

Pioneering a New Approach to Digital Access & Inclusion

Tuesday, 2/13, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. EST

Panelists

- Moderator: Julia Brinjac (Pennsylvania Broadband Office)
- Panelist: Erika Smith (Microsoft)
- Panelist: Jahari Soward (NPursuit Careers)
- Panelist: Quasandria Turner (CareerRise)
- Panelist: Richard Hicks (InspireEDU)

Notes:

Workforce Development!

Train and Retain

Erika Smith - Microsoft made many assumptions when launching digital inclusion program in Atlanta. People thought they would finish the program and get immediately employed, but partners said that despite their skills, they weren't employable due to a lack of work experience. Lack of understanding from corporate side about what potential employees needed. Switched from MS program to a coalition. Goal was to redesign model to know needs of community members.

Complementary skills of participants in coalitions

Became a technology version of a food bank

Consistent programs, asked what was needed from community, language access – intel

Needed pre-assessments before people entered into programs, InspireEDU provided digital literacy skills to people who were not digitally skilled enough to participate

Chromebooks are not fully functional laptops!

Q - Are people being served in a way that meets their needs? Community focus groups identified needs challenges of people at work. Wasn't just people in poverty who needed support. Also tech-adjacent positions.

No one org had the capacity to solve the problem on its own
Individual resources leveraged to address needs of individuals served
(See back page of uploaded document for ecosystem model)

Jahari – Employers were saying participants didn't have experience after the 6-12-week program. Asked employers what future skills they would need people to have. Employers provided scenarios of what people might experience during their first 30 days, 60 days, etc. Built tech exercises, hands-on – built scenarios and added to the curricula. Then employer needs changed, and employers started backing out. Then the model was refocused and changed to an upskilling model.

Most jobs are not “tech” roles, but tech is ubiquitous
Many core requirements are tech-related (safety using devices, for example) but necessary core skills are the bare minimum of what is expected, and are not going to open doors.

Experiential labs (theory in practice) provided confidence for participants
Atlanta provided mock interviews, etc. Microsoft helped create network. Stipend for students.

Basic generative AI has to be incorporated into basic digital skills training

Provided Generative AI training to nonprofit organizations (incorporating power apps for data visualization, incorporate generative tools into workflows) through experiential lab

Capstone projects – 9 people to go through lab (build community trust), allow people to play around and fail safely, lean on others

Real tools are not just coding and analytics, nonprofits have to lean on corporate community – corporations can inject training, convene businesses and orgs, feedback loops with corporations, and now there is wrap-around support among nonprofits

Speed of adoption has accelerated rapidly (ex. 100M mobile phone users took 16 years, 100M users of ChatGPT took 69 days). Have to move at pace of adoption/acceleration with training programs

Without creating comprehensive programs, are not addressing digital equity. Just creating a corporate brand story and setting graduates up for failure.

People need to understand that the training they are getting with basic digital skills aligns with and leads to the training they need to get into a career or higher level digital training - need data and assessment to lead

Trust, simplifying language, ease of access and data are critical to building education and training programs. Intake and assessments critical to keep refining and building curriculum (never complete)

Q&A

Q: What components are in pre-assessment?

A: (Richard - InspiredEDU) - How much do you understand tech? Do you have a device that you own? What do you know about the internet (outside of cell phone)? How proficient in Office Suite? Outside of skills/access - do you have a child? Assessments are based on partner and what skills they need for that particular program.

Each organization identified its own strength(s) – assessments should complement the work of the org

Application is structured that can result in referral to appropriate partner based on current skill level. Team built this based on pre-assessments already had, Northstar, InspiredEDU. Added other questions that supported training programs (intro to AI, intro to help desk, etc). Have a team to analyze the assessments on the back end.

Q: Family tree of all orgs?

A: internal doc used among org showing who does what in continuum (will be shared out of ListServ)

Q: What challenges did you run into with implementation of a decentralized program with a lot of partners and how did you address them?

A: At first, partners came in with intent to please funder when giving feedback. Microsoft opened door of “this isn’t working, what can we do to fix it?” All things experiencing as individual orgs and leveraging Microsoft funding and resources brought partners together to address. Took design thinking approach with pilots and iteration. Met every Friday for 6 weeks to address issues. Say to funder we were unable to meet goal because of X, this is the strategy we put in place, this is the data, and we want to pilot the model to iterate until its scalable.

A: Structure strategy to address breadth and depth. Ex. learning platform can reach the high # that corporate partners leaders request, but in depth training can provide real impact if lower numbers. Be comfortable with iteration. Re-evaluate and make adaptations on regular basis. This company hobbled together what they appreciated from many different programs.

Q: What are good devices?

A: Laptop

Resources:

https://static.sched.com/hosted_files/netinclusion2024/fe/NDIA%20%20Train%20to%20Hire%20Model%20.pdf

Feedback:

It was clear that the panel did a great job in prep to help the session run smoothly