E-Studio

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an effort to provide e-learning for staff, Contra Costa County Staff Development launched its SMART system in 2014. The SMART system allows staff to request, enroll, and track trainings. Contra Costa County also utilizes Vector Solutions (formerly Target Solutions) for additional trainings not offered in SMART. Staff Development's goal is to have e-learning available for all trainings when it is conducive. This will allow staff to access and complete trainings at their own pace. This study includes observations and best practices from Alameda County's E-Studio. It also includes suggested recommendations to enhance the virtual learning experience in Contra Costa County.

Christina Navarro, Division Manager, Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services

Introduction

E-Learning has been at the forefront of department plans for some years now. As a Division Manager, it is imperative that I incorporate trainings to communicate pertinent information to staff. This aids in compliance and allows understanding that is necessary for quality work performance. However, staff members are now less motivated to attend in-person training due to the discomfort derived from the pandemic. Offering modern, engaging e-learning trainings is important to ensure staff are retaining information provided virtually and Staff Development must have the proper equipment to meet this need.

The 2-year pandemic struck a sense of urgency for implementation. Public Service Staff were considered essential workers and still required to keep up with training materials; however, the majority were now working remotely. Had our trainings been available via our e-learning platform, we would have been able to pivot with very little interruption. Keeping up with all the new information from multiple sources was a challenge for staff, as emails were the only reference point. I met with Alameda County E-studio staff in person and reviewed their process. I expected to walk into a recording studio. However, when I arrived, I learned that Alameda County does not designate space specifically for recordings. In fact, they store all equipment in a small designated room in storage bins and can record in various locations, which displays innovation, creativity, and a flexible production approach. Furthermore, they were able to utilize their previous workspace for Sim Labs, allowing trainees the opportunity to participate in interactive experiential trainings.

During the pandemic, remote staff were able to utilize E-Studio to create and deliver time-sensitive micro-learning videos such as "Creating a Team in Microsoft Teams," "Start a Teams Meeting," and "Tour the Teams Interface."

Background

The Alameda County TACT team (Training and Consulting Team) is under the umbrella of Agency Administration and Finance. The TACT team provides training for approximately 2,500 Social Security Administration (SSA) employees, including Executive Managers, Managers, Supervisors, and staff from five different departments. The TACT team consists of approximately 42 full-time staff; 25 Staff Development Specialists, five Administrative staff, six Eligibility Supervisors, five Training Supervisors, and one Manager. E-Studio is a specialized unit within TACT and consists of three dedicated team members. TACT developed E-Studio and launched it in 2014, shortly after the need for virtual training was discovered. E-Studio was created to provide and deliver modern, efficient, and original forms of training.

E-Studio Video Request Process/ E-Studio Production Process

- When a need arises, Program Managers and their superiors complete a Training Request Form (TCR).
- Pre-meeting e-mail is set up. Staff Development sends a pre-meeting email to the designated Subject Matter Expert (SME), which includes a five-question SME Assessment to assess the needs of the video project.
- Staff Development reviews the assessment responses and set up a meeting with the SME.
- A recorded meeting occurs between the SME and Staff Development Specialist.

- A Staff Development Specialist develops a video lesson plan, which includes a script and other media.
- A video lesson plan is sent to the SME for approval.
- A lesson plan is sent to the Staff Development Supervisor for final approval before production.
- The Production Staff will seek locations for recordings and reserve rooms if necessary.
- The Production Staff note the need for lighting, microphones, teleprompter, or cameras to ensure they have all the proper equipment for filming.

E-Studio Essential Computer Hardware, Software, and Equipment

To create and develop content, it is essential to have the appropriate computer hardware, software, and other equipment. When E-studio was originally developed, Alameda County was working with inherited, outdated equipment. They quickly learned new equipment was necessary for E-Studio to function effectively, and with the spending flexibility, Alameda was able to order reliable, trustworthy, cost-effective equipment on an as-needed basis. Having the proper equipment can reduce the time it takes to create content. It can also assist with improved audience engagement. Some of the necessary computer hardware equipment for E-Studio include a computer with a powerful processing chip such as the Intel i7 or i9, an HDMI port and multiple USB 3.0 ports, at least 16 – 32 GB of random access memory, an integrated video card, a solid-state drive for the operating system and additional drive for the significant storage (2 TB minimum), and monitors (two side-by-side, widescreen, 24-27 inch). Software utilized for content creation includes Adobe Premiere Pro CC, Adobe

Photoshop CC, Adobe After Effects CC, Adobe Media Encoder CC, Articulate Suite 360, Audacity, and The Articulate Rise.

E-Studio Budget

The establishment of E-Studio required an initial $5,000 investment which was used to purchase needed equipment. E-Studio's ongoing costs are contained within the annual TACT budget. Their current expenses include a reasonable monthly subscription of $50 to 60 for access to the suite of powerful tools from Adobe that are vital in creating content. The TACT budget is approximately $6.5 million per fiscal year. There is no specific amount allocated to E-Studio. The majority of expenses are salary, equipment, then subscriptions.

E-Studio Benefits and Challenges

E-Studio Benefits

- Self-paced, engaging/interactive trainings that support information retention.
- Commute Cost Reduction: No commute is needed; therefore, fewer expenses are incurred for mileage demands.
- Time Savings: Frees up time currently used for commuting; Greater attendee capacity requires less time for trainers. These videos reach a large number of employees while making trainers available for other projects. On-demand training also allows schedule flexibility for trainees.
- E-training was an essential tool during the pandemic allowing E-Studio staff to create training content while remote working.
- Professional, innovative, modernized training.
- Reduction in training delivery: Providing training in a form of

e-learning videos has been more cost-effective than having to organize, plan, or attend an in-class training (for both trainer and participants), especially regarding annual mandatory trainings such as "Compliance."

- The ability to track the learning of staff through the learning management system and generate e-learning reports.

E-Studio Challenges

As with any new project, staff experienced a steep learning curve with the new equipment and technology. Identifying staff for this assignment remains a challenge at times because those that are selected for this type of position require a passion for these types of video projects, which is quite different than traditional classroom training. Appropriate staff need to be comfortable with learning new technologies and ideally have some prior experience in creating video content. They should also be willing to do independent research and take online courses to build their skills.

Recommendations for Contra Costa County

What I learned from meeting with Contra Costa County Staff Development is that we have knowledgeable, skilled, and driven staff to create content. However, we lack high-quality, modern equipment and space for recordings and storage. Staff Development also could benefit from having provisions for additional dedicated staff.

My recommendations for Contra Costa County include the following:

- Invest in modern equipment. Some of the equipment recommended for Staff Development employees who create e-learning content includes the following: approximately four new desktop computers preferably Dell Precision Workstations, large screen Nikon D5300 Camera, strong tripods able to hold necessary camera weight, teleprompter, iPad, newer iPhone, DJI OM 5 Athens Gray attachment for iPhone camera; two lapel microphones, NAS drive to store the projects, documents, videos, etc., and Vyond, Moovly or Animaker animation software. Currently, the few Staff Development Specialists who do the large majority of creating the content for e-learning are utilizing laptops and an iPhone 7. Although Community/Media Relations has been generous to loan their equipment and room, Staff Development needs readily available and dedicated access to the equipment. Our induction training receives a lot of videos as a part of the onboarding process. The county needs updated equipment to enable the production of modern videos.

- Creation of additional positions in Staff Development. Staff Development creates training videos for approximately 2,000 employees within Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department. Currently, the County has approximately thirteen Staff Development Specialists, and between three and four of these are designated for the creation of e-learning content. This same group often provides support for the Children & Family Service trainers as well, who have three dedicated trainers of their own.

- Training for Staff Development Specialists. Currently, trainers are self-taught. Newcomers may not have the technical skills required. Both could benefit from formal Instructional Design training and education. A few options may be T4T Training for Trainers and a trainer series developed with UC Davis.

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