Digital Literacy and Equity Resource Website for Volunteers

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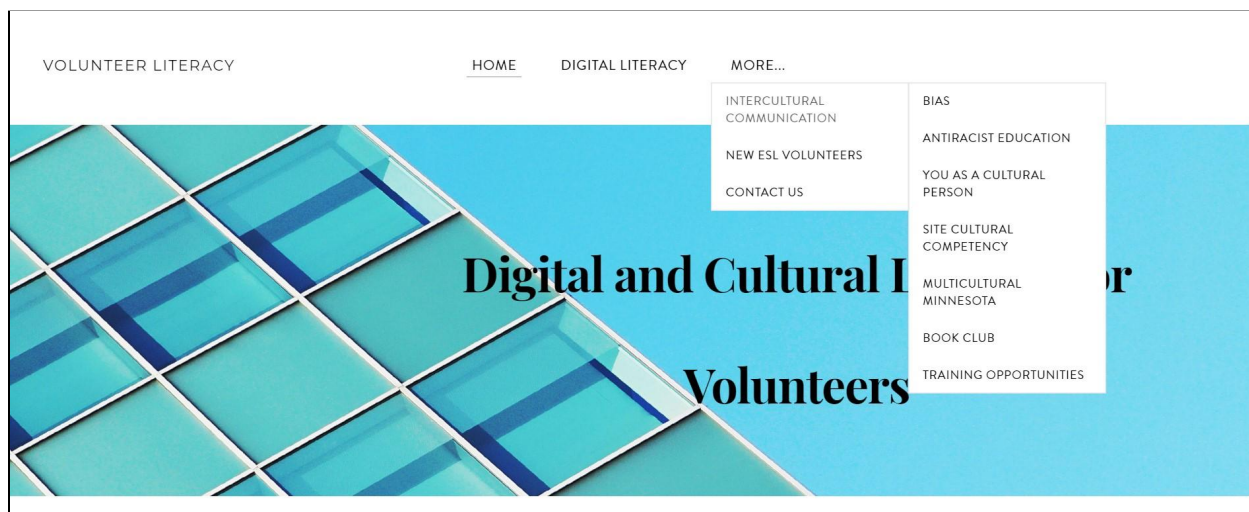
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Project Inspiration

   A variety of new challenges arose with COVID-19, including a swift and bumpy transition to an online format for many CTEP sites. While our programs often focus on helping students and community members to learn digital skills, the new digital landscape made it difficult for organization volunteers to keep up. Along with the need to develop new technological skills, the past year has also highlighted the need for improved intercultural skills, both online and offline. Though a variety of resources currently exist, they're scattered across many different websites and organizations, in ways that make it more difficult for them to reach the needed

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[1] Group members sit at a park and discuss website updates (Left to right: Kali Lo-Ng, Isabel Huot-Link, Vincent Safarik, Nicole Yang)

communities. We wanted to compile the many digital and cultural resources that exist, and create a website that targeted volunteers specifically. Our ultimate goal was to help volunteers smoothly transition to digital formats, so that they could be as helpful to their communities as possible.

VOLUNTEER LITERACY   HOME   DIGITAL LITERACY   MORE...

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION   BIAS

NEW ESL VOLUNTEERS   ANTIRACIST EDUCATION

CONTACT US   YOU AS A CULTURAL PERSON

                                    SITE CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Digital and Cultural L... or   MULTICULTURAL MINNESOTA

Volunteers   BOOK CLUB

                                    TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

2

Goals and Accomplishments

We were able to complete the website with a scope beyond our original dreams, including resources for interculturalism and anti-racism, digital literacy, and new ESL volunteers. We added a book club which was not a part of the initial plan that will hopefully encourage readers to engage more fully with the ideas we present on this website, especially anti-racism and intercultural communication. We have had only a few website hits thus far, but with more publicity to the website we hope that many current educators and volunteers will find this information useful. Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA) and Literacy Minnesota have promised to share our website on their platforms, and group members will implement the website resources at their sites with current teachers and volunteers. We will share this website with CTEP members so that any site who engages volunteers may draw from the extensive resources compiled here. The Metro South Adult Basic Education volunteer coordinator has expressed interest in utilizing this website for volunteer training. Though it will be difficult to measure our full impact until the website has been in place for a longer period of time, we are hopeful that volunteers and those they serve will feel the benefits of our work for many years to come.

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[2] The Volunteer Literacy website home page and the menu demonstrating the breadth of resources included within the site. We chose an image of windows to back the title to symbolize the new opportunities opening up for volunteers that utilize these resources.

Book Club

Engage more deeply with intercultural literacy through our **twelve-month, self-paced Book Club!**

1. Click on the book title to read the linked description on Bookshop.org
2. Purchase on Bookshop to support local bookstores, or find at your local library!
3. After reading, consider the Discussion Questions below, and send your thoughts/reflections to volunteerliteracy.contact@gmail.com.

3

Our project has created a website to be used for cultural and digital competency training for volunteers--a need that was articulated in conversation among group members and MAVA. Although we've successfully published the website and have some possible avenues for distribution, it's difficult to say how many individuals learned technology skills through it or how many volunteers it helped manage at this stage.

Our main impact goal for this project is that it helps in volunteer management, potentially for organizations such as Metro North and Literacy Minnesota. It is an added bonus that our project ties in with the CTEP goal of teaching digital literacy skills to individuals as well, regardless of the individuals being volunteers. We see that volunteers at these sites are and will continue to be "bridges" for participants in many ways by connecting others in their community to resources, services, and skills. Therefore, we also hope to also carry out CTEP's goal of bridging the digital divide by encouraging cultural and digital literacy training for volunteers.

In terms of tracking impact after our website is actively being used, we had hoped to be able to assess site traffic data. Unfortunately, this feature is not fully available with a free

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[3] The Book Club was designed to reinforce the anti-racism and intercultural communication resources provided on the website, and provide the opportunity for learners to share their thoughts with others, which would deepen their learning and develop more self-awareness.

Weebly account. Broad summaries of site traffic are only available for the past 7 days. Therefore, we may get some useful numbers, but it is an inconvenient and unreliable source of data.

Another way that we will be able to track numbers for impact is by managing the website's email address as well as its linked Google Classroom. Volunteers will be invited on the website to participate in a book club activity as part of intercultural competency training. As part of this activity, they are encouraged to submit reflections of their reading to the email address, which is managed by the current group of members. As the website has not gone live yet (not yet distributed by Metro North or MAVA), we haven't yet been able to see the results of this activity. The Google Classroom is another way that volunteers/learners/visitors of this website are able to engage actively so that we will be able to track participation. There is an option on the website for new volunteers to join a Google Classroom that organizes all resources on the website into a curriculum. Users will have to join the class using an email address, and the CE group's Google account manages this classroom, allowing us to see participation.

New ESL Volunteer Resources

May 2021

Thank you for volunteering! We are so happy that you have decided to give your time and effort.

To volunteer and teach online, there are some important digital literacy and cultural competency skills that you need to have. Please click on the resources for each step below to learn more about these skills. Contact your volunteer coordinator if you need more help or if you have questions.

You can access the resources on the website or you can join our Google Classroom.

Click on the Google Classroom picture to access those resourcess or continue reading below.

POWERED BY weebly

Google Classroom

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Our project has achieved some of the goals we set out for. When we set out, we had the goal to complete a functional website containing resources compiled to the best of our ability, presented in an understandable way. We had the goal to create any resources we felt were

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[4] It was very important for us to include resources specifically geared toward volunteers new to working with ESL populations. These resources target specific cultural barriers and how to overcome them from a digital platform perspective.

missing and include those as well. Initially, one of our main goals was to present this website project at a MAVA panel in order to reach our impact goal of the website being used to train volunteers through a partner organization. Another initial aspect of our project goals was to target volunteers in need of cultural training because they are specifically working with and teaching ESL participants.

After meeting with MAVA, the focus of our project changed. We saw a need not only for cultural competency training but also for digital literacy training for new volunteers beyond ESL. In response to this need, our goal became to create a website with two main content areas: cultural literacy and digital literacy for volunteers. Another goal that changed was our intention to present our project at a MAVA panel for outreach. Due to factors outside of our control, we were not able to present at this panel, which was a big blow to our plans. We improvised by reaching out to other contacts who showed an interest in our website (staff connected through our sites, including an ABE volunteer manager) and are currently in communication with them. One group member also anticipates using this website heavily when working with volunteers in their own service.

As for the goal of completing a robust, comprehensive website, we feel that we have achieved this goal. Despite needing to learn Weebly along the way, we have continuously tweaked the content, ideas, and formatting of the website as we discussed the order and relevance of content, user-friendliness, and wording of explanations. Our current website contains sections for digital literacy, cultural literacy, an easy link for new volunteers looking to use the full extent of the site, a book club page, and a simple contact page. We've received feedback and made adjustments to ensure the website responds well to future users.

Looking back at our additional goal to create resources from scratch where we saw a gap in content, we feel that we have completed this goal to a moderate extent. We had anticipated that we may need to create videos with slower talking speed, subtitles, and simple language for volunteers to use with ESL learners. However, due to a shift in focus away from ESL specifically as well as the unexpected amount of time spent on creating the website, these videos didn't become part of our final product. On the other hand, we have established a book club as part of the website in response to a slightly different gap in content; we feel that cultural literacy training works best when the learner engages in an activity and receives feedback on their work. We finally decided on a self-guided book club, where volunteer users of the site can read the recommended books and submit a written reflection to an email address associated with the website. We are excited about this portion of the site but are waiting for the site to actually be implemented so that we can assess engagement with the email address.
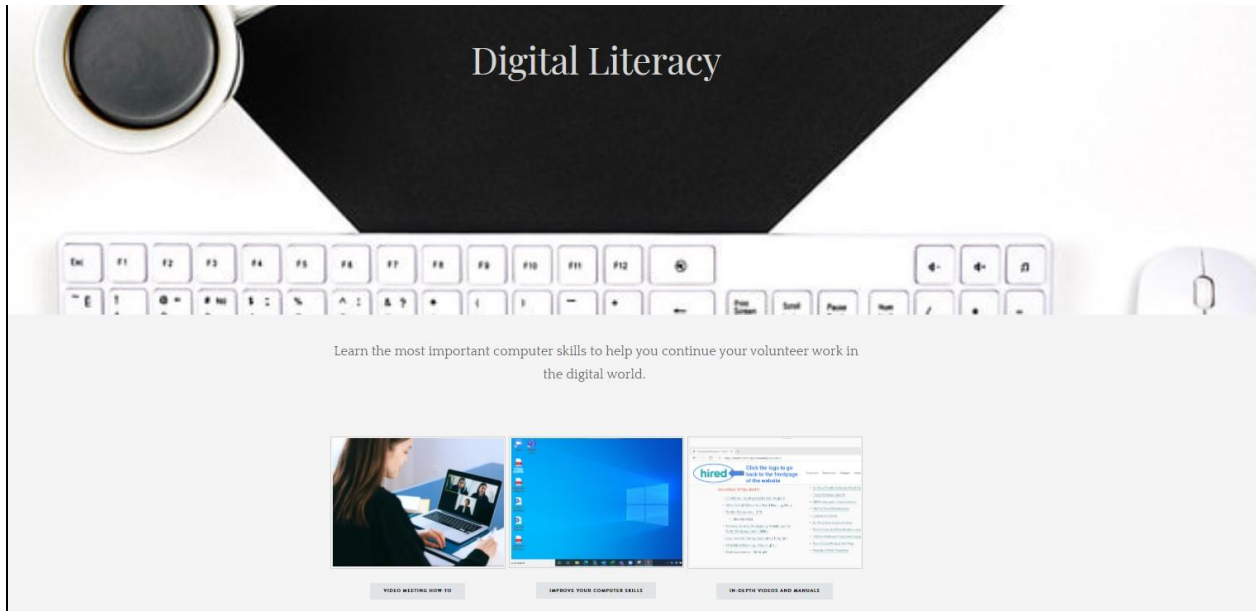
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Overcoming Stumbling Blocks

There were a few stumbling blocks along the way and many of them have already been mentioned or alluded to in earlier sections. The first and most significant stumbling block has been our work with community partners. Whether it was identifying community partners, maintaining consistent communication, or working together, it has been the biggest challenge of the project by far. However, this challenge and the need to overcome it has forced us to continue reaching out to more and more organizations. It has also resulted in changes to the scope of the project and the materials on it. We learned to keep searching for organizations and continue reaching out, adjusting our materials and website based on community feedback.

In relation to the aforementioned challenge, this project has brought to light how inconsistent volunteer training has become during the pandemic as the number of organizations with their hands in the pot is actually quite large with no one organization seemingly in charge. Our project has therefore reached out to numerous organizations along the way, from volunteer focused organizations such as MAVA, to volunteer coordinators for ABE consortiums, to specific ABE sites. Through this effort, we are attempting to establish awareness of our website at all possible levels of the volunteer training pipeline. Although the success of this choice is still unclear, it does give us multiple avenues to reach the people we want to reach (volunteers) and reach our end goal (more culturally and digitally literate volunteers, especially in ESL).

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[5] We added individualized images as page headers to set the tone of each page and engage the viewer. We are particularly proud of the dynamic geometry of the Digital Literacy page.

Another issue was simply the abundance of resources available on digital and cultural literacy and our desire to present the information in a concise and simplified manner so that it was not overwhelming for volunteers. For example, many of the resources on cultural competency are aimed at teachers and often include detailed and technical explanations that draw on a teacher's expertise as an educator. As our target audience does not necessarily have that knowledge or experience nor the time to commit to intensive training, our resources needed to be more focused and easily accessible. For the most part, this was accomplished through feedback from ABE sites and teachers and our own conversations on what we are observing in classrooms and what is most needed.

Weebly also proved to be rather finicky and difficult as it is not the most intuitive or forgiving website builder. There is no save function so if a page is not published and you make a mistake, it is lost forever and just needs to be redone. In this case, the only way to overcome it was to just keep working hard and to learn to deal with those inevitable mistakes and setbacks.

Lastly, the final stumbling block relates to measuring outcomes as the true success of the project relates to how much other organizations use and access the resources. This can be somewhat captured through web traffic, but that does not truly take into account how it is being used while volunteering, if at all. This stumbling block still remains. Besides monitoring traffic, we did not implement a system to really capture how the site is being used.
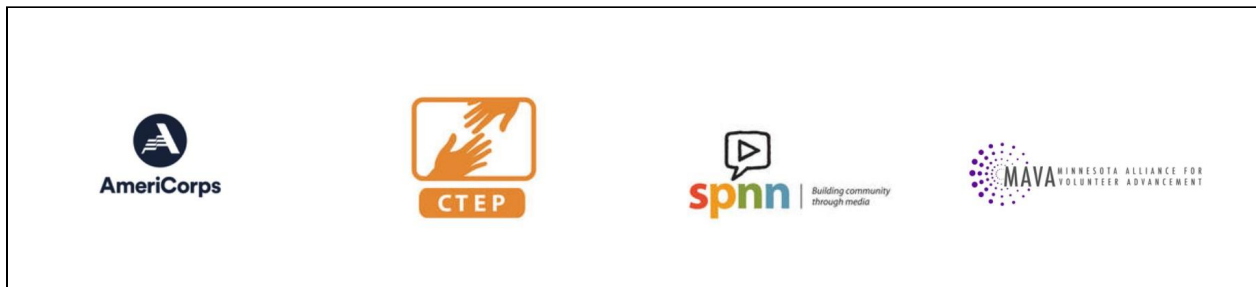
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Risks

There were six main risks which we identified in our charter. The first risk and our primary concern throughout the project has been identifying a community partner. This has proven to be an issue throughout the project as communication with community partners remains challenging. Since the project seemingly collocates two disparate types of training (cultural vs digital literacy), it often conflicts with other organizations' goals and purpose. In addition, volunteer training, at least in ABE, is accomplished through many different

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[6] Our community affiliations including MAVA and our CTEP sites were essential to the development of this website.

organizations so there is not one central organization that handles this issue. This, as well as the pandemic, was always going to complicate our efforts to find a perfectly suited community partner.

Many of the other risks have not proven prescient as of the time of this reflection. However, many of those risk factors are still present since it relates to the website's functionality, the resources and their usefulness, and the overall project's future viability.

Future Usage

As for future usage, we designed the website to be adaptable. We know that information is constantly changing, and we wanted the site to have space for growth as it continues to exist into the future. Though our service years will be ending, we're going to include login information in the handoff materials for the next cohort. Future CTEPs will be able to update the website as needed, and utilize it to train any volunteers that they work with. Additionally, we've added a contact form to the website. If there are any out of date links, missing information, or other concerns with the website, patrons will be able to notify anyone with the login information.

This website is focused around dense subject material. There is a vast amount of information surrounding digital literacy and intercultural communication that exists. We didn't have the time to include more, but it could absolutely be expanded upon in the future.

Final Takeaways

We were able to learn a lot about civic engagement from this project. We learned how difficult and time consuming it is to work across organizations, especially at a lower level of responsibility and authority. That being said, the usefulness of working and coordinating with others is clear as the true usefulness of our project is going to rely on whether those lines of communication and relationships we worked on establishing will result in those organizations using our website.

We all grew a lot throughout the course of the project. We learned that it is very challenging to bring many ideas together cohesively. We bit off a lot more than we initially realized, and were struggling for a bit to bring it together. We were able to work together very well as a group to make sure that everything flowed well, and that we weren't missing any major aspects that we had wanted to include.

We also learned that more persistent communication is necessary when working with bigger organizations. It's common for emails from smaller groups or less established persons to

get lost in someone's inbox, so we had to send follow up emails and reminders often. Next time we work on a project with a community partner, we'll be sure to send weekly emails with updates, even if there isn't too much to say, just to keep the project fresh on their list.