NNIPCamp San Antonio, April 7, 2016

Session 2 – Civic Data and Technology Training

Led by Kathy Pettit – Urban Institute

Notes by Maia Woluchem

Present: Jim Farnam, Claudia Coulton, Ji Won Shon, Taylor Tyger, Jung Hyun Choi, Victoria O’Dell, Charlotte-Anne Lucas, Shahrukh Farooq, Nate Ron-Ferguson, Tim Reardon, Seema Iyer, Sharon Kandris, Meg Merrick, Jie Wu, Bob Gradeck, Christopher Whitaker, Katherine Hillenbrand, Denise Linn, Laura Simmons, John Cruz, Ryan Gerety, Stephanie Martinez, Cheryl Knott, Tom Kingsley, Kim Pierson, Andrea Ducas

Kathy - There are four main stages. The first is figuring out that there is a lot of great stuff happening in the community. So this isn’t about creating new stuff. We’re going to find a lot of places where there are a lot of things. We’re doing a scan in an online survey about what kind of training is happening. There are a lot of different kinds of training. Training that we’re interested in is data and technology for a group of folks that are working to improve communities. It’s not grandma working on Facebook. So these are government agency staff that need to use data better, nonprofits, United Ways, but also resident leaders and organizers too. Not just professionals, necessarily. Generally for the purpose of improving communities. We won’t be focusing on webinars because this is a narrower scope. The last time we did this we made an excellent book – “[Four training experiences from NNIP](http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/library/catalog/building-community-capacity-use-information-four-training-options-experience-nationa)” from 2000. Shockingly, with the technology and the online work that Cleveland and the Boston Indicators Project were doing they were pretty far ahead of themselves. All of the questions and the advice are just as true today as they were back in 2000. So the first stage will be the scan and the second stage will be a pre-session at the Cleveland meeting. Content to be determined depending on the scan. Some elements that I thought could happen – we could do a training of trainers to try to think about how to transfer knowledge and skills. Could be more of a reflection on how to do training and how to help people who would be launching these programs.

Elizabeth – We could discuss the gaps.

Kathy – We could do a workshop. So there are many different forms that it could take in September and we’re not settled on that yet. But we are thinking about the Tuesday before the meeting. We’ll be taking what we learned from the scan and the guide and writing an introductory guide that will be advice from the field about how to do this well and principles about cultural competence. The guide on MOUs was not about “the perfect MOU” but “here are the things you need in an MOU”. Something about the components you should think about when doing this training. The idea is that more training isn’t the outcome in itself. Volume is not it. When does the training make sense versus the technical assistance that you guys do one on one? So training isn’t the answer for every issue. Thirdly, I think I have a vision of a curriculum bank. One of the beauties I was explaining is that there is very generous sharing among partners. Baltimore doesn’t care, Charlotte has their curriculum. So the idea is that there’s a searchable bank that people can pull from and share in an easier way from what we have now. We brought this up to the executive committee and they were very enthusiastic. I knew we hadn’t done it. I can share the to-do list of all the different ideas that we have, and this was one of the things that I had to pay more attention to. This was an area and a clear obvious area of common interest that came up and mashed well.

Grossman – The fourth stage is dissemination. It’s important to us as one of the stages.

Kathy – And then we would share the world.

Gross – We hope it’ll be valuable to other people in the room but there are other people too.

Kathy – If you have an institution there to help you, that’s fantastic. If you have volunteer groups to help you, could do really fantastic training capacity about their city. NNIP is like my audience in my brain about who can use this but I think we’ll see that it has a broad audience.

Grossman – I’m a little giddy. So the other two points, I’m not sure everyone knows I’m at a group at Microsoft working on tech and civic engagement. Why Microsoft? The Tech and Civic Engagement group is a small group but basically we’re on the ground in a few cities in the US. Very small teams. We’re about participating and partnering with local and national organizations to better understand how technology can be harnessed for civic priorities. We don’t do anything that doesn’t have the civic part it in it. Obviously some of that is about tech deployment but it’s really about the models. How does tech and data help enable them to meet their goals? That helps us understand what kind of tech could be useful. We’re partnering to understand the landscape. How the tech is being developed and where those needs might be. The question that Microsoft gets asked is—when do conversations turn to scale and scalability? One of the reasons we want to partner here is that not only are we thinking about what is going on, but we’re making sure that more people have access to these trainings. This is not something that we are supporting because of Microsoft technologies. It is about all kinds of tools as driven by the civic uses around strengthening technologies. It is about the capabilities and purposes and what technologies get you there.

Kathy – I think that their local folks are doing really amazing work. To the extent where the Microsoft team is doing great training we should grab it and think about where it works.

Grossman – We’ll be surveying the group but we’ll be surveying more broadly than that.

Kathy – I think tapping into our friends at Code for America. I think one of our questions is how to do our survey. If we go to strangers we have to vet things and the like. That’s just one of the implementation questions. Hopefully that’s the end of us talking. We have many questions – one I have never done a training. I think these are the areas that I imagine are on the survey. And I may not have them right but I think questions about what else we should be asking about. Question – when is it useful? Who is doing the training? There were three models of training – site/tool specific, embedded in curriculum, neighborhood/issue-area focus.

Grossman – One thing I would add to the list – something around a task. Grant writing or advocacy or telling a story or communications/digitalization, etc. So you bring the problem and talk about how to fix it.

Abby– We do trainings on NEO CANDO, which takes Census and ACS data by making it more relatable to Northeast Ohio. Also do trainings on our local data portal. City of Cleveland departments coming and learning how to use that tool. And for the NEO CANDO trainings, that’s specific to our graduate students.

Chris – So the Code for America brigades do informal trainings. They’ll teach a breakout rooms at their hack nights. Or they’ll invite a speaker to do a speaker on a certain tool. Had trainings on GitHub, on data portals, FOIAs. If there are people who are looking for training on civic technology tools or issues, we can probably reach out to brigade members. We can ask if people are willing to be trainings.

John - So we’ve done things in the past on how to navigate through the data. We’ve done stuff for other CDC partners, sometimes the general public, at least quarterly. A lot of that you know how to engage and talk to these people. We’ve talked about all of the data driven reasons it makes sense. We don’t usually get more focused locally in that.

Kathy –When have you thought about evaluation or outcomes?

John – We know it’s worthwhile. We collect emails and send out a survey yearly. Everyone who have interacted with Rise in any way. It takes you through all of the SurveyMonkey things. That’s how we’re using these metrics to quantify it and see if these trainings are worthwhile.

Sharon – Yes, we do trainings on how to use the SAVI tools but also on the applications of the data to do strategic planning, grant assessment, grant writing. Sometimes we partner and do a workshop. We introduce them to SAVI and show them how to use data well. We’re getting ready to revamp our training to look at how we <inaudible>. Where we need nonprofits to provide us data, info on how to collect data, how to manage it.

Kathy – Data collection isn’t even one I thought about.

Bob – We’ve done trainings about how to collect property data. We’re getting ramped up to do trainings for two audiences. Thinking about our library system. Whether it’s a tool or whatever. Thinking about data buyers as well. Data collectors too.

Kim – We’ve done training for the community profiles for in the field and another on principals and parents. Wanted all of the town planners to attend that. Talked to Elizabeth earlier. We are in the early phases of data literacy trainings. That is for data literacy for potential grantees, United Ways, and Rhode Island. Very basic as we’re producing data.

Seema – I don’t know how you get to this question but we’re a small shop. So for us to lead, it’s a huge lift. If someone else has done that work, it’s easy. But it gets to what their audiences are. People that are writing a grant. The foundations tend to organize that and then we’ll attend a session. We focus on community based organizations themselves. We’ve done very few where we curate the content themselves.

Kathy – So I think the “who else is training people”. Those are totally inbounds.

Seema – We put together learning modules. We modeled them after KIDS COUNT in the classroom. You could be a professor using it or could be a leader using it. What does this variable have to do with childhood poverty? Allow the teaching with data.org.

Charlotte-Anne – We’ve trained people on taking data and putting context around that data. We’re now having people talk to us about walkability in their neighborhoods and stray dogs and no lighting. Then the other part is kind of fuzzy. We do teach media literacy and digital footprints. And determining the credibility of sources. I don’t know how that fits into this.

Kathy – Being good consumers of data is in scope.

Elizabeth – That’s interesting because I said it was out of scope. But I think it’s drawing out organizational responsibility vs personal responsibility.

Kathy – But I do think if there’s a specific funder, that would be helpful. If we give you the curriculum you still have to pay for your time. So we should know what organizations are funding this. With help desks, ¾ of you said that general support was funding it.

Jim – Our work to support the open data portal—the one full time person is really frustrated with the number of data departments. It raised the question for me – what about assessment and certification? If you knew what level you had, you’d know what kind of data 101 certificates to have. So you’d know that they’d be built into certain capabilities.

Kathy – There have been examples in the past of people continuing to get credit.

Tom – Are you thinking about moving from training-related into decision support? Decision support tools and how to frame data for decisions? Could be a huge thing but also an interesting thing.

Kathy – I think if the tools exist and people are training on the tools…the proposal for the DC Civic Tech project combines all of our data on housing preservation into a usable dashboard that people can buy up. When they’re trying to figure out what they need. I think there’s a difference between…

Tom – The difference between training that showed you how to make a bar chart. But how to frame the data to be more interesting in a data driven process?

Elizabeth – One of the conversations that we often have is how you judge quality for data where you’re doing research to understand the landscape or the trends. It’s different from the way you do that if you want to direct decisions.

Ryan – Maybe also what materials have been already used for the trainings?

Seema – The level of digital knowledge of the participants coming in needs to match the kind of training that you’re trying to provide. I hesitate to train low digital literacy participants on a brand new technology. So the “how long” – if you’re doing a site and tool specific training, it needs to matter how long it’s been around. It’s easy to train someone on factfinder.

Meg – I think what goes through my mind is that it seems to be a difference in training people about data and training people about information. They are different things. And then the issue of use. Thinking about the audiences, those distinctions are kind of important.

Kathy – I could see the difference between data and information. How would I describe that in our scope.

Meg – Data is a wide open universe. People who aren’t familiar with it have a hard time making the leap between statistics and use. Whereas I think that a lot of what we’re doing now is processing it and putting it out in a way that makes it more information like. And also a little more directive. I think for a lot of groups, they need that help. Statistics are very hard for a lot of community groups even if their needs are off.

Kathy – I think stats would be helpful.

Denise – I think when scanning the field of individual fields, I think it’d be helpful to know what the communities are. Sometimes there’s a community of practice around trainers, definitely in Chicago. Also there are convening events for people who do that work. So there might be an infrastructure in place. Like LISC Chicago does Data Fridays.

Bob – There’s a brigade or a student group. But the thing that we’ve learned is that a core of community organizations or groups won’t go to those trainings because they won’t think they meet the prerequisites. So the focus here is data 101. If they want to do that, they can do the Maptime. But really just get their core data tools up to speed and getting them to look at a problem.

Kathy – I also added marketing. Who’s finding out about the training and how.

Seema – Does anybody else get trainings from faculty requests?

Elizabeth - My favorite question is scale and sustainability. One of the questions is the “train the trainer” sessions. Are there other activities that are empowering professors or other people in their agency?

Ryan – In Detroit they’re having data discotheques. The idea is that they work with face-building community groups. There’s a series of tables and people learn about different tools and different projects. They discuss database discrimination and the open data portal that Detroit is starting. So people with low digital literacy can get engaged to different levels. But then you have different teachers around the room. So that’s a discotheque. They made a discotheque scene and now other people replicate it. The 2nd one is April 23rd. The idea is that communities would self-organize. The other thing is to train the trainers. Or to train people in neighborhoods who can bring people together in their own neighborhoods. In Detroit that’s digital trainers.

Sabina – Our community profiles—One of our funders spread a little myth that Liz was going out to do trainings. But it’s one of the joys of being in a university. It’s a new project and there’s a lot of marketing that goes on. They’re learning the system but also learning something new. The second point is that if anyone is doing things with podcasts or using Audacity, we’re finally getting around to producing a few things. I know there are some people here in San Antonio and Saint Mary’s that are good at this. Has anyone done a brief podcast?

Kathy – Not that I’ve heard of.

Charlotte–Anne – I used it once but that’s been about four years now.

Kathy – What is Audacity?

Charlotte-Anne – Free audio editor. You can download it on your computer right now.

Claudia – Has anyone developed a ladder of training? Or any idea of providing certificates? People like to get certificates. And if they could do that, they could get an opening to employment or being able to raise their level in some way.

Kathy – Sharon has a very specific level 1, level 2, at least they’ve mentioned certificates. Tim Bray’s work around program management is a certificate program. The foundations give money to the grantees to buy into his program. He’s not funded to do it for free but he feels like it’s a good way to make sure it’s useful. Framed as a certificate. Some of the old ones in DC did have community education credits. That didn’t last.

Grossman – One of the challenges in timing is that the tools do evolve and change. So how are various people striking a balance so that people don’t feel that they’re being too tool-specific? So making sure that it’s examples. We have conversations around some training that we’re involved in. Machine learning. There’s a bunch of different languages you can use for that. So you could show the underlying model, and show the example that’s using a specific tool or language. And you could have three types of examples maybe. But there are other types of languages or tools. Maybe you could have the training focus on the task and show different examples.

Ryan – If you ask about the goal and the skills, sometimes the skills might just be general data analysis. Sometimes the tool might be look at the new tool that we developed.

Grossman – Are there tools that you guys have developed that are different from the other tools?

Chris Whitaker – Is there room for project management training or product management training? People get trained on a language but then they’re told to go do something and they’re not the most equipped to lead a team on something.

Elizabeth – Project management is where there are a lot of industry training courses and official tools around project management. Here are some kinds of projects that are totally unique to community organizations that you might want to say <inaudible>. This is the workforce development question. We’re not interested in generic skills.

Seema – I think people are going to do a training using our websites. Which of course begs the question about how user friendly your website is? So it’s maybe one of the questions that you ask? Is it paper? Is it web? For just some digital communications.

Kathy – I think if you look at a training around the vital signs website, on one hand it is helpful around what you’re looking for. So there might be pieces in there or it might not be relevant. So if you publish the training…

Elizabeth - Are there trainings that you all receive?

Ryan – During the digital stewards program, they all got training on pedagogy.

Jie - We are a university so…

Kathy – So I think on the scan are there gaps or other topics. That’s also part of the scan.

Claudia – I’ll just preface this by saying more universities are now being involved with content exclusively online. I’m raising the question on whether that is or not useful for educating the community. We should probably be mindful of that. It’s possible at the grassroots level that your training is really really good because you have people who care about the problem at the same room. And you can come out with some relationships. You’re getting other things from the training. But there could be other things that could be there done well with UI doing it online. And I think that – we should be mindful of different deliveries.

Charlotte-Anne – We’ve been asked more and more about that. It’s more and more a question of asking you –

Kathy – You’re training people to train online?

Charlotte-Anne – On online delivery. Maybe webcasting or putting it online as video. The online delivery of the training that can be very useful.

Claudia – When you really get into online education, there may be some videos in it or some lectures that have been taped but there’s also other ways to ask questions or whatever. It tracks every attempt you make and it gives you a feedback or a score. It’s quite expansive, if there was something that didn’t benefit from all this community interaction. It could be a higher quality.

Jim – It could be combined with the community.

Claudia – I think data skills are really suited for the instantaneous feedback.