Creating an Assistive Technology Exposition with Planning Guide & Toolkit for the Seven Hills Foundation: Executive Summary

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

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Link to Project Website:

http://wp.wpi.edu/wcpc/projects/projects-by-term/spring-2018/seven-hills-foundation-executing-an-assistive-technology-exposition/

Executive Summary

In the United States alone, over 30 million people experience difficulty with daily tasks due to a disability (NIH, 2016). In order to assist these people, software programs, equipment, and product systems have been developed to improve accessibility and promote independence. Such "assistive technologies" range from pencil grips to modified cars. The world of assistive technology (AT) is constantly evolving, but the professional staff that work with individuals who need AT are often much too busy to keep up. Additionally, there are no centralized sources of information about available AT (Fischer, 2016). The lack of organized information about AT leads to an increasing problem about AT awareness and education. One of the organizations impacted by this increasing knowledge gap is a Massachusetts-based non-profit organization: The Seven Hills Foundation.

The Seven Hills Foundation seeks to address this knowledge gap by hosting an annual AT exposition, gathering together local companies, businesses, and organizations to talk about and demonstrate their devices and services to the Seven Hills staff and the community of disabled people they serve. However, this exposition was still a very new undertaking for Seven Hills in 2017, and few procedural guidelines were in place. We worked with Seven Hills to organize and carry out the 2018 Assistive Technology Exposition and create a Planning Guide & Toolkit to provide assistance in running future expositions.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objectives of this project aimed to assist the Seven Hills Foundation in the creation of AT expositions, both this year and in the future. The first objective was to organize the details of the exposition. The second objective was to run and evaluate the exposition. The third objective was to provide a guide & toolkit for planning future expositions for Seven Hills to use. The final objective was to recommend other ways to increase AT exposure and education within Seven Hills. These objectives were achieved through constant communication with Seven Hills staff to run the exposition and create a Planning Guide & Toolkit for carrying out future expositions.

Results & Outcomes

The AT Expo Planning Guide & Toolkit contained the majority of the results of the project, as it was a comprehensive guide for staff at Seven Hills to use to host future AT Expo. Core elements of the AT Expo Planning Guide & Toolkit contain:

- User friendly design
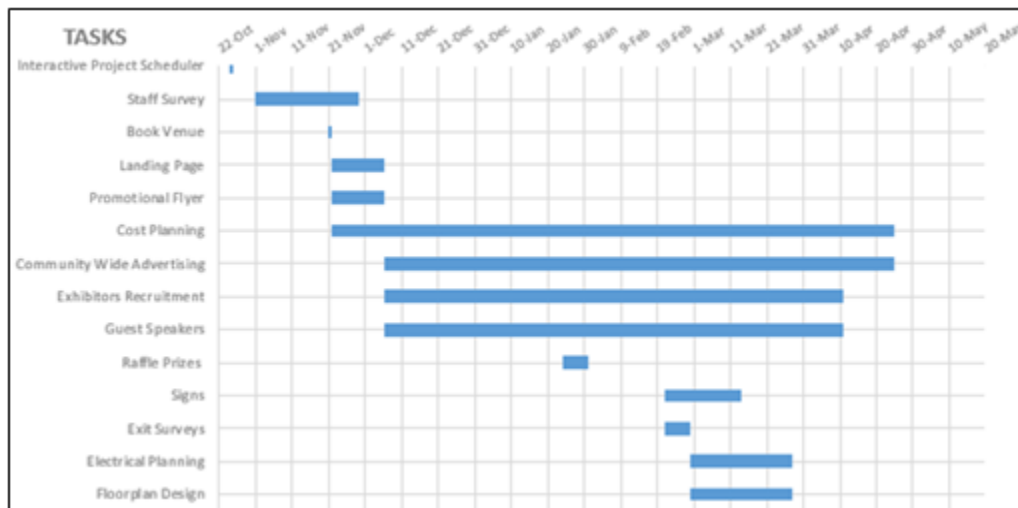- Interactive Project Scheduler (See Figure 1 below)

Figure 1: Interactive Project Scheduler Partial Snapshot

- AT Expo Toolkit (See Figure 2 below)
    - Easy to edit documents/files
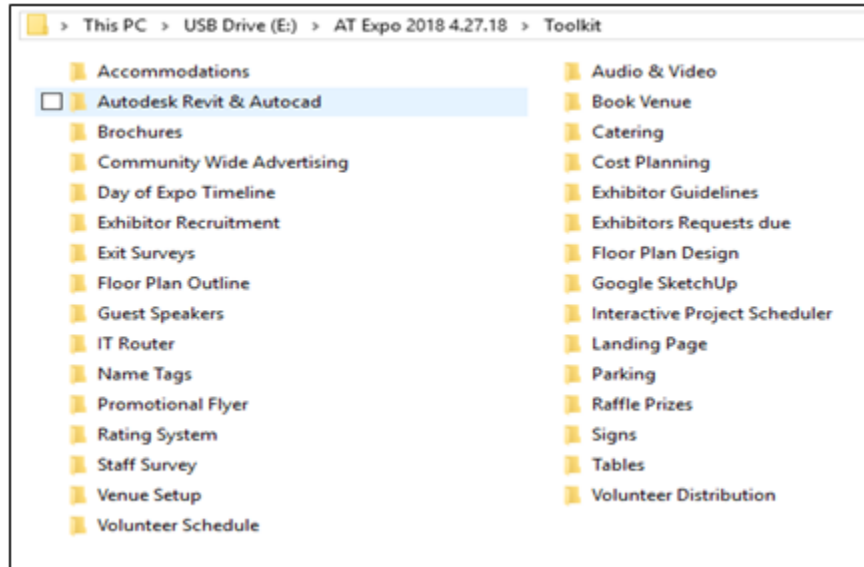   - Synchronized with AT Planning Guide

Figure 2: AT Expo Toolkit

- AT Expo task pages with guidance, duration, tools, and key contacts (See Figure 3 below)

1.5 Promotional Flyer

The layout of the advertisement flyer should be quick, to the point, and contain all necessary information about the exposition. Such information is: the date, time, location, exhibitors, and a registration link. Highlights about the event, to draw interest, is also highly recommended. This will make the flyer one of the best advertisement/informational tools and can be sent to all exhibitors as they are contacted. Once this information is gathered, the flyer will be made by the Marketing and Communications Department. The 2018 exposition flyer can be seen in Figure 6 below.

Resources
Contact: Office of Advancement, Nancy Benoit, Nbenoit@sevenhills.org
Tools: Promotional Flyer
Start **110** days before the Exposition, **10** days to complete

Figure 3: Sample AT Expo Task Page

This planning guide can be used for many years with simple edits made to both the planning guide and the toolkit for continual simplification of hosting a beneficial exposition. The Planning Guide included a timeline and step-by-step process of how to run an exposition, each step with a section elaborating on the process necessary to accomplish it. Also included is an extensive list of all the people we contacted, including members within the Seven Hills Foundation, exhibitors, colleges, and social media, detailing their contact information and services.

In addition, the exposition and preparation for it produced its own set of results that we analyzed. Survey results received from the staff of the Seven Hills Foundation helped to indicate that the range of assistive technologies the exposition needed to cover was very wide, as shown in Figure 4 below.
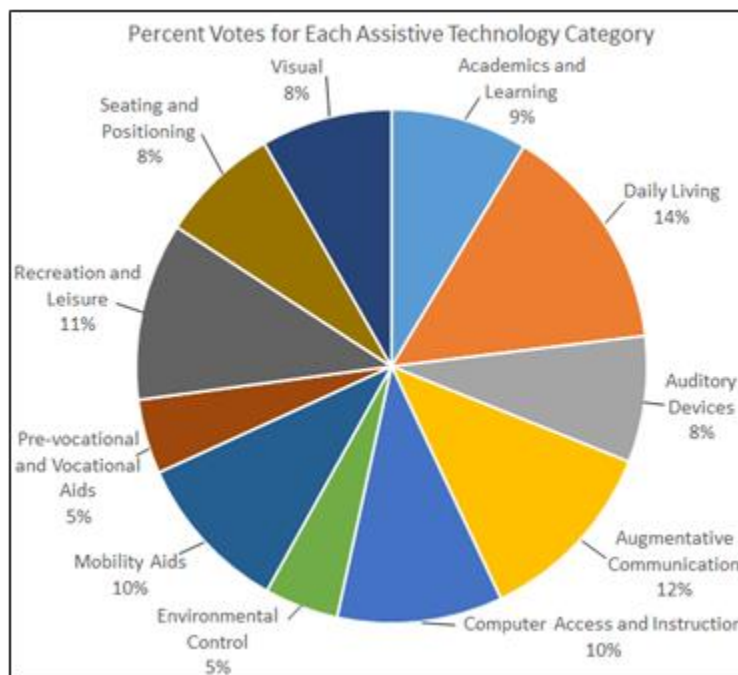

Figure 4: The Percent of Total Votes for Each Category of Assistive Technology

Roughly 200 attendees came to the exposition and 24 exhibitors demonstrated their devices and services. A total of 50 expo attendees took the exit survey, of whom 90% rated the overall exposition either good or excellent. Additionally, 20 exhibitors took the exit survey, of

whom 90% responded that the exposition was executed very or extremely well. The remaining 10% of exhibitors responded that the exposition was executed moderately well. When asked, all the attending staff from Seven Hills said that they had learned at least a moderate amount about assistive technology. From these results, we determined that running the exposition according to the Planning Guide was successful in delivering information about assistive technology to its attendees.

Recommendations

At the conclusion of the project, we developed a list of recommendations. These suggestions should help support the needs of Seven Hills staff, promote professional development, and improve the levels of communication among Seven Hills affiliates. These suggestions include:

- Ensure AT Exposition Planning Guide & Toolkit are updated for each Exposition.
- Increase the number of training sessions and workshops about AT beyond what an Expo has to offer.
- Maintain up-to-date Seven Hills staff information on SHF Website.
- Regularly survey staff to track areas of need.
- Maintain open communication among all Seven Hills staff regarding Expo details.