

When Access Goes Viral:

Considering the Impact of Resource Sharing



Our Context



The University of Arkansas is located in Fayetteville and has a student population of approximately 27,000, representing all 50 states and over 120 countries. University of Arkansas – Partners for Inclusive Communities (Partners) is an outreach program positioned administratively in the College of Education and Public Health. Partners receives funding from a variety of sources to carry out projects related to disability inclusion, and access.

Melanie Thornton, Coordinator of Access and Equity Outreach with Partners, oversees several projects that focus on accessible design. With support from these projects, she has created a website called **Explore Access: Tools for Promoting Disability Access and Inclusion** (exploreaccess.org) which hosts a variety of resources and toolkits. Among the target audiences for these resources are those working in higher education settings, and specifically disability resource professionals.

Data Points: Meeting a Need During a Crisis

In mid-March 2020, campuses across the country prepared to move all classes online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We responded by developing a toolkit called [Designing an Accessible Online Course](#). We announced the resource on 5 listservs and on Partners' social media pages. What resulted was surprising.

The toolkit received
11,897 Visitors
from March 15
to April 30, 2020.

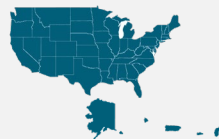


137 Websites

posted a link to the toolkit on their site.



**67 Colleges
and Universities**



**31 U.S. States
and Territories**



**3 Canadian
Provinces**

** For comparison, the next most popular toolkit had about 1000 visitors during this same period, about 1200 hits in the first 45 days it was released, and currently has 18 links from external sites.*

Understanding the Impact

Clearly, the resource went viral as a result of the pandemic and the need for instructors to move their courses to an online environment quickly. As a result, our projects and the Explore Access website received more attention, our newsletter subscribers increased by 25%, and our funder was thrilled by the reach this product achieved. This experience has caused us to want to have a better understanding of and to increase the impact of our resources. We want to gather data that answers the questions:

- Was the toolkit helpful to our users?
- Did it result in behavior change for instructors?
- Did it result in improved access for disabled students?

As we explore ways to collect more data, we plan to move forward with a better understanding of the dynamics of organizational change.

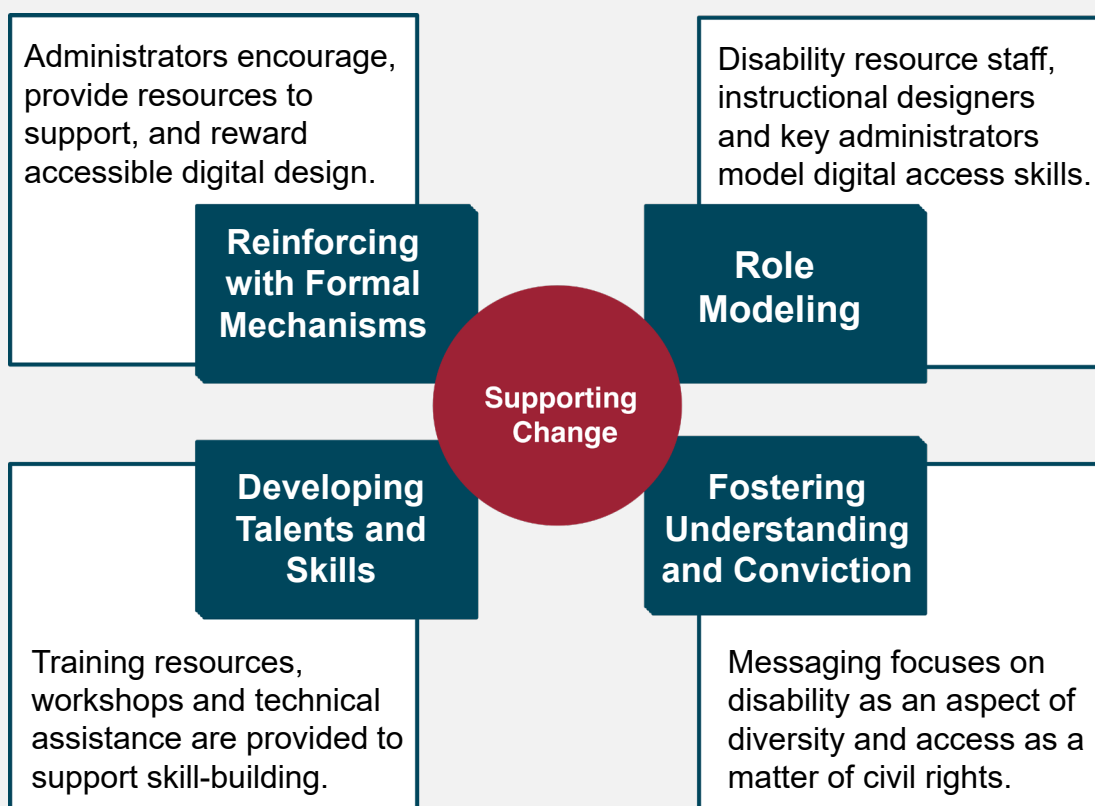
ACCESSIBILITY



LOADING...

How Does Change Happen?

Since our goal is not only to create resources that are used by a large number of people, but also to improve access, it helps to consider how change happens within an organization or specifically on a college campus. There is general agreement among those researching organizational change that providing training alone is not adequate, but that change occurs when a variety of elements are in place. An article in the *McKinsey Quarterly* describes these key elements as: role modeling, fostering understanding and conviction, reinforcing changes through formal mechanisms, and developing talents and skills (Basford and Schaninger, 2016). How might this model apply to improving digital access? This diagram shows how key behaviors related to digital access might support change.



What Did We Learn?

- **Timing and circumstances can help resources take flight:** Releasing and sharing a resource at the right time can be an effective way to have that resource go viral.
- **More data is better:** Built-in statistics plug-ins and analytics provide numbers but don't measure impact. Including a way to collect user data is a good practice to better understand how resources are being used and how they might be improved.
- **Releasing toolkits in strategic locations may increase impact:** Whether a training resource has a lasting impact depends on where it is shared. It will be more likely to have an impact in environments where other elements are in place: role modeling, messaging, and reinforcement.
- **Emphasizing the “why” could be important:** Building some messaging into a product about why it is important may help to “foster understanding and conviction.”



Opportunities and Next Steps

- **Be prepared to respond to “big needs”:** Looking forward and thinking about how things might change and how we can respond will help us ensure our resources are helpful and relevant.
- **Add a “Give us Feedback” module:** We added a module requesting feedback on the helpfulness of the toolkit and what items in their course they expect to change as a result of the toolkit.
- **Add a plug-in to measure time on page:** Knowing how much time people spend on a specific page will tell us more about their engagement.
- **Emphasize the “why” more when developing a toolkit:** We will make sure to include information about why digital access is important in ways that are consistent with our values of disability as an aspect of diversity and access as a matter of social justice.
- **Provide resources for disability resource professionals on supporting institutional change:** We will develop a toolkit for disability resource professions on digital access and organizational change.

References:

- Basford, T. & Schaninger, B. (2016). The four building blocks of change. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from: [April 2016 McKinsey Quarterly](#).
- Lawson, E. & Price, C. (2003). The psychology of change management. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from: [June 2003 McKinsey Quarterly](#).
- Patterson, K; Grenny, J; Maxfield, D; McMillan, R; & Switzler, A. (2008). Influencer: The power to change anything. McGraw Hill.

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