

## Southeast Steuben County BE:Lab

### OBE Final Report Narrative

June 1, 2011-December 31, 2012

Your Final OBE report (June 1, 2011 through end date of operation) must be accompanied by a narrative report that basically provides an interpretation of findings.

- observations regarding digital literacy and workforce development best practices

Throughout the year and 6 months that the BE:Lab has been in existence we observed many practices that did (and some that did not) work so effectively with our community:

It is important to develop a partnership/collaboration with your local Workforce New York office in order to have a collaborative referral of patrons needing assistance with job search and resume assistance.

Know your audience. In the beginning we were striving to assist patrons that may need access to a computer (cannot afford one for their home) or access to broadband (cannot afford and/or is not available for their home) but quickly realized that these were not the individuals (in our community) seeking assistance. Our largest population of individuals seeking computer assistance are over the age of 50 years.

Just because you know that there are people who don't have computer skills, and who you are pretty sure could benefit from learning some computer skills, doesn't mean that those people will ever do anything to acquire those skills, no matter how convivial, accessible, and affordable you make the opportunity to teach them those skills.

The same thing goes for job seekers.

- observations regarding access, scheduling (including one-on-one and open lab practices), course offerings, instructional practices, demographics. Include a discussion of your target audiences and challenges/successes in reaching those populations.

**ACCESS:** At the time that our program began, the library already had a robust PCC that provided high speed access on 20 adult and 7 children's desktop computers, as well as open broadband access for patrons who have their own devices. After studying the demographics and broadband availability of the seven communities that make up the library's service area, BE:Lab created a mobile computer lab of 14 laptops, and a program to bring the lab each week to three town halls in our service area. We also provided these town halls with wireless routers, making them public access broadband "hubs".

After nine months of bringing weekly Broadband access and training to these town halls, it was determined that the number of individuals actually using the service wasn't sufficient to justify the time, manpower and resources being used, so BE:Lab focused its efforts on reaching patrons primarily at the library itself.

Even though we feel that there are still patrons in our area who likely have access challenges, the library's PCC annually serves over 45,000 users. It is there for them.

**COURSE OFFERINGS:** We first began creating a list of courses based upon what we thought, as savvy users, that people needed for digital literacy: basic computer skills, how to set up and use email, navigating the web, principles of computer and internet safety, basic knowledge of Microsoft Office tools (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.) We noted which classes were attended, and which classes were requested, and adjusted accordingly, adding and dropping classes to tailor the offerings to our patrons.

We also tried every way of describing or labeling our “formal multi-patron learning opportunities,” i.e., “classes,” “workshops,” “courses,” “seminars” etc. (workshop might sound like ‘work’ and put some people off, while ‘class’ might remind others of bad school experiences, etc.)

We scheduled classes in three month blocks, often repeating classes on different days & times to give us enough time to evaluate their relevance to our patrons. As time went on we added “fun” classes on digital photographs & computers, digital music, video & VOIP, etc. Some were popular, for a while, and then went unattended, for a while. Some never caught on. There is someone for every topic we have offered, but not necessarily when we have offered it. The upshot is that we cannot seem to predict what people will want, or what (they think) they will need.

When it is all said and done, by far the most effective means of reaching the most patrons and their needs is the One-on-One. One-on-One offers a non-threatening environment for patrons who might be self-conscious or insecure about learning in front of others. Patrons seemed to prefer the privacy and personal attention of One-on-One sessions that deal with their individual needs.

**SCHEDULING:** This has been a challenge for BE:Lab. We have scheduled classes on every week day and Saturdays, in the morning, afternoon and evening, and have found no time that assures participation. Patrons have asked for particular classes at particular times, and still these classes often go unattended.

Early in the program we had somewhat limited room access as other library staff had scheduled the rooms & times well in advance, and even before BE:Lab's existence. After a few months we were able to generally book a classroom space when we needed it.

For a while we offered one class a week on Thursdays, and an additional bi-weekly evening event. Currently, we offer One Hour Tech Wednesdays with workshops that offer just enough of an introduction in the tech subject of the week to get a patron started. Tech subjects include but are not limited to; iPad, various tablets or ereaders, photos, Microsoft

Office (Word, Excel, Publisher), digital music & email. We also offer an Evening Tech Workshop one evening a month again covering many of the same tech subjects, just at a different time of day for those that work during the day. These classes are being attended but occasionally it is on a limited basis. As stated previously, One-on-One assistance is our most popular means of instruction; it is available 5 days a week, from opening until 5 PM on weekdays, with additional staff hours available 3 evenings a month and one full weekend a month. Library hours vary depending on the day of the week as well as the time of year; allowing patrons about 55 hours a week for one-on-one assistance. While we prefer patrons to call/email ahead to book time with us, we can generally handle walk-ins.

Another, ancillary aspect of the scheduling issue is getting the word out to potential learners. The Southeast Steuben County Library has a part-time marketing director who sends out press releases, helps develop signage and advertises all of the library programs to many different marketing/media outlets. The Library gets a good amount of media coverage through local television stations and newspapers. In addition to the efforts by the marketing director, BE:Lab has created its own signage, placed its own inserts into local newspapers, printed and mailed hundreds of postcards, added material to local community mailings, hung posters in area businesses, distributed flyers through the Chamber of Commerce, and created PowerPoint slides that are shown on electronic displays in area Workforce New York offices in Hornell, Bath & Corning, as well as, creating our very BE:Lab Facebook page where we update our classes regularly and post interesting tech articles. We also have a daily Tech Blog that highlights interesting technology news of the day. However, in spite of these efforts, it just doesn't seem to be enough to assure participation in BE:Lab programs; there are still patrons who tell us now that they did not hear about a particular class until after the fact. Other patrons, some of whom we see regularly in the library, tell us they didn't even know about the program's existence STILL! (how do they miss our stacks of flyers, big signs and two huge office 'pods' next to the reference desk, and the two of us assisting patrons at a table in the center of the main aisle?)

Having said that, there are always new patrons taking advantage of our services, and many tell us that they heard about us from friends and family. Word of mouth is probably our best outreach tool.

- **narrative regarding all other essential elements of your program especially those items you deem particularly unique. Include a discussion of how you feel the PCC has particularly met the needs of your partners and your community.**

One-on-One [E-readers/Tablets] Sessions seem to be our biggest hit! The B:Lab had no idea back in November/December 2010 when we were developing our programming that E-readers would become such a popular item! As you will note in our OBE FINAL Report, we have exceeded our predicted outcome by EXACTLY double the attendees (how does that even happen...it's a sign of greater things to come for the BE:Lab)!

Excel has been another popular course that has brought attendance at nearly every offering! Again, we had no idea that so many individuals would be so interested in learning Excel!

In April 2012, The BE:Lab developed out “Dream & Create with PINTEREST” Group; which was desired to be an evening of “Dreaming & Creating” for those with an “addiction” to the ever popular social media website. We meet every other Tuesday evening “creating” one simple craft and one decadent recipe straight from PINTEREST! It has definitely become a hit, securing quite a following!

Aside from our regular programming, the BE:Lab also established collaborations and partnerships with our local high school Special Education Dept., PTA and Diversity Leadership Team offering iPad training and computers to use for their Parent Portal initiative. We also collaborated with the Corning Senior Center and DaySpring II Apartments (a senior living facility) to offer an overview of our services and answer some of the residents basic computer questions.

In September 2012, the Southeast Steuben County Library’s BE:Lab in conjunction with the Corning Area Chamber of Commerce [Denise Ackley], CSS Workforce New York [Dan Porter] and the City of Corning [Mark Ryckman] held their 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Corning Area Job Fair on September 22, 2012 from 10:00AM - 1:00 PM! Six Businesses (ADECCO, Gentiva, Inc., Sibley Nursing, Radisson, Pathways, Inc, and Culligan) were present and 67 individuals attended seeking employment. Resume and Job Application assistance were provided by Wayland Library eSkills Shop, Alfred Box Of Books ePlace and STLS JobLink. WETM News covered the Fair on the 6:00PM & 11:00PM news that evening. All participating agencies/partners are looking forward to next year’s event!

- discussion of challenges and lessons learned.

The biggest challenges are getting the word out, what time to hold classes, and course topics.  
(SEE ABOVE)

Graphics- charts, graphs etc.- should be used to highlight particularly important information. Ideally, this narrative, when combined with your data, will document grant activity and be part of your final project evaluation.

## BE:Lab Custom OBE Plan

■ Target Audience    ■ Actual Achievement Level

