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The NExT Project: Phase 1 Finally Complete – Well Almost!

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In May of 2014, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Library of the Health Sciences was privileged to receive a Target Outreach Award from the Greater Midwest Region. We knew our Nursing Experts: Translating the Evidence project, otherwise known as NExT, was a big undertaking, but we were excited to get started. We had a 12-member team of nurses and librarians ready to begin teaching evidence based public health and how to find high-quality, free government resources. Our idea was to divide the state into regions with a ‘local’ team in each region. After all, we had 2 universities, 4 libraries, and 5 cities with faculty that had agreed to participate. The Western Illinois University School of Nursing would be joining the UIC libraries and UIC College of Nursing in this effort. The plan was to conduct workshops at various health departments, as well as at a conference, and to translate that in-person experience to an online course for anyone that could not attend in person. Each workshop, whether in person or online, would provide 3 free continuing education credits for nurses. As you might already suspect, a project this large has had its fair share of hiccups and successes. Here are just a couple of examples:

A large team meant that we could divide the work, but it also meant that the team was affected by several different careers. So far, we have had seven of our original twelve leave the project. Reasons have included retirements, new positions, new appointments, and one member who won new unrelated project grants that needed her undivided attention. As team members have needed to leave the project, we have missed them but have benefited from the fresh perspective of new faculty.

We have made new connections with our colleagues on geographically dispersed campuses and been given the opportunity to meet face to face with our peers as we have conducted the sessions. We have also been given a fresh burst of energy with each new member that is excited to be a part of such a large project. New faculty have also brought with them their experience and expertise which has helped to strengthen the project.
Another hurdle was the current economic climate, which can be especially difficult for non-profit groups, even if they have been doing good work for over a decade. The NExT project was working with the Rural Public Health Institute (RPHI) to provide a pre-conference workshop at their 11th Annual Institute in Effingham. Unfortunately, RPHI lost their funding, and we were left with no clear way to reach the public health workforce in southern Illinois. However, all this changed when we made a connection with the Illinois Rural Health Association (IRHA). The IRHA invited us to be a part of their Video Conference Workshop Series which is broadcast to their members and available at ten sites throughout the state. This opportunity allowed us to once again meet our primary objective of delivering the NExT educational content locally and at no cost to the public health workforce.

During this project, the NExT team has also dealt with organizational changes, software licensing issues, and a myriad of other obstacles. However, with a dedicated team and patience from the GMR, we were able to turn each hurdle into a new opportunity for success. We provided ten in-person sessions for 85 attendees, conducted a video conference workshop that was broadcast across Illinois, and are days away from launching our online course accessible to the world.

Would we do it again? Absolutely! In fact, we have already begun work on Phase 2 thanks to another Target Outreach Award from the GMR. Right now, the team is scheduling in-person sessions; a mobile website is in development; and new hurdles are waiting to be turned into opportunities. So visit us online at http://phnext.uic.edu to see what’s NExT!

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