Equipment

The E-Studio has grown over the years and currently has very sophisticated equipment. Each piece has been an investment and some software requires monthly subscriptions. The equipment currently used to make learning videos are as follows:

- Nikon camera
- Tripods
- Samsung Galaxy Tablet (used as the teleprompter)
- Tablet holder with reflective glass frame
- Lavalier microphones (for audio)
- SD and micro SD cards
- LED box lights
- Backup microphones

The hardware/software needed are as follows:

- Video editing software subscription
- Photo/video stock subscription
- Course authoring tool
- Vimeo (used as the video host)

E-Studio Benefits

The E-Studio has received an enormous amount of positive feedback from various levels of management and staff for their professionalism and dedication to eLearning. Staff is very impressed with the

E-studio content and having a hybrid model, where learning can be done virtually and reaches staff when they need it and are available to receive it.

The primary benefit of the E-Studio is the ability to address the specific training needs within the organization on demand. With staff assigned to support the development of online training, an agency can create job specific training efficiently, tailor it to all learning styles, deliver it uniformly, evaluate its effectiveness instantly, and revise it as needed without waiting for a company to update it and then paying that cost again.

By building online training in house, new and existing E-Studio staff can easily access the online material and build on the comprehensive knowledge. Lastly, the E-Studio can incorporate interactive elements such as quizzes, assessments and multimedia resources, which will create an interactive learning experience. These added features often engage and motivate staff to actively participate in their professional development.

Recommendations for Monterey County

Alameda County SSA E-Studio is a professional studio that is able to create and provide interactive eLearning modules for all staff. The recommendation for MCDSS is that we staff our E-Studio to create content for the FCS branch. Although FCS currently receives training from NEOGOV LEARN, Bay Area Academy (BAA) and local agencies, staff would benefit from specific job duty eLearning videos. For example, an eLearning video on how to fill out placement paperwork such as a protective custody form, how to conduct an interview, and the steps to create a court report. This would allow social workers' to participate in eLearning when needed and support supervisors with minor tasks.

The recommendations for the MCDSS FCS are as follows:

- Create additional staff development positions for FCS staff. The FCS team consists of approximately 160 staff and currently houses one SWS trainer. By adding at least two additional staff, FCS would have additional training support of their own.
- Provide technical training and education for the training team. Historically the trainers have been self-taught and would benefit from formal training on E-Studio equipment, training on how to create effective eLearning modules and training on employee development. In addition, there is a need for more facilitators to carry out these tasks.

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