An Online Education and Training Program for the Deborah Women’s Organization

Project #3: Leadership Vision and ELearning Plan

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Author Note

The organization and staff/member names mentioned in this paper are fictional.

**Introduction**

TheDeborah Women’s Organization (DWO) is an international Jewish organization that was founded in the early 1950’s to support education, immigrant absorption, and at risk populations in Israel. The DWO is a volunteer-led, fundraising organization with a national headquarters in Washington, DC and membership chapters in the United States, the U.K. France, South Africa, Australia, Argentina, and Israel. Since its inception, the DWO has built over 100 schools for both Israeli and Palestinian populations, developed adult education and career training centers in all of the major cities in Israel, and has partnered with the Israeli government to create a network of teen intervention programs in community centers nationwide. For its own membership, DWO provides leadership development, educational programs, and political advocacy training.

**Vision**

 Technology is pervasive and its exponential growth continues. One of the reasons for this growth is that the world of technological innovation is democratic. Using the tools of the read/write web, anyone can create websites and mobile apps, design and print 3D models, create and play game, and find new ways to make social connections. Millions of people are inspired to do exact this and more.

 The digital age has also been called the Knowledge Era, because the Internet has given the masses unprecedented access to information. Now “the gates of knowledge are keyless entry and anyone can Google the code” (Nagler, 2010). Open access to facts and information has empowered the average person beyond anything that could have been imagined 100 years ago (Beaudoin, 2015).

 Technology has affected social hierarchies. To be a leader at this time means that every constituent will not only fact-check constantly, but will make his or her opinion known in online polls, social media, and blog posts. Further, technology has removed geographic boundaries and dissolved distances. People now see their interests aligned to a global community, rather than only the community they can see from their own backyard.

 Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen (Wolf, 2014) a philanthropist and lecturer at Stanford University, suggests technology has actually redefined the meaning of community for millenials. Social media participation has shifted their allegiances and the options for electronic giving has redirected their donations “farther afield, such as directly to projects in developing countries” (Wolf, 2014, para 4). All of the above challenges and, in particular, that which was described by Arrillaga-Andreessen must be addressed by nonprofit organizations, like DWO, if they are to continue to fulfill their missions.

 Today’s nonprofit organizations can benefit from the use of technology for fundraising, marketing, and managing donor records. This paper will focus on a fourth potential benefit of technology: eLearning. ELearning utilizes “electronic technologies to access educational curriculum…(in order to deliver) a course, program or degree … online” (eLearningNC.gov, 2015, para. 1). The vision that will be described in the following paragraphs supports the development of on eLearning program for DWO.

 Donors need to be recruited and their commitment cultivated for DWO’s cause. Education is one of the most powerful ways of connecting with DWO’s volunteer leaders, members, and potential donors. Through specially prepared online modules, these learners can increase their knowledge of the organization and its work and develop skills as volunteer leaders, fundraisers, or simply friendly advocates for DWO. An added bonus of participation in these modules would be access to high-level DWO and Israeli leadership in regularly scheduled webinars.

 In order to accommodate the global membership of DWO, the eLearning program will be staged from both synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms. A Learning Management System, linked to the DWO website, will used to deliver the coursework. Web-conferencing software will enable DWO to supplement asynchronous learning with “live” webinars.

 The DWO eLearning program will use state of the art technology to provide the learners with the best digital experience possible It will feature engaging digital media in interactive, self-paced learning modules. The training and learning units within the modules will be designed with an eye to ease-of-use and clarity in all instructions. Content will be chunked so that the learner can plug in conveniently for either a small or larger period of time. All synchronous programming will be taped and offered for later viewing in a library on the DWO website.

 The source for content to be used in the classroom will be DWO volunteer leaders and trainers. A full-time Instructional Designer will gather the needed materials and create the online courses. In the beginning the Instructional Designer will also manage the courses, with the help of the DWO Education and Training Department staff. As the program grows, more staff will be added.

 Learners who successfully complete these courses will be awarded specially designed digital badges that can be added to their email signature, posted on social media, or shared in any other electronic venue. These badges will not only recognize the achievement of the individual, they will also serve to recruit other learners for the courses.

 The eLearning program will be supported a 24 hour help desk, in order to make sure that every participant has the tools to succeed.

 Until this point in time, DWO has relied on a cadre of volunteer leaders and trainers to travel around the US and other parts of the world providing sporadic learning experiences. As well, many devoted members living in small communities or distant countries have not had the benefit of learning with DWO. This program will save DWO significant money by cutting back travel costs and will open the door to increased participation by European, Latin American, South African, Australian, and Israeli members.

 Note that in phase two of this project, courses will be translated into Spanish and French to attract more non-English speaking members. Also, subsequent to the establishment of an effective DWO eLearning program, the organization will begin the research and plan for the integration of eLearning in its schools and programs in Israel. The proposal for this project will be submitted at a later date.

**ELearning Plan**

Executive Summary

The proposed eLearning Program will be a cost-effective and scalable way for DWO to educate and train members around the world. Its use of state-of-the-art digital technology and availability 24/7 will make it accessible and attractive to potential members. The eLearning Program will have a multiplier effect, enabling more members to be exposed to the talents of DWO’s most talented leaders and trainers, while saving the cost of extensive travel.

Background

 In 2014, DWO underwent a needs analysis as a part of redrafting their five-year strategic plan. The findings stated that while DWO’s membership base in the United States had declined significantly over the past ten years, member affiliation was rising in other parts of the world. In addition, smaller communities that are geographically distant from DWO headquarters were identified as underserved with existing training and education. At the same time, the results of an independent survey of members showed that participation in DWO educational or training programs increased member retention by 39% and donations by 54%. Of course, like many other nonprofits in today’s economy, DWO must find ways to cut costs and show the lowest possible ratio of administrative over-head to direct donation.

Action Goals

 Among the prioritized goals for the DWO 2015 strategic plan are:

* To reach and cultivate more members/donors outside of the United States,
* To reach and cultivate more members/donors from small communities around the United States,
* To revitalize and engage more members/donors from traditionally active, larger communities, and
* To find ways to decrease budget expenditures.

The planned DWO eLearning Program will address each of these goals.

Planning and Research Team

Miriam Blackstone, Director, Education and Training Division (staff)

Gladys Winograd, Coordinator, Education and Training Division (volunteer leader)

Toni Frankel, Director, Membership Division (staff)

Barbara Sweet, Coordinator, Membership Division (volunteer leader)

Mike Pilowski, Director, IT

Timetable

The following timetable outlines the steps that will be taken in order to bring this program to fruition.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Action** | **Responsible Parties** | **Timeframe** |
| **Infrastructure/Development Phase** |
| Research & prepare proposal for Executive Board | Planning & Research Team | August – September 2015 |
| Research grant funding sources |
| Copy & circulate proposal among the members of the Executive Board | Planning & Research Team | End of September 2015 |
| Prepare Grant proposal for October 1 Deadline |
| Present the Draft Proposal at the Monthly Executive Board Meeting for Feedback & Revisions | Gladys WinogradBarbara Sweet | October 2015 |
| Meet with the CFO to finalize budget | Planning & Research Team | November 2015 |
| Present the Final Proposal & budget at the Monthly Executive Board Meeting for Approval | Gladys WinogradBarbara Sweet | December 2015 |
| Create a budget action item for the Annual meeting | Don Adams, CFOHarriet Bach, TreasurerDon Adams, CFOHarriet Bach, Treasurer | December 2015December 2015 |
| Grant notification received, if approved, incorporate into budget |
| **Action** | **Responsible Parties** | **Timeframe** |
| Present the budget action item at the annual meeting  | Harriet Bach, Treasurer | January 2016 |
| Meet with current trainers & educators to discuss their role in the Project | Miriam BlackstoneGladys Winograd, | January/February 2016 |
| Meet with HR to discuss hiring the Instructional Designer | Miriam BlackstoneMike Pilowski | February/March 2016 |
| Plan & begin outreach to trainers & educators to gather materials | Miriam BlackstoneGladys Winograd | March 2016 |
| Finalize Implementation Plan | Planning & Research Team | April/May 2016 |
| Create a registration process(A tool exists in the DWO Blackbaud database) |
| Discuss AUP with the legal Department  |
| Prepare registration materials | Miriam BlackstoneGladys Winograd | May 2016 |
| Meet with Marketing Department to plan informational campaign | Martha Mendes, Marketing DirectorPlanning & Research Team | May 2016 |
| **Implementation Phase** |
| Hire Instructional Designer | Marge Wendel, HR DirectorPlanning and Research Team | June 2016 |
| Choose online software and prepare the LMS for uploads; Test the video conference platform | Mike PilowskiTrish Greene, IDMike PilowskiTrish Greene, ID | June/July 2016July/September 2016 |
| Investigate and contract a company to serve as the help desk as of December 1 |
| **Action** | **Responsible Parties** | **Timeframe** |
| Develop & begin to implement training for staff & volunteers involved in the program | Mike PilowskiTrish Greene, IDMiriam BlackstoneGladys Winograd, | July/November 2016 |
| Work with the ID & trainers/educators to create online modules | Trish Greene, IDMiriam BlackstoneGladys Winograd, | July/December 2016 |
| Implement marketing campaign and begin registration | Miriam Blackstone, Gladys Winograd, Toni Frankel Barbara Sweet | November /December 2016 |
| Draft & Submit 2017-18 budget proposal to Executive Board | Don Adams, CFOHarriet Bach, Treasurer | November 2016 |
| Submit 1st quarter report to grant foundation | Miriam BlackstoneGladys Winograd, | December 20117 |
| The Program is open. |  | January 2017 |

These are, of course, just headlines. There would need to be on-going communication with the Executive Board about the project’s progress, continual outreach and information sharing with leadership around the globe, articles and press-releases for chapter newsletters, as well as information posted to the DWO website.

 There will be a number of change issues surrounding this program. First, older members may not be comfortable with the technologies. Extensive training opportunities and on-going support will be necessary. A second issue is the “down-sizing” of travel on the part of the volunteer leaders and trainers. This has been a long-standing perk of such positions. The President and Executive Board will need to be engaged to re-educate their volunteers about the value of making this change. Finally, it is possible that not all of the materials received from the trainers will be of equal quality. The Director of Education will need to work closely with the Instructional Designer to vet and upgrade any materials that do not meet the standard.

 This program will only work if it is the product of a multi-division collaboration. It requires the resources and the buy-in of all involved. The leader of this project will, in some measure, need to be Transformational (Northouse, 2012). She will need to rally the team and the organizational leaders around a vision that is new for them, helping them to understand that its potential. At the same time, she needs to encourage both the staff and volunteers that they have the capacity to make this project succeed and that their contributions are essential. As Beudoin (2015) states “it is a leader’s challenge to “institutionalize” innovations with a minimum

of disorder for such innovations to be accepted and sustained” (p. 38).

 One of the biggest hurdles for innovation in a large, volunteer-driven, nonprofit is the amount of time that is needed to implement a new program. From the first planning meeting until the launch, this program will require 17 months and for the program to really establish itself in the field, possibly another two years. Nonprofit organizations are not known for their agility.

**Funding Proposal**

Year One Proposed Budget (June 2016-May 2017)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Income** |  | Notes |
| Grant | $ 75,000 | *Year one of Howard Foundation[[1]](#footnote-1) Grant* |
| Budget Line (Membership Division) | $ 20,000 | *Re-allocated travel & housing*  |
| Budget Line (Education/Training Division) | $ 13,000 | *Includes both $5000 or marketing and $8000 in in-kind services* |
| Total | $108,000 |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Expenditure** |  |  |
| Salary (Instructional Designer) | $ 75, 00 | *Gross pay* |
| Help Desk | $ 18,000 | *Half year for contract with vendor* |
| LMS hosting Services | $ 2000 |  |
| Hardware & Office Furniture | $ 8,000 | *To be reflected as in-kind services* |
| Marketing Materials | $ 5,000 | *To be reflected as in-kind services* |
| Total | $108,000 |  |

 The eLearning Program will be of value to DWO in several critical ways:

It will:

* Increase membership by cultivating communities around the globe.
* Increase donations by deepening member commitment through education and training.
* Decrease budget expenditure on travel and housing for training.

Perhaps, as important as all of the above, it will enable DWO to bring its education and training efforts into alignment with 21st Century expectations. With accessible, easy-to-use, online training and education, DWO will be able to bring its message to a much larger audience.

 As the above table indicates, in the first year, this program will be supported by a combination of grant funding, divisional budget allocation, and in-kind services. The Howard Foundation Technology Springboard grant is a three-year, $200k award. Additional grant funding will be sought, but the principal means of funding this program will come from increased donations by members. While the program will be offered at no cost, students will be encouraged to make donations at various points in the course of study. At a future date, the eLearning Program may represent a naming opportunity that can generate enough income to support its ongoing operation.

Evaluation

 Formative measures of success will be taken through participant surveys and interviews. Enrollment and completion numbers will be evaluated for each module. The eLearning Program will establish a system of digital badges to be awarded upon completion of a unit of modules. Badges will serve as a motivational tool and can also be used as benchmarks for gauging the effectiveness of the program structure and delivery.

 In addition, the Membership Division, which maintains a database of members and donation levels, will be able to track the impact of participation in the eLearning on membership and giving growth.

**Conclusion**

The Deborah Women’s Organization has begun to move into the 21st Century in terms of its creative use of the website and social media. The next step is to reach geographically diverse members on a deeper level with online training and education. This online educational program would offer ongoing and accessible training for local leaders and inspiring Deborah content for all members. It is an innovation that can enhance and support the valuable work of the organization.

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1. A fictional foundation [↑](#footnote-ref-1)