Promising Practices

Creating Videos to Tell the Story

Contributed by

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Introduction

If a picture is worth a thousand words, you may find that creating a video is just what you need to get the word out about your program, highlight your successful students, and capture the impact your program has on your students and your community. There are several adult education programs and regional and national initiatives that use videos for storytelling in a teaching, learning, and promotional context. This Promising Practice profiles a Texas adult basic literacy program and is a collaboration between Nancy Crawford, Executive Director of the Literacy Council of Tyler, and Cynthia Zafft, and Ben Bruno, at the National College Transition Network (NCTN) at World Education, Inc.

Program Context

The Literacy Council of Tyler (LCOT) began in 1990 as an adult basic literacy program, but quickly expanded in collaboration with other area agencies and began to offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Their reputation of quality program delivery and solid financial management led Tyler Junior College to subcontract their entire Texas Education Agency adult education program to Literacy Council of Tyler in 2001. LCOT now offers Basic Education, GED, and ESL classes. They also have a successful family literacy program at the Family Learning Center of Tyler.

In 2012, LCOT provided educational services to 2,300 students with a staff of 44 and 360 volunteers. They have programs in three counties that draw from a seven county region, however the majority of their services are provided in Smith County. Because of their excellent student results, the Texas Education Agency recognizes LCOT as a "Model Program;" only 25% of the Texas programs received this award. In fact, the Literacy Council of Tyler was one of the few programs in the state to achieve 100% of the Federal Performance Measures for Adult Education.

Literacy Council of Tyler has an intensive College Prep program. College Prep is an 8-week program and students attend for 16 hours per week. Its purpose is to continue to build the students' skills so they will succeed in college. Prior to the program, only 27% of GED graduates were completing a semester the local community college. However, when they participate in this program, 70% complete a semester and the staff members at the Literacy Council of Tyler are now tracking the completion of a degree or credential and it is looking very promising.

Rationale and Background of the Practice

In January 2012, LCOT hosted Former First Lady Barbara Bush as their keynote for a fundraiser. The video was viewed at the event and it helped raise money to start an endowment. LCOT had a professional company, Glow in the Dark, do the video. In total, the video cost $3,000, which was paid for through private funds. Although this may be prohibitive for some programs, from LCOT's perspective it has been an investment as opposed to an expense.

The video is posted on LCOT's website and has taken on a life of its own, telling the success stories of four students. The video continues to be an effective outreach and fundraising vehicle. According to Nancy, "We plan to produce one video annually."
Why create videos?

**Videos can tell complex stories.** Is it difficult to convince students that college is the next step? You can invite your program graduates back for a panel discussion, ask the graduates to stay a little longer, and videotape their answers to a few key questions. Why should students go on to college? How did you get over your initial college jitters? How did you decide what to study? There’s many ways to go (full-time or part-time, days or evenings). Have panelists answer those few key questions your students always ask. And, you can certainly videotape the student panel as well.

**Videos can be used to raise funds.** YouTube is the second biggest search engine after Google, and they provide [fundraising advice for nonprofits](https://www.youtube.com). But, your supporters may be closer by. You can include links to your video in fundraising announcements and show your video at community events.

**More people prefer their information in video format.** There’s a reason why YouTube is so popular for outreach and teaching. Videos are engaging and increase the time people spend on a website. One in three young adults (think Millennials) watch more online videos than TV. (Source: 2013 New York Times Video Study)

Focus on Replication

Nancy Crawford commented, "(Our experience at LCOT has shown) you should keep your video short. Our first video was 7 minutes long. Our second is 3 minutes long. So, we are still learning." If you would like to learn more about making your own video, here are some tips and resources from the NCTN team.

**Start by identifying the purpose and audience for your video.** For example, a video to recruit students for a transition program might look quite different from a video for fundraising for an entire adult education program. One video will probably not serve both purposes.

**Keep it short and engaging.** This cannot be emphasized enough. A short, one-minute video is a good place to start. Long videos are more time consuming to produce and more difficult to disseminate. In general, videos with crowds of people, poor lighting, and muddled audio turn viewers away. Try to use concise language, deliver a straightforward message, keep the visual elements simple but engaging, and carefully integrate audio elements.

**Your video is an investment.** Create a video project schedule, like a professional studio would do. That way, your video is more likely to be completed and everyone’s time respected. Do your best to make your video timeless - rather than mentioning specific dates or program details that change over time, encourage viewers to contact your program for more details. You want your video to have the longest shelf life possible. Lastly, make sure your video is seen. That requires a dissemination plan. Who needs to view your video? How will you reach them?

**Plan carefully.** Surf the internet and find 3-5 videos that represent what you are aiming for. What do they contain? What do you like about them? From there, create a pre-production storyboard that lays out exactly what you want to do. During production, try to get the best quality video possible. A smart phone might be sufficient or a simple DSLR camera. Plan to use a tripod. Read these tips on quality video production. Post-production is the most time consuming part of creating a video. Consider making more than one draft and make sure you get honest feedback before you finalize your video.

**Start your high quality multimedia library now.** Most videos require a variety of images, such as still pictures. Is there an amateur photographer in your program or in a photography club in your community? Invite them to attend as the official event photographer. Consider restaging key moments 'for the camera' to get the best shots. A library of 20 bright, high quality photos can go a long way. And don’t forget written permissions! It’s important to get permission from participants in writing. Keep a file with these permission slips along with the photos.

**More on the technology.** Rather than invest in expensive software, consider starting your video production using free software like Windows’ Movie Maker or iMovie for Mac. Browse the offerings at [Tech Soup](https://www.techsoup.org), a nonprofit that distributes software and hardware at free or reduced costs to other qualifying nonprofits. Consider saving time by transferring existing resources into videos by narrating a slide show. Posting your video to YouTube is easy. Just follow the simple directions provided on the YouTube website. Your video can be designated as either public or private. See directions here if you would like to embed your YouTube video into a page on your website. Make your video accessible.
If you would like to embed your YouTube video into a page on your website, make your video accessible. For additional information on making videos accessible, see the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The federal government has a wealth of information on web content and social media, see www.howto.gov.

**Need more support?** Your local public-access channel may be interested in filming and posting your program events on their station. They can also teach you to use their equipment. If you would like to use the material on your own website, you will need permission and access to a digital format that you can use. Your video could also make a good project for your local high school or college multimedia studio class. How about a joint project between your adult education students and a college class?

**Does your program have a video you would like to share?** Have you or your students created a video that focuses on transition to postsecondary education or training? We’d love to see it. Just send a link to your video to Ben Bruno.

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**More Video Examples**

- **You Can Too!**
  Watch a story of three New Yorkers as they change their lives through their commitment to furthering their education.

- **Accelerating Opportunity Student Testimonials**
  Watch the stories of six students as they work on basic skills while in college career programs.