Project Report

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Project Title
Voice activated access to information - phase 1 implementation
This question is read only.

Please provide a short summary of the work that was completed as part of this project / research *
The project is about rolling out the Blind Foundation Library Alexa skill to our library users. The whole programme consists of loaning an Amazon Echo device with multi-media/multi-format user resources, as well as offer for volunteers to visit the users in their homes to help with device installation, user training, and subsequent follow up. Blind Foundation is undertaking this project to provide a more intuitive digital channel for our users to receive their Talking Books and Magazines (accessible audio files). Utilising the accessible nature of voice-enabled technology, we also hope to encourage wider usage of the Internet to access general information among people with vision loss and/or are older.
Describe the 'who, what, where, when and why' of your initiative

Timing

Is your project / research complete? *
○ Yes   ◉ No
If your initiative is still in progress, pick 'no'

When do you anticipate that your project / research will be completed?
31/12/2021
Must be a date.
Leave blank if this is an ongoing initiative or if finish date is unknown

Milestones

What have been the major steps / stages (i.e. milestones) involved in delivering your initiative to date?

Milestone	Description
Planning	Project team coordinated cross-functional project kick off and planning sessions across the wider Blind Foundation; including Communications, Fundraising, Library, and other service teams that work with people directly. This is to ensure a coordinated approach and buy-in to the project rollout.
Recruited Volunteer Coordinator	Feb 2019; to coordinate the delivery of the project, specifically the recruitment and training of volunteers in areas where the Skill has been rolled out.

Started recruitment and training of volunteers	Volunteer Coordinated started this process nation-wide, with a specific focus on Auckland and Palmerston North, which are our first target areas. The process started in March. She worked with existing volunteer pool, local staff, and local community organisations to recruit suitable volunteers.
Developed volunteer training modules	Volunteer Coordinator developed a set of volunteer training modules that covers components such as how to approach people who are Blind or have low vision; how to conduct home-based visits, and technical instructions on setting up the Echo device and using the Skill. The modules also teach volunteers about other offerings and uses offered through the device. We have seen many people wanting to know how they can find more information on things they are interested in, such as music, sports, etc. The modules provides for FAQs and basic Internet safety and data privacy information so our volunteers are equipped to inform and conduct baseline training to our library users on those topics.
Users' resources developed	Resources for users on introduction to Amazon Echo devices (installation, commands associated to the Skill). These resources are reproduced in accessible formats preferred by the users (e.g. large-print, braille), and sent out with the Amazon Echo device at the first instance. We have developed videos for users as well that are almost ready to launch.
Internal communications to Auckland and Palmerston North based service users	Auckland and Palmerston North were the first areas for rollout. The communication to service users was completed in April 2019.
Trained national contact centre staff	Basic training conducted with the national contact centre staff, who are the first point of call for service users who are responding to the internal communication and wish to express interest for using the Skill.
500 users by June 2019	The goal was to roll out the Skill to 500 users by June 2019. We have exceeded this goal with 724 people actively using the skill; out of those, 579 people received a smart-speaker on loan from Blind Low Vision NZ NZ. We have provided hands-on volunteer support with at least 255 people.

Receive feedback	Received unsolicited positive feedback through national contact centre, project team, and volunteers.
Follow ups by volunteers	Volunteers have been continuously following up with new users to see how they are going and whether or not they require additional support. So far, hardly anyone had to go back and visit the user again, indicating a relatively smooth uptake process.
e.g. planning; major activities; evaluation	

Outcomes

What outcomes were generated as a result of this project / research?

Outcomes are the changes that have occurred for the beneficiaries of your initiative. Generally outcomes can be framed as an increase or decrease in one or more of the following:

- Skills, knowledge, confidence, aspiration, motivation, (these are generally **immediate** or short-term outcomes)
- Actions, behaviour, change in policy (these are generally **intermediate** or medium-term outcomes)
- Social, financial, environmental, physical conditions (these are generally **long-term** outcomes)

Immediate outcomes occur directly following an activity (e.g. within 1 month); intermediate outcomes are those that fall between the immediate and long-term (e.g. between 1 month and 2 years); and long-term outcomes are those we expect to see years later (e.g. 2, 5, 10 or 50 years after the activity).

We also want to learn more about how you tracked the outcomes of your initiative - what you measured and how.

If you need more help understanding what outcomes are, read the help sheets at www.ourcommunity.com.au/evaluation

List your initiative's outcomes and attached information in the following table. Leave blank any fields that do not apply to your project.

Outcome	Were these outcomes anticipated?	Timeframe	Indicator	Verification Method
Increased access to books/ general information	Anticipated	Immediate	Reduced wait time	Number of people with devices no longer receiving books on CD
People appear to be reading more library books	Anticipated	Immediate	Sessions with the library skill, Search intent instances	Alexa analytics

Increased independence (around accessing information)	Anticipated	Immediate	Utterances, range of intents	Alexa analytics
People utilising the internet more	Anticipated	Intermediate	Users report their growing confidence finding things they are interested in on the internet	Report on follow up
Outcomes are the changes that you believe were generated or influenced by your initiative. See information above.	Choose from the list	Choose from the list (see description above)	What you used to measure this outcome - e.g. 'change in teenage pregnancy rates from x to y'	e.g. survey; interviews; focus groups

What (if anything) did you change in your approach and practices as your project? research proceeded, and why? *

When we first started the project, we thought we could roll through the regions rapidly, but the practicalities of working with volunteers means that it does take time to find, train, and set up the before volunteers are ready to be deployed. This also taught us that it is best to have largely set up that volunteer infrastructure before marketing to users, instead of expecting we would be able to set up the infrastructure at the same time as responding to user interests. This will help us create a better customer experience.

In order to achieve this, we have adjusted the roll-out deliverable to a limited number of geographic areas instead of nationwide.

We also learnt that there is immense amount of work behind the scene (like organisation resources, collateral) that needs to be done before the programme can be rolled out, so that helped us understand how we would deliver similar projects in the future.

We had to manage client expectations after asking for expressions of interest and not being able to meet the demand within a reasonable timeframe. We needed to further break down the size of the areas that get the roll out to ensure we had sufficient volunteers and resources to deliver within an area. As we proceeded, we learnt the amount of time required and were able to refine the process for more seamless roll-out.

Our initial focus was on providing access to the library and teaching clients to use the library skill. Based on feedback from volunteers, we got more confident in how our clients needed to be taught our skill. Our volunteers were then able to encourage users to find and use other skills and give recommendations to clients about skills that they may be interested in and what the internet can be used for.

Feeding in with our regional volunteer coordinators has been really effective since they are on the ground working with volunteers and have the networks to share information.

We may use this information to help inform others undertaking similar work

What did you learn as a result of undertaking this project/program? *

It was good to have comprehensive teaching/learning documentation that is easy to understand and provides step-by-step advice for users who are not confident, who are not

tech savvy and for whom the internet is very new. It would have been more effective to set up and trial the process before rolling out the service.

It was a struggle to deliver in Auckland, our first roll-out area, because it became apparent we needed many more volunteer resources to cover such a huge area. We learnt that it is helpful to recruit and train a large number of volunteers because people may not have the commitment to the project, may prioritise other things, and they are not always reliable. In recruiting volunteers, it is important that they have some tech skills otherwise they are not able to troubleshoot and resolve issues when things don't work as they should.

The take up has been phenomenal, compared to other devices that enable web-based internet access. We expected more negative comments from users and challenges however, once it is set up, people have really taken to it and feel very comfortable with voice commands.

The main thing that caused problems was Amazon's update as it interferes with our skills and we have needed to engage more IT engineer time to resolve it.

We are particularly interested in lessons that may help others undertaking similar work. Think about what you learned about your inputs (money, skills, personnel, time - too much; too little; about right?); your assumptions (were they 100% right, only partly right, or were the results a complete surprise?); and the context of the project/program (timing; targeted beneficiaries; geographic settings - were they right; wrong; about right?)

How will you share your learnings from this project/research? *
We communicated with Vision Australia (our sister charity in Australia) and Amazon in Australia and shared positive feedback and training notes which they are reviewing and providing advice to improve. There is a lot of interest and we are working to find out what kind of discount would be available for ordering large numbers of devices.

What mediums were used to share the learnings? Have you reached the audience you expected?

We'd love to see some visual and audio representations of your work. Please share below.

Upload files:

Filename: Alexa analytics.pdf
File size: 131.4 kB

Filename: Alexa Volunteer Blanche with Elizabeth Nutall 2 .jpg
File size: 4.5 MB

Filename: Bob Wickes_2.jpg
File size: 4.3 MB

Filename: SueFraser-BlindFoundation-122.jpg
File size: 2.6 MB

and/or

Provide web link:

Must be a URL

and/or

Provide additional details:	The Alexa analytics could only be drawn from April 2019 onwards. The photos are of clients receiving training from volunteers in using their new Alexa devices.
	Please include captions, if relevant
Can we use your media content in our own communications?	◉ Yes ○ No ○ Please contact us first
	e.g. in our annual report

Financial Report

* indicates a required field

Project Income & Expenditure

Please provide details of any project income (funds received) and project expenditure (funds spent) to date.

Use the 'Notes' column to provide any additional information you think we should be aware of.

Income Description	Income Type	Confirmed Funding?	Income Amount ($)	Notes
Milford Asset	Donations *	Confirmed *	$50,000.00	160 devices & wrap around delivery/support
Ministry of Social Development	Government Grants	Confirmed	$10,760.00	160 devices
Hugh Green Foundation	Philanthropic Grants	Confirmed	$10,000.00	34 devices & wrap around delivery/support
Room-Simmonds Charitable Trust	Philanthropic Grants	Confirmed	$10,000.00	34 devices & wrap around delivery/support
Estate of P H Bell	Donations	Confirmed	$50,000.00	169 devices & wrap around delivery/services
Ministry of Social Development	Philanthropic Grants	Confirmed	$20,175.00	300 devices

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Type	Expenditure Amount ($)	Notes
Project Coordination	Salaries and Wages *	$22,516.00	

User resource development & support	Project and Production	$4,537.50	
Technical trouble shooting and support for users	Salaries and Wages	$78,975.00	7.5FTE national contact centre @ 20% time
Amazon Echo Dots	Infrastructure and/or Hardware	$57,633.25	857 devices @ $67.25
Solution maintenance and development	Project and Production	$15,000.00	
Travel for volunteer recruitment and training	Project and Production	$600.00	Moratorium on travel
Volunteer travel	Project and Production	$7,752.00	255 trips @ 40km av x .76c/km

Income and Expenditure Totals

Total Income Amount

$150,935.00

This number/amount is calculated.

Total Expenditure Amount

$187,013.75

This number/amount is calculated.

Income - Expenditure

-$36,078.75

This number/amount is calculated.

Have you experienced any issues with your intended project budget to date? If so, please explain reasons for any major variances or for providing incomplete information:
In September our new Chief Executive put a moratorium on staff travel due to the cost already incurred for the year so we had to focus on two sites - Auckland and Palmerston North.

Certification and Feedback

Feedback

You are now nearing the end of this form. Before you review your application and click the **SUBMIT** button please take a few moments to provide some feedback. (If you would rather provide anonymous feedback, please go to **{{ Grantmakers: provide a link to an anonymous survey or delete this sentence }}**

Please indicate how you found the acquittal process:
○ Very easy   ○ Easy   ◉ Neutral   ○ Difficult   ○ Very Difficult

How many minutes in total did it take you to complete this form?
240
Estimate in minutes (i.e. 1 hour = 60 minutes)

Please provide us with your suggestions about any improvements and/or additions to this form that you think we need to consider:
The form is perfectly fine it just takes time along the way to collect the required information from the project team.