

Public Health Outreach Project Description

Title: The Public Health Information Link (P.H.I.L.) for Nevada

Staff: Joan Zenan, Terry Henner

Organization: Savitt Medical Library, University of Nevada School of Medicine

Date: 10/1/98-3/31/01

Objectives:

- 1) Provide training for public health professionals in searching the Internet, PubMed, and other NLM databases.
- 2) Develop a public health information web site, including some Nevada-specific "gray" literature and data.
- 3) Establish site coordinators with all participating public health agencies and professional associations.
- 4) Promote awareness of the project and the public health information resources available.

Target Audience:

All public health professionals in state and county public health agencies in Nevada.

Needs assessment (methodology and results):

The Focus Group process was chosen as the primary means of data collection for our needs assessment phase. It was chosen because it would give us the most helpful data in the least amount of time, and with the least amount of effort on the part of the participating agencies' professional staff.

The project staff met with the focus groups in their individual agency settings with arrangements made by that agency's contact person. 4-10 staff members attended each session. All attendees were asked to complete a brief survey about their access to and use of the Internet at work. Joan Zenan, Project Director, gave an overview of the PHIL project. Terry Henner, project co-director, assisted with the survey and directed 2 of the focus groups. Patricia Charles, project evaluator, directed the other 6 focus groups. She introduced the participants to the focus group process and then guided them in answering the questions. Joan and Terry took notes and handled the tape recorder. The focus group sessions lasted approximately 1½ hours.

58 staff members from four Nevada public health agencies participated in the 8 focus group meetings that took place from 12/9/98-2/23/99. A wide variety of public health professionals attended: air pollution control specialists, chemists, environmental health specialists, public health nurses, microbiologists, health educators, physicians, administrators, and secretarial support staff.

The information gathered via the focus groups was evaluated and used to plan the training classes and the schedule for those classes, as well as the development of the PHIL web site. A report on the results of the focus groups was produced and shared with the participating agencies.

Intervention: 7/99 to present

Training sessions were designed using a Power Point introduction and hands on exercises. Sessions focused on web searching skills and a wide range of public health information sites. When the PHIL web site was up and available, it was used as the web-searching starting point.

25 training sessions have been held so far with an attendance of 240 persons. The sessions have had 4-12 attendees. We have reached more than 25% of Nevada's public health professionals with these classes, and we know that the attendees have returned to their offices and shared their new knowledge with their colleagues.

Our grant period has been extended until March 31, 2001, so we will be doing more training sessions in an effort to reach a larger percentage of our public health professionals, especially at the Washoe County District Health Department in Reno.

Training and other materials developed:

53 Power Point slides were developed for the introductory part of the training sessions:

- 5 - Introduction
- 7 – Web evaluation
- 12 – Identifying quality web sites
- 13 – Search engines
- 7 – Browser tips
- 2 – MEDLINE
- 7 – PHIL site demonstration

Handout – very simple – the URL for the PHIL web site and e-mail addresses for Joan Zenan and Terry Henner.

Website (developed as part of project and how maintained):

www.med.unr.edu/phil - Is a categorized, extensive list of key public health websites, including those specific to Nevada. Maintained by Terry Henner, co-PI, with assistance from a student intern from the Health Ecology Department.

Evaluation (methodology and results):

Several evaluation methods have been used:

1. The PHIL website has a “satisfaction/feedback/suggestion” response area. Unfortunately, we have had no response via this method.
2. Evaluation questionnaires were distributed at every training session, and were filled out by all attendees. Copies of these evaluations were given to the project evaluator, Patricia Charles, and she has had her research assistant input all the responses into a database.

3. Using the responses to the training sessions, a random sample of class participants were called on the phone 2 ½ months after attending class as part of an Outcomes Assessment process. We wanted to see whether the information gained in the classes was being used. The responses were very positive as far as usefulness. Also, most folks were interested in more training, especially in web searching skills. A final Outcomes Assessment will be done in March by following up with class attendees from the final 8 months of our project.
4. We had planned to use interactive videoconferencing with our agency contacts to discuss progress on the PHIL project and to generate any new ideas for PHIL. This did not work because the agencies did not end up having the videoconferencing ability they thought they would. We did do follow up with our contacts via phone, e-mail and in person. No new ideas came up, but the need for ongoing class sessions was a definite “yes!”

Poster Sessions/Exhibits/Presentations/Publications:

10/20/98 – “What Are You Missing If You Are Not on the Internet?” - 1 ½ hour presentation with the PSRML staff – Nevada Public Health Association/Nevada Environmental Health Association annual meeting – Reno, NV.

2/5/99 – “Providing Access in a Digital World: the Public Health Information Link (PHIL) for Nevada.” Paper/Power Point presentation. Joint Meeting NCNMLG/MLGSCA - San Jose, CA.

3/99 – “Do You Know P.H.I.L.?” Article written for the Nevada Public Health Association’s Spring 1999 newsletter. An overview of NLM/CDC’s Partners In Information Access projects and the PHIL project.

5/17/99 – “Providing Access in a Digital World: the Public Health Information Link (PHIL) for Nevada.” Power Point presentation. Medical Library Association annual meeting – Chicago, IL.

8/10/99 – The PHIL project was described in the “Dean’s Update,” an in-house electronic newsletter for the University of Nevada School of Medicine.

10/13/99 – “A PHIL Update.” 15 minute Power Point presentation on the progress of the PHIL project during a plenary session at the Nevada Public Health Association’s annual meeting – Las Vegas, NV.

1/25/00 – “Providing Access in a Digital World: the Public Health Information Link (P.H.I.L.) for Nevada.” Power Point presentation at the Partnerships for Health in the New Millennium: Launching Health People 2010 meeting – Washington, D.C.

2/11/00 – “Partners in Information Access: Outreach to Public Health Professionals in Nevada.” Power Point presentation. Joint Meeting NCNMLG/MLGSCA – San Diego, CA.

5/10/00 – “Partners in Information Access for Public Health Professionals: the Nevada Experience.” Power Point presentation with a Las Vegas public health professional. Medical Library Association annual meeting – Vancouver, BC.

11/2/00 – “A PHIL Update.” 10 minute. Power Point presentation during opening plenary session of the joint meeting of the Nevada Rural Health Association and the Nevada Public Health Association. Minden, NV.

Partnerships:

Have worked closely with 2 presidents of the Nevada Public Health Association. They provided access to presentation time at their annual meetings and helped with publicity efforts.

Our contacts at each public health agency have also worked fairly well, especially in Clark County and Washoe County. They helped get folks signed up for our training classes.

The State Health Division contact, our State Health Officer, has been enthusiastic, but way too busy most of the time to pave the way in Carson City. The internal politics, their legislative agenda, and way too many projects for their number of staff, has kept her from helping us accomplish some of our objectives with the State Health Division professional staff.

Marketing:

- Attended and gave presentations at the Nevada Public Health Association’s annual meetings 3 times.
- Published an article on PHIL in the NPHA Newsletter.
- Gave 5 papers with Power Point slides at national and regional meetings.
- Had an article in the School of Medicine’s electronic newsletter.
- Worked closely with our agency contacts to market our training classes and the PHIL web site.

Administrative issues:

Our biggest administrative challenge has been keeping a reliable web development technician on board. The initial design of the web site was accomplished with a very talented student from the Journalism Department. Unfortunately, he graduated and got a professional job just as the web site was ready for its first major update. Terry Henner hired another student who lasted only a few weeks because he was able to get an assistantship in the Computer Science Department. We then had to wait until school started to recruit and the next student hired turned out not to be very responsible about showing up for work. Terry fired her. We are now on our 4th web technician!

Challenges Faced:

- Everything took longer than we expected
- When we started the project many of the public health professionals did not have computers on their desks or access to the Internet. This changed rapidly in the first year of our grant.
- The 2nd and 3rd quarters of our first year were during Nevada's biennial legislative session. This activity greatly impacted the State Health Division, and especially the State Health Officer, who was our contact. We were constantly rescheduling times with them
- It took a lot longer to schedule our 8 focus groups than we thought it would.
- We ran into many scheduling difficulties and challenging facility logistics for the training classes.
- Organizational political issues (e.g. a vacancy in the county health officer position) slowed us down or kept us from accomplishing some goals in the early part of the grant period.

Were Project Objectives Met?

Yes, we have been able to meet, or will be meeting by 3/31/01, all our objectives. The training classes have been very successful and we will be offering more through the end of the grant period. The web site is fairly well developed and is constantly being tweaked. We have established site coordinators for each agency and have worked well with them. (Unfortunately, one of our best ones is leaving soon.) Promotion of PHIL, with the help of the Nevada Public Health Association officers, has been fun and fairly easy. We are going to produce a final PHIL brochure that will be sent directly to all class attendees. Extra copies will be sent to our agency contacts for distribution to new employees and those who did not attend our classes.

Sustainability:

We feel the PHIL web site can be maintained and sustained for the foreseeable future with the help of the Health Ecology Department's pool of interns. All their students are required to do internships, so in the years ahead we should be able to get "free" help most semesters. We will offer public health professionals the opportunity to attend training classes we give in Las Vegas and Reno for health professionals. And, we will maintain our ties with our public health agencies as long as we have contacts that will work with us.

Anecdotes or Other Observations: