

Narrative

Project Justification

Overview

The La Veta Regional Library District (LVRLD) seeks to build capacity in technology training and resources to better serve its community in this rural and underserved region of Colorado. To do this the Library is requesting funding to support the development of a technology training program and the fostering of a core volunteer community whom Library staff will train to take on the day-to-day delivery of this program (beginning in the second year of the project). Key to delivery of these training and volunteer programs will be delivered will be a “pop-up computer lab”, for which the Library also seeks funding. The “pop-up computer lab” is a high-specification and highly mobile portable computer lab allowing training to adapt to on and off-site teaching environments. Finally, the Library seeks funding for a half-time temporary Assistant Librarian position to take on some of the responsibilities and duties of the key project staff during this two-year project while the key project staff are engaged in project activities.

What need, problem, challenge, or opportunity will your project address, and how was it identified?

We seek to close the technology skills gap present in our region while also opening paths toward participation in the digital economy. We have identified this skills gap through our weekly “Tech Help” program and through regular interaction with patrons. LVRLD is within Huerfano County with the highest unemployment rate in Colorado (8.5% as of December 2018).¹ Residents of the LVRLD District have limited access to personal development, training, and job opportunities. This is hampered by the region’s average residential internet connection speed of between 10 and 25Mbps.² In January 2019 LVRLD signed a contract with a local fiber optic ISP to bring a 100Mbps to 1Gbps connection to the Library and is in negotiations to spread this to the rest of the town of La Veta. LVRLD seeks to take advantage of this opportunity by building our capacity to offer training in technical skills.

Our patrons’ skills needs vary by age group. While we receive requests for technical support and training from all ages and backgrounds, our older patrons represent the majority. The Region’s population skews older. La Veta’s median age is 51 years with 32% of the population aged 62 and over.³ 13% of the population is under 18.⁴ These two ages groups are our most frequent patrons. We are planning training tailored to suit the needs of both of these groups. The missing 55% of the population are the library’s least frequent users. This is a difficult population to reach because of their work commitments. By offering out-of-hours and by-request training, we hope to serve this community better, too.

¹ Colorado Department of Local Affairs, https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/CO_BLS_Unemployment/

² Colorado Broadband Office,

https://gis.colorado.gov/broadbandviewer/index.html?Viewer=broadbandmapping.broadbandmapping_hv/

³ US Census Bureau, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

⁴ Ibid.

What best practices or prior IMLS funded work will inform your approach?

We will adopt best-practices derived from the experiences of other Colorado libraries, which have an active and open discussion about how to best deliver technology skills training. We also look forward to benefitting from the results of the IMLS STEMEx program, as these become available over the next two years. We will build up our volunteer tech support core by creating student-teachers, inviting particularly engaged program participants to teach classes themselves, encouraging community buy-in. Our approach will be one that is as agnostic as possible in terms of platforms and software developers, pursuing a principles-first approach which will help mitigate problems from locking our patrons into particular technology platforms or commercial software packages. Transferrable skillsets are key, not only to enabling our patrons to take advantage of opportunities that may arise from their participation in our training programs, but also to sustaining our training program in the long-term. Principles-first develops flexibility and the ability to adapt as technology and needs change.

How would you qualify your library as small and/or rural?

LVRLD serves a Legal Service Area (LSA) of 1300 in a district covering about 55 square miles of mountainous terrain. Currently, there is one branch, based in La Veta. The District is located in Huerfano County in south-central Colorado, an entirely rural county with an economic base composed primarily of retirees, regional service providers, and agriculture.⁵

The Library itself is small but active. The Library employs two full-time staff members with a further 2 FTE. It has a collection of approximately 12,000 items and a circulation of 34,000 items per year. It serves 1300 local patrons and an additional 1300 seasonal patrons, which reflects the regions strong retiree profile. Compared to other libraries serving similar-sized LSAs we rank second in the state for circulation size and first in program attendance.⁶ Because our community engagement is so well-established, we are in an excellent position to close the technology skills gap and increase opportunities for the people we serve.

Who will benefit from your project? How have you engaged them in your planning?

Our goal is that all of our patrons will benefit from our project. Because this is a capacity-building project emphasizing building community buy-in, we will be able to offer benefits to all. Our project focuses first on creating a core group of highly-engaged volunteers. These will be drawn from two groups: patrons over 50 and patrons 18 and under, as these are the segments of our population who are already most invested in using our services. After the core volunteer group becomes established in the program's first year, our impact will broaden as we are able to offer training and resources to more and more people. We will also be able to specialize further.

⁵ Colorado Department of Local Affairs, https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/CO_BaseIndustries_Bar/

⁶ All library data from the Library Research Service data for Colorado Libraries: <https://www.lrs.org/data-tools/public-libraries/annual-statistics/>

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The Library benefits from long-established working relationships with existing community groups. We have been in dialogue with key community groups such as the public school district, the Town of La Veta, the local arts council, and the seniors' groups about this program and our technology hub initiative. We have broad support from these groups and our community more generally going forward.

How will your project address the goals of APP (as described above in Section A, in particular A1), your selected project category, and the agency-wide goal you selected on the IMLS Program Information Sheet?

This project is stage one of a new LVRLD initiative to serve our community more broadly and deeply. We seek to take the Library into the community, literally, with the creation of the pop-up computer lab, but also to enable the Library to serve its patrons beyond the confines of the regular working week. Through training and access to digital (and hardware) resources, the Library will serving its community every time a patron engages with new technologies with which they were previously unfamiliar, or takes advantages of opportunities that arise from things they have learned or technologies they have accessed via the Library.

Our project is focused on capacity building. By assembling a core group of volunteers who are enthusiastic about technology and sharing their skills, we will create a community-based resource which will be sustainable beyond the term of this specific project. We will also further train our staff so that the staff will feel comfortable working with patrons' technology needs, and we will be able to extend our "Tech Help" sessions throughout the week, rather than the one day we are able to offer currently. Finally, this project builds the support network needed to establish the Library as the tech hub for the District as well as serve as a model for other small and rural libraries seeking to close the technology skills gap in their own communities.

Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out?

The "Tech Hub" project is organized by phases, each phase having a specific set of activities. Some activities are concurrent. Phase I focuses on creating a group of volunteers who will form the core of the "Tech Club". We will invite highly-engaged community members to participate in discussions about their technology needs and goals. We will also begin a series of classes teaching a range of tech basics. Particularly engaged or enthusiastic participants in these will be invited to volunteer for the Tech Club. Phase II focuses on building-up the Tech Club volunteers to run training sessions themselves. Intermediate-level and special-interest tech training sessions will be run for volunteers and other interested community members, to build enthusiasm and personal interest for technology in the community. These more specialist classes will include coding (for middle-schoolers and teens, but also for over-50s) and digital art. Phase II ends when the Tech Club volunteers begin teaching beginning-level and special-topic classes of their own. Phase III sees the establishment of a long-term tech-help and training program with regular classes at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels run primarily by the Tech Club but also by library staff where the subject matter is suited to their particular strengths.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project? Will partners be engaged and, if so, for what purpose?

The project will be planned by Dr Anthony Masinton (Director) and Ashley Vandagriff (Librarian). Dr Masinton is a specialist in digital humanities and “technology-on-a-shoestring” for heritage organizations. Before taking the Director role, Dr Masinton practiced, taught, and researched digital humanities within the Departments of Archaeology and History at the University of York, UK. Ms Vandagriff is the Library’s communications and social media director and provides the weekly “Tech Help” service. They will be assisted through planning consultations with key community groups including the school district, Town Board of Trustees, the local arts council, and seniors’ groups. Dr Masinton and Ms Vandagriff will lead the implementation of the project, especially in Phase I. The project is designed to require less and less staff time as it progresses, and the volunteer group grows in confidence and personal investment. Masinton and Vandagriff will regularly teach specific classes and participate in the Tech Club project throughout Phases II and III. The project will be managed by Ms Vandagriff as part of her role as Librarian. Dr Masinton will provide further assistance by guiding purchases of hardware and software.

Partners will be engaged as a natural part of the project’s design in the form of community volunteers. On a program-by-program basis, outside expertise will also participate to provide specialist training and services.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?

The project is training-based, designed as an ongoing series of bi-weekly, two hour training sessions. When those sessions are delivered by staff, preparation time of approximately four hours per session is also required. The time requirements beyond design and delivery of training sessions differ for each phase of the project. The first half of Phase I involves Masinton and Vandagriff’s time setting up the overall project, as well as meetings with existing and potential partners. We estimate this will take eight hours per week, each. In the second half of Phase I, the initial training sessions and recruitment and orientation of volunteers will begin. In addition to training, Phase II will require weekly time for Vandagriff’s volunteer coordination and project management duties, continuing to require about eight hours of her time each week. This will continue through Phase III, but the planning and delivery of training time requirements for staff will decrease.

To compensate for the time required to start and maintain the program, LVRLD will need to hire an additional part-time Assistant Librarian for 20 hours per week. This person will take on the general Library duties for Vandagriff and some of the administration work for Masinton while they are engaged with the project.

Training and volunteer activities will be split between activities at the Library and outreach activities at the senior center, public school, and other locations, as needed. The Library building is small with only one meeting room, which is frequently booked by community groups, especially in the spring and summer. The Library will hold on-site training sessions after-hours to accommodate patrons with employment responsibilities and it will schedule

regular day-time sessions in the meeting room for more general audiences. During the summer we will also conduct some sessions outdoors, on the Library lawn which it shares with the Francisco Fort Museum and the local farmer's market. Some of these sessions will be BYOD (Bring-Your-Own-Device) and will only require a device for the instructor and a projector, if needed. However, other sessions will require that the Library provide dedicated computing resources. Because the nature of the project is intended to be mobile and flexible, the Library will create a "Pop-up Computer Lab" composed of nine Microsoft Surface Pros, and a projector. For at-table use, the Pros will be furnished with external monitor, mouse, and keyboard. For use outdoors the Pros' touchscreen features will be used. Each Pro will have Microsoft Office installed as well as training-specific software, as required for each session. Finally, we will install Veyon open source classroom management software, to eliminate the need for the instructor to use a screen and projector, if the venue of the activity mitigates against it. Because of their compact size, this pop-up computer lab can be stored and transported in a single container suitable for one person to carry.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?

Lack of widespread attendance for the training, or a lack of volunteers are the main risks to this project. Consistent, clear, and regular communication are keys to building and maintaining interest. The Library will post the training events in the weekly community calendar as well as run a monthly column about the project in the local newspaper. Advertising in the community and regular in-person visits to community groups are also planned. The project is designed for flexibility and continual evaluation. If a particular training strand proves to be poorly attended, the project can drop that strand and put more resources into strands which are over-subscribed or which are frequently requested.

How will you measure your progress and evaluate your project performance goals?

Every training session will conclude with a brief evaluation survey for the students and a separate one for the instructor. Every week, as part of the project management procedures, these evaluations will be gathered and reviewed along with basic quantitative data such as attendance. This data will guide planning week-by-week, ensuring we understand our audiences and what resources and schedules suit them best. Impact beyond attendance will be counted indirectly through monitoring technology resource usage outside training sessions. If the program works as intended, we will see an increase in technology resources.

Project Outcomes

What are the intended results and outputs of your project? How do they address the need articulated in your Project Justification?

Our project intends to create technology training and resources to close the technology skills gap identified in our community. We intend to build and deliver an ongoing, regular bi-weekly series of training sessions on a broad range of subjects and at a mixture of beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. The range of subjects and the level of the course offerings will be under constant development and adjustment according to our findings from our continual assessments. Key to the success of this project is the creation of a "Tech Club" of

engaged volunteers who, by the end of the project, will be designing and delivering the training programs as well as participating in a “club project.” The “Tech Club” volunteers will also maintain a regular (ideally, daily) “Tech Help” service at the Library. The Library will become the technology training center for the community and the technology hub for the region. The technology skills gap will be narrowed as far as possible through this comprehensive, ongoing training and support system. Long-term this project is intended to become self-sustaining and to complement new local initiatives to improve residential access to high-speed internet, which will help broaden the employment opportunities available to residents and make a more resilient economic base.

How do you define success for your project?

Success for this project is the creation of an active, engaged core of volunteers forming a “Tech Club” who will develop and deliver technology training and support for the community. A second measure of success will come in the form of increased usage and circulation (as appropriate) of technology resources and services at the Library.

What is your plan for collecting and reporting data on your performance goals and outcomes?

We will collect the data in the Performance Measure Statements through surveys during technology training, community and volunteer focus groups, and quarterly surveys of our patrons. We will evaluate these responses and use them to regularly update and refine our training and resource offerings. The “Tech Club” project will form a community-driven expression of how well these performance goals and outcomes have been achieved in practice.

How will you sustain the benefits of your project beyond the funding period?

The project is designed for sustainability long after the project funding period. The primary outcome is the establishment of an ongoing technology training and support service run by engaged and enthusiastic volunteers organized into a “Tech Club” sponsored by the Library. This helps ensure that the project is always in-touch with the community, up-to-date with the development of technology, and not dependent on Library staff alone for delivery.

La Veta Regional Library District
Schedule of Completion

Year 1 (2019-2020)

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Project Evaluation												
Tech Help Desk (Staff)												
Project Phase I												
Project Setup, Hiring, & Equipment Purchase												
Community Consultation												
Teaching (Staff) - Beginner												
Teaching (Staff) - Intermediate												
Project Phase II												
Volunteer Training												
Teaching (Staff with Volunteers) - Beginner												
Teaching (Staff) - Intermediate												

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Schedule of Completion

Year 2 (2020-2021)

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Project Evaluation	[Shaded]											
Tech Help Desk (Staff)	[Shaded]											
Tech Help Desk (Volunteer)	[Shaded]											
Project Phase II (Continued) Volunteer Training	[Shaded]											
Teaching (Staff with Volunteers) - Beginner	[Shaded]											
Teaching (Staff) - Intermediate	[Shaded]											
Teaching (Staff) - Beginner	[Shaded]											
Project Phase III Volunteer Training	[Shaded]											
Teaching (Volunteers) - Beginner	[Shaded]											
Teaching (Staff & Volunteers) - Intermediate	[Shaded]											
Teaching (Staff & Volunteers) - Advanced	[Shaded]											