Community Projects 2018/19
Community Projects mid-year report
Application CP000142018/19 From Ms Geraldine Lewis
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Instructions for Grantees

This form is designed to help us understand the challenges, triumphs and insights you experienced and gained while running your funded project/program. Please be frank – while we absolutely want to know about and celebrate your successes, it's just important to us that we understand what did not work so well. This will help us to learn what we and others could do differently next time.

You must complete and submit this form no later than the date stipulated in your funding agreement. However, should you not be able to meet the deadline please contact Gertrud to arrange an alternative date. If you fail to do so you may not be eligible to apply for further grants from **InternetNZ**.

The completion of this form should be overseen by someone with an intimate knowledge of the funded project/program.

Mid-project Report

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

Amount of funding granted from InternetNZ?
$30,000.00
Must be a dollar amount.

Please provide a short summary of the work that has been 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

When do you anticipate that your project will be completed?
30/06/2020
Must be a date.

Milestones

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

Milestone	Description

Project planning/kick off	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 is 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.
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 is to roll out the Skill to 500 users by June 2019. We exceeded that target with more than 600 people receiving the service by that date.
Receive feedback	Received unsolicited positive feedback through national contact centre, project team, and volunteers.
Volunteers have been offered call back	Volunteers have been continuously follow 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	

What findings have you made so far?

• People's aptitude to the Skill is not determined by age: there has always been an assumption that elderly people have less appetite for emerging technology. However, we have seen many people in their 80s and 90s responding to Blind Foundation's internal communication to register their interest for the Skill.

• People are generally very positive about the solution: the project team was also responsible for rolling out another Blind Foundation developed digital library product (to deliver audio content). In comparison, the Skill has exhibited less issues and the feedback from users have been overwhelmingly positive compared to other digital library products in the past.

• People are diversifying from our skills and onto other offerings of the Alexa device: we have found that users, through volunteer support or own exploration, have expanded their use of Alexa beyond our Skills, to other offering available through the smart speaker. This observation confirmed our hypothesis that voice-enabled technology and smart-speakers are low-barrier entry points to technology and utilising the Internet for different aspects of life. The development also aligns with the strategic direction for our Library to serve as not only a place where people can borrow reading material, but also a service that facilitates people's wider access to information.

• Volunteer retention is difficult – people cannot consistently commit to the role as being older, our volunteers tend to go on longer holidays, have more family commitments, even though they are usually very committed to the cause as well. On top of that, some areas are harder to recruit volunteers from compared to others, particularly in rural, remote areas.

• The idea of volunteer support is instrumental to user uptake and ongoing engagement: this is in comparison to a similar initiative where the project team loaned out iPads for our online library app/web. The project did not incorporate components of user training or face-to-face support; the uptake was low comparing to the Alexa rollout.

What (if anything) did you change in your approach and practices as your project/ program/initiative 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 may use this information to help inform others undertaking similar work

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
Towards implementation of the programme + purchase of devices	Philanthropic Grants *	Confirmed *	$77,450.00	N/A
Towards implementation of the programme + purchase of devices	Donations	Confirmed	$228,558.00	this includes funds that needed to be used in the last financial year (ending 30 June 2019) and the new financial year.
Towards purchases of devices	Government Grants	Confirmed	$8,643.00	$67 per unit

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Type	Expenditure Amount ($)	Notes
Project Coordination	Salaries and Wages *	$11,258.00	Including recruitment, training, and supporting volunteers who install, train, and follow up with people who signed to use the Library Skill
User resource development and support	Project and Production	$12,000.00	Developing multimedia user resources, including videos, print (in accessible formats).
Technical trouble shooting and support for users	Infrastructure and/or Hardware	$15,210.00	Accessible through 0800 pathway
Amazon Echo Dots	Infrastructure and/or Hardware	$40,736.00	At $67 per unit
Solution maintenance and development	Infrastructure and/or Hardware	$15,000.00	

Income and Expenditure Totals

Total Income Amount	**Total Expenditure Amount**	**Income - Expenditure**
$314,651.00	$94,204.00	$220,447.00
This number/amount is calculated.	This number/amount is calculated.	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:
This is an explanation towards the income amount versus the expenditure. A huge part of the donations received belonged to last financial year (our financial year runs from 1 July to 30 June). A part of the cost is around recruitment, training and deployment of volunteers. That work has recently ramped up and we will do a stock take for the final accountability report.

Certification and Feedback

Feedback

You are almost at the end of our application process. Before **Submitting** your application, please take a few moments to provide some feedback.

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?
180
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: