

**TOWN OF DRUMHELLER
INFORMATION 2000 PROJECT**

POLICY # A-11-98

TRAINING AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Training in computer applications is ideally provided to each individual, based on his or her existing skill level and the expected degree of use of the computer application. This is no different than training for use of any other tools in the workplace. The training that is needed consists of technical training on how to use the general features of the application, and operational training in procedures and custom features specific to the Town.

Training needs to take place as the computer application is being introduced, and during its initial use. The training that occurs after use has commenced is most likely in the form of help on using specific tasks or features, or solving problems. This is referred to as support. As a worker becomes more familiar with the computer application through either training or experience, the need for ongoing support generally decreases. A greater investment in training will lead to a decrease in the support that has to be provided. Thus, strategies for training and support must be integrated.

For any application, it can be expected that there will be a few staff who need to use many of the features of the application, on an almost continuous basis. These staff should receive advanced level training. Most staff will use the application's more basic features, and some of these will use the application only sporadically. For these staff, introductory level training is sufficient.

All staff will require training on procedures that are specific to the Town. This may be in the form of short workshops, or written procedure manuals, depending on the complexity of the procedures. The procedural experts will most likely be Town staff who are responsible for creating the procedures.

Organizations should expect that, for off-the-shelf software, introductory level training will cost about 50% of the price of the software purchased, and advanced training can cost up to 150% of the software's purchase price. In all cases, it is recommended that training be purchased from qualified organizations, such as the software vendors, educational institutions, or contracted trainers. Depending on the number of staff for which training must be provided, and the level of training needed, either existing courses, or custom courses may be cost effective, especially when the cost of staff time away from work is considered.

As it is impractical to provide training that is customized for each individual, workers must be grouped according to skill level and expected intensity of use. As applications are being planned, it will be necessary to poll the potential users to determine the expected level of use of specific functionality of the software, and to determine if there is any pre-existing knowledge that may reduce the amount of training needed. From this, training plans can be developed, and training provided.

Ongoing support can be expensive to provide. To reduce these costs as much as possible, users should be taught to be self-sufficient. For off-the-shelf applications, on-line help functionality is usually provided, and (especially novice) users should receive training in how to use this tool to solve their problems. The on-line help also offers the advantage of being just-in-time: it only is accessed when it is needed, and the users can learn to do only those things that they need to do immediately.

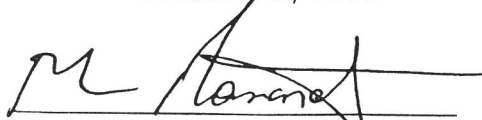
Those who use the application the most can be expected to gain the most skill, from advanced training, from practice, and from the experience gained in overcoming the problems that arise. In the absence of on-site support personnel, these users can be given the responsibility of assisting less skillful staff in solving their problems.

Lastly, there is a need for "last resort" help for most applications. When the on-line help, reference manuals, and expert user colleagues can not solve a problem, there needs to be an external source of assistance that is readily available. This service is usually contracted out to the software developer, in the form of annual contracts for telephone support. Some sophisticated forms of this use software that lets the support person view the monitor of the person who is being helped, so that step-by-step instructions can be provided.

To summarize, the following steps need to be taken to ensure adequate training and support for each application and associated new procedure introduced. For each application there will need to be a specific training plan prepared.

1. Identify both the application's technical features and the Town's unique procedures that are being implemented.
2. Survey staff to determine pre-existing level of skill, and expected use of the application's functionality.
3. Identify procedural experts among Town staff, who will be tasked with documenting the new procedures and conducting workshops for Town staff.
4. Group users according to the technical skills that must be taught.
5. Identify potential courses offered by vendors and educational institutions, and compare their curricula to the needs identified. Acquire training courses or custom course development, as is most cost effective.
6. Schedule courses and workshops for staff, to coincide with the introduction of the new application and procedures. Where advanced training is needed, schedule this for a few months after initial training.
7. Identify external sources for support, and contract for this.
8. A few months after the application is introduced, survey staff again to determine if additional training is needed. Arrange for this – likely through either purchasing additional training, or providing short in-service sessions.

Adopted by Muni2000 Steering Committee:
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