UPSKILL WITH EDTECH:

Preparing Adult Learners For The Future Of Work

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Constantly evolving work environments powered by technology demand workers with more than basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills. To get and keep jobs in a competitive environment, workers also need the digital competencies required to work with new workplace technologies.

The purpose of **ISTE's framework Upskill With Edtech: Preparing Adult Learners for the Future of Work** is to help adult-learning and workforce-development organizations understand how to leverage educational and productivity technology to better prepare adult workers and job seekers in the digital age. Changes are needed in both the content of programs and how they are delivered to be more relevant and reach more people. By redesigning the model for content and delivery through transformative uses of technology, organizations have the opportunity to increase both access and impact.

Five areas of activity are essential to the success of technology initiatives:

1. **VISION & READINESS**
2. **TEAM CAPACITY & DEVELOPMENT**
3. **RESEARCH & PLANNING**
4. **PROCUREMENT & IMPLEMENTATION**
5. **COMMUNICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS**

The framework addresses why each one is important and offers proven practices and actionable guidance for planning, designing and decision-making around the adoption, scaling and sustainability of programs and services enabled by technology.

SKILLRISE

AN ISTE INITIATIVE

VISION & READINESS

An important attribute of organizations that succeed at leveraging technology is the ability to develop a compelling vision of the future. A clear vision helps with goal setting, implementation and measuring progress, and serves as a reminder to all stakeholders of the benefits they will realize when vision becomes reality. When a vision is lacking, organizations have difficulty communicating why they are embracing technology, what they hope to achieve with it and how everyone will benefit. Some organizations place too much emphasis on technology and not enough on the problems they are trying to solve.

A good place for organizations to start developing a vision is to define the needs of the worker population they serve and evaluate the effectiveness and accessibility of the services they offer. This helps determine how technology can be used to improve their offerings. To assess readiness, organizations look at existing staff, skills and resources in the context of both developing and sustaining the technology-enabled programs and services they've decided to implement. Such an assessment identifies gaps, which can then be filled.

TEAM CAPACITY & DEVELOPMENT

An organization's ability to use technology in innovative ways depends on staff members' expertise and their willingness to embrace new ways of doing things. Ideally, an organization's technology planning and implementation team will include people with a broad range of knowledge and skills, starting with programs and services. Financial expertise is necessary because technology decisions are also business decisions. People with technical skills are also essential. One way to acquire the essential technical skills is to rethink existing staff responsibilities and reassign or upskill some team members. Other options are to hire new people who already have the skills or outsource the work. Once assembled, the team will need processes and tools to ensure that it can work collaboratively.

Organizations frequently underestimate the impact technology will have on the jobs, roles and daily working lives of their staffs and how they will react to change. To overcome resistance and help people embrace the mindset and cultural changes necessary to succeed, leaders can model desired behaviors and mentor staff. Formal change-management training and professional development programs might also be required.

RESEARCH & PLANNING

Developing a vision and building team capacity for leveraging technology in programs and services are activities that apply to all technology projects. However, each specific technology solution requires focused research and planning. The first step in defining a specific solution is to identify a pressing worker need that can be supported effectively by a technology-enabled program or service. This can be done through research with surveys, one-on-one conversations or focus groups. The next step is to define requirements for the solution, which includes articulating its purpose, features, functionality and capabilities through the lens of worker needs.

It's important to plan for scaling and sustainability of a specific solution from the very beginning. Failure to do so can lead to a solution being underutilized or quickly becoming obsolete.

PROCUREMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

With research and planning for a specific solution completed, organizations have three options for procuring and/or implementing it: 1) find an existing product that has almost everything needed and make it work; 2) find an existing product that can be augmented, modified or combined with others to get closer to the ideal; or 3) build a product from scratch.

Starting with an existing product that meets most or all needs is often less expensive because it's quicker to implement. In addition, maintenance and upgrades are typically included in the price. There are proven practices for evaluating existing products that fall into three categories: procurement, piloting and implementation.

Procurement

Until recently, identifying suitable products has been a hit-or-miss process, with most organizations relying primarily on recommendations from peers. However, the field is changing rapidly and there are now resources for more objective evaluations.

Once products have been identified, the next step is to speak directly with the vendors. Vendors should be asked to provide proof of their claims. If available, reviewing credible third-party evidence of a product's effectiveness is essential.

Piloting

A well-designed and executed pilot can provide data that can be used to evaluate, purchase and implement a product with confidence. To be successful, a pilot requires clarity of purpose and attention to detail. The framework includes several readily available sources of information and tools for running pilots.

Implementation

Implementing a technology-enabled solution requires assembling a multidisciplinary core team of people that can be expanded to include people with other skills at key points.

During the procurement, piloting and implementation phase, decisions made about a specific solution during the research and planning phase might need to be revisited and possibly revised. Organizations should remain open to these changes and adapt as needed.

COMMUNICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

To ensure widespread adoption of a technology-enabled solution, a well-designed and executed launch, rollout plan and strategy for ongoing communications that includes direct outreach and traditional and social media are essential. Another key to success is ensuring that staff members stay up to speed on current practices and technologies that similar organizations are using to rethink services and how to deliver them. Organizations can seek out professional learning networks to augment their own training and professional development or create their own informal networks.

Communications

Staff members can be great ambassadors internally and with workers, partners, funders and other key stakeholders. However, they must understand the vision for the solution and be able to articulate its benefits. For external audiences, early adopters and partners can be recruited to test the solution before it is launched. Their feedback and stories can be gathered and shared with others to ensure the solution is well understood.

Developing and executing a comprehensive communications plan takes time. Organizations are advised to begin planning well in advance of launching a solution. A poorly or hastily executed launch can give a solution a bad reputation it might never overcome.

Professional Learning Networks

A professional learning network is a vibrant community of people in similar roles in similar organizations who can learn from one another and share ideas. Professional learning networks can expose staff members to other ways of doing things. This exposure helps keep skills and ideas fresh and ensures the ready availability of a network of trusted people who can be sought out for advice.

To access the complete framework, please visit **WWW.SKILLRISE.ORG**