

Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County saves time and improves quality of training using online training

The Challenge

Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County (BBBS-EDC) had a small staff that was stretched thin. Providing pre-match training to volunteer mentors was a time-consuming activity in terms of developing, providing, and especially, scheduling. They also recognized the need to increase the quality of their training as BBBS of America (BBBSA) began to require affiliates to implement more comprehensive, high quality mentor training. In order to better prepare volunteers to be effective mentors and to meet BBBSA's rigorous standards of practice, BBBS-EDC needed a solution that would place a minimal time burden on staff, while also wanting to significantly increase the quality of pre-match mentor training.

The Context

Located about 45 minutes northwest of Sacramento, California, BBBS-EDC supports over 200 community and school-based matches annually with a staff of eight and a budget of slightly less than \$500,000 per year. BBBSA began requiring local affiliates to meet more rigorous standards of practice in 2014.

The Solution

BBBSA worked with Mentoring Central to develop and offer three evidence-based online courses to all affiliates for use with volunteers and early match mentors. In 2014, BBBS-EDC began to require all volunteers to complete the training program before the volunteer and mentee's first meeting. The online courses helped BBBS-EDC meet BBBSA's rigorous national standards.

BBBS-EDC also requires all of their Board members to complete the pre-match course prior to becoming an official Board member. Taking the course has improved their understanding of mentoring and their ability to guide the organization.

"I'd absolutely recommend these courses to other BBBS affiliates! In fact, I'm always talking with my peers promoting it."



– Amber Henrichs
Program Director
BBBS-EDC

*"I've had nothing but positive feedback from my Bigs.
They love how interactive it is."*

– Amber Henrichs Program Director, BBBS-EDC

The Results, ROI, and Future Plans

BBBS-EDC continues to offer quarterly in-person post-match trainings in addition to the pre-match online courses, but finds that these in-person trainings are sparsely attended and are often attended by the same group of people each time. Thus, the in-person trainings do not universally reach all mentors.

As the Program Director at BBBS-EDC, Amber is ecstatic with the results of implementing the online training program. Volunteers love how interactive it is and report feeling far better prepared to be a mentor after completing the training. Busy volunteers also really appreciate the convenience of being able to take the training online, as they can take the course when they want, as well as start, stop, and rejoin the training as they like. Amber notes that the courses help many volunteers have more realistic expectations, as many come in thinking they'll "be doing cartwheels from the start with their mentees".

There have been some challenges with implementing the online training protocol. For example, some volunteers don't have regular access to the internet and some older volunteers have reported not being comfortable with using technology. BBBS-EDC has found a simple work around to solve these challenges – they simply invite the volunteers to their office to take the courses there on a computer or tablet. This further strengthens the connections between BBBS-EDC staff and volunteer mentors.

Amber feels great knowing how much better the quality of her training is for her mentors, and loves that it frees up her time to be able to devote herself to other critical activities.



Big Brothers Big Sisters

For more information about BBBS-EDC:
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