

D. Technological Capacity

An objective of this assessment was to survey the technological capacity of child welfare agencies across the state and of the OCWTP Regional Training Centers. Information was collected in four ways:

1. Twenty-three executive directors/designees participated in telephone interviews and were asked a series of questions about the use of computers in their agencies.
2. An interview was conducted with Frank Myers, ODJFS MIS Project Manager, to determine county computer capabilities.
3. Regional training center staff were asked about RTC use of technology.
4. OCWTP trainers in three focus groups were asked their opinions regarding the use of technology in training.

PCSA County Technological Capacity

FINDINGS:

According to Frank Myers, an ODJFS Management Information System (MIS) Project Manager, 81 of 88 county child welfare agencies have worked through ODJFS to obtain their computer hardware and software. These counties are connected to the ODJFS internal network. All six metro counties and Wayne County Children Services acquired their own computer equipment and developed their own internal agency networks.

Caseworker/Supervisor Access to Computers

According to ODJFS, every caseworker and supervisor in the child welfare system has access to a computer. Most have their own individual computers (with the exception of part-time employees, who may share a computer with co-workers). This was confirmed in telephone interviews with executive directors/designees, who reported that all workers have access to computers, and the vast majority have computers at their desks.

Computer Components: CD-ROMs/Sound Cards/Speakers/Video Cards

According to ODJFS and executive directors/designees, almost all computers used by professional child welfare staff are equipped with CD ROM drives and sound cards, although not all are equipped with speakers. Workers can use headphones to access audio files; for some counties, this is a preferred method, as it reduces noise in the work place.

However, Central Ohio RTC reported that Franklin County Children Services staff do not have sound cards installed on their computers. Franklin is a metro county and is not linked to the ODJFS network.

During telephone interviews with executive directors/designees, it was determined that ODJFS is replacing the few remaining child welfare agency computers that do not have CD-ROM drives or sound cards.

The state reported that all computers linked to the ODJFS network have video cards. However, most executive directors could not confirm this information; they did not know whether their computers were installed with video cards.

PCSA Word Processing Software

The 81 child welfare agencies networked with ODJFS use Corel WordPerfect word processing software. According to ODJFS, within the next year, the state will convert to Microsoft Word word processing software. ODJFS was currently negotiating the software contract with Microsoft.

Corel WordPerfect and Microsoft Word users are able to share files, although counties have reported problems in doing so.

PCSA Access to the Internet/World Wide Web

The 81 child welfare agencies on the ODJFS network have access to the Internet and the World Wide Web through the state's network. However, ODJFS has installed firewall software for security purposes that limits searches and web site access. This firewall can be circumvented on a case-by-case basis, but requires permission of ODJFS.

The remaining seven counties have access to the Internet and the World Wide Web through their internal networks. All have similar firewalls for security purposes, which limits access and searches.

PCSA Ability to Download Files/Programs from Internet/E-mail

Because of security software, the 81 agencies networked to ODJFS cannot download program files to their computers via e-mail or the Internet, but they can download document files via e-mail or the Internet. E-mail attachments that are larger than 1 MB cannot be sent or received on state-networked computers. The inability to download program files can be overridden, in some cases, through a request from the PCSA director to the ODJFS MIS department.

Frank Myers, the ODJFS MIS project manager, suggested that programs or plug-ins required for training purposes be submitted to the ODJFS MIS department for testing and dissemination through the ODJFS network, rather than disseminating such software through downloads to individual counties.

The seven counties not linked to the ODJFS network will need to be approached individually to identify security devices or agency policies that prohibit downloading certain types of files.

PCSA Browsers

The 81 agencies linked to the ODJFS network use Netscape Navigator as a browser, but will convert to Microsoft Internet Explorer in the next year.

PCSA Computer Training

ODJFS does not currently provide any computer training to PCSA staff. Some executive directors/designees reported they sent staff to TOPS computer training, and several agencies hired trainers for on-site computer training. Other PCSAs rely on online technical support or technical assistance from more experienced staff.

Peggy Kuntzman manages the ODJFS computer labs, which are located in Columbus, Akron, Findlay, Cincinnati, and Cambridge. According to ODJFS, the OCWTP can contact Ms. Kuntzman to discuss possible uses of these labs for future OCWTP training.

DISCUSSION:

Child welfare staff have access to their own computers with CD-ROM and sound and video cards installed. An exception is Franklin County Children Services, which does not have sound cards installed on its staff's computers. This information is important to the OCWTP, as it opens possible electronic training

strategies that could be used in training, transfer-of-learning, and self-directed learning activities.

ODJFS technical staff indicated a strong willingness to help the OCWTP integrate computer technologies into training. As suggested elsewhere in this report, ODJFS should be involved in technology discussions and planning from the outset in order to find the most effective and efficient methods of integrating computer-based technologies in training.

Seven child welfare agencies have their own internal computer systems and networks. The OCWTP will need to work with each of these agencies and their MIS staff to assess the compatibility of their systems with any technologically-based training strategies.

Since all child welfare Internet systems have firewalls that prevent workers from downloading anything but document files, the OCWTP will need to work closely with ODJFS and the counties to ensure access to computer-based programs by all training participants.

A critical dilemma is that ODJFS does not provide training to child welfare agency staff on the use of their computer hardware and software. As the OCWTP increases its use of computer technologies to provide distance learning, this dilemma will have greater impact. During the Skill Building Certificate Training (SBCT) program development, the OCWTP experimented with a number of computer-based technologies. When many SBCT participants experienced difficulty using the technology, there was often no one in their agency to help them. As a result, the OCWTP developed and implemented a preservice training in using computers and the SBCT technologies. Still, many SBCT participants had to send and receive their materials by fax in order to complete program requirements, because they were unable to access them on line.

Regional Training Center Feedback on Computer-Related Technology

FINDINGS:

RTC staff from all eight regions participated in focus groups. They were asked their opinions about additional technology that would improve workshops offered in their regions. RTC staff reported:

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- Laptops were needed to use with the newly purchased LCD equipment (North Central, Southwest, Northwest, and Central Ohio RTCs); East Central Ohio RTC requested additional LCDs.
- Central Ohio RTC would like to make CD ROMS available to trainers, necessitating the availability of an on-site computer installed with a CD-ROM drive. Central Ohio RTC mentioned wanting to use several other technologies, including: Palm Pilots with keyboards, bridge line calls, and “distance learning” strategies.
- DVD equipment for use in training (East Central and North Central)
- Computer-ready training tables (Central and North Central). East Central Ohio RTC has already purchased computer-ready tables.
- Video-conferencing equipment, including cameras (East Central, Southeast, North Central, and Northeast).
- Northeast Ohio RTC requested development of a “virtual brief case” for new staff.
- Access to computer lab equipment in order to combine content training with hands-on computer skills training (Southeast and Northeast Ohio RTCs)
- Western Ohio RTC would like to replace their television with one that has a larger screen.
- Northwest Ohio RTC would like Power Point to be used in more workshops, and would like to be able to provide orientation, transfer of learning, and training online.
- Video clips for county staff to use “that exemplify a skill or knowledge” The video clips would include help screens (East Central and Northeast Ohio RTCs).
- East Central Ohio RTC would like high-speed access to the Internet.

Several RTCs reported that the OCWTP website could be further utilized to assist the training program and child welfare staff, including:

- Hosting an online library that would provide resource information for county staff (Northwest and Central Ohio RTCs).

- Providing information that would assist newly hired staff in understanding their job, provide orientation information, explain the OCWTP, and encourage participation in Core workshops (Southeast and Northeast Ohio RTCs).
- Six of the eight RTCs recommended that the OCWTP website be used for online registration of training participants. Northwest Ohio RTC uses e-mail for participant registration and Northeast Ohio RTC indicated they were “very close” to implementing online registration. However, Western Ohio RTC commented that registration by telephone “avoided confusion.”
- Southwest RTC would like to eliminate hard copy calendars and allow trainees to obtain workshop descriptions and other calendar information from the web site. Northwest RTC would like access to all regional training calendars online.
- Several RTCs reported that the website could be used to post training announcements, communicate with trainers, and to post county and general employment notices.
- Central, Southeast, Northeast, East Central, North Central, and Northwest Ohio RTCs wanted to explore using the OCWTP website for trainee pre- and post testing, providing Core quizzes, and homework assignments.

Several RTCs also recommended that the OCWTP website be used for maintaining online training records, ITNA data, and submitting and tracking trainer payments.

DISCUSSION:

Overall, the RTCs routinely use the OCWTP web site and want to increase its use in a variety of ways for both administrative and training purposes. However, Western Ohio RTC reported a reluctance to use the OCWTP web site and North Central Ohio RTC reported a firewall in their system prohibits access to it.

There was little consistency among RTC staff regarding additional computer hardware and electronic technologies for training. This is not surprising, as the OCWTP has not yet developed a coordinated plan to incorporate the use of these technologies. Therefore, the RTCs have provided a menu of potential technologies that could be used to enhance training, especially in the areas of transfer of learning and skill building. However, several RTCs reported that a barrier to using new technology is the “readiness” of county agencies to utilize new technologies.

Trainer Feedback on Training Technology

The following feedback was collected from one face-to-face and two bridge line focus groups with OCWTP trainers.

When you think about the future, how should the OCWTP include computer technology to train child welfare professionals?

- Trainers reported LCD projectors, TVs, VCRs, and overhead projectors are needed at every training site.
- Some trainers reported wanting to use technology but not wanting to have to carry the equipment to the site.
- Several trainers believe laptop computers for using CD-ROMS and Power Point are needed at training sites.
- One trainer reported it was important to have access to compatible equipment, since it becomes obsolete quickly. For example, this trainer's laptop was not compatible with newer LCDs.
- One trainer reported the OCWTP should be a leader in the use of technology in training. The trainer indicated OCWTP should look to universities for ideas.
- Several trainers wanted to use Power Point more in workshops.
- One trainer would like to use computer-based Internet chat rooms for follow-up and assignments, especially for multi-day workshops.
- Several trainers wanted to become skilled in using the Computer Performance System, recently purchased by OCWTP.
- One trainer cautioned OCWTP not to rely on technology alone; "Staff must still learn to process when they are in a home, and to use observation and critical thinking skills."
- Several trainers reported that RTCs needed to be technology experts.
- Trainers discussed the need to continue to bring flip charts or overhead transparencies as backups in case newer technology fails.

What types of distance learning techniques would you like to see incorporated into workshops?

The following were each recommended by one trainer (not the same individual):

- Use video conferencing for three-month follow-up, for learning labs and for STAR (Skills Transfer and Application Review) sessions.
- Use video conferencing or satellite video connection for selected sessions.
- Use “Smart Board” screen for video—it’s better than TV, and doubles as a projector.
- Use bridge line phone calls for post training follow-up.
- Use video conferencing or bridge line to make up time if training must end early or start late because of weather, etc., so that staff receive certificates and training doesn’t need to be canceled.
- Use the web site called “GROVE.” Trainers can post documents and access audio. This takes a lot of preparation to develop and means that the training or follow-up is all visual.
- Use chat rooms for post training follow-up.
- Use list serves for specific training topics and resources.

Are you using any computer-based training techniques in workshops that you provide for the OCWTP?

- Several trainers reported using Power Point.
- One trainer had experience setting up Internet chat rooms and posting assignments and quizzes on the Internet. This required monitoring by the trainer.

How comfortable are you in integrating computer-based training into training you provide?

- Trainers reported they would be willing to integrate technology into training if they themselves were trained in the techniques and had the equipment available to practice.

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- Some trainers reported they knew they needed to learn how to use technological training strategies but were still uncertain and intimidated by the equipment. Nonetheless, they did not want to be “left behind.”
- One trainer indicated that by incorporating technology into training, the OCWTP is “upping the ante,” and trainees will come to expect technology all the time. In addition, the trainer reported, not all trainees are under 25; some are older and are comfortable with traditional training techniques.

DISCUSSION:

The majority of trainers surveyed were enthusiastic about incorporating technology as a means of enhancing, rather than replacing, classroom training.

Trainers expressed a desire to use a wide variety of technological training strategies. But, trainers want the RTCs to provide the equipment, and want to receive training and technical support for its use from the OCWTP.

**DECISIONS OF THE OCWTP STEERING COMMITTEE REGARDING
TECHNOLOGICAL CAPACITY**

- 1. The first technological priority of the OCWTP will be to develop a new Training Management Software System. The OCWTP will conduct a comprehensive review of current and future needs that includes the following steps: development of a comprehensive list of required data and functions; and development of a detailed list of data fields, tables, indexing, relationships, forms, reports, functions, and delivery/input methods.**

As a result of this assessment, and other recommendations contained in this report, the OCWTP must develop a new MIS system, compatible with program developments. The current OCWTP MIS system is antiquated and unable to meet current program needs. This problem will grow exponentially unless a new system is developed.

- 2. The OCWTP will develop a computerized Individual Training Needs Assessment that will: accommodate revised competencies; direct the user through a logical progression of an Individual Training Needs Assessment; accommodate reporting functions; and interface with the new Training Management System.**
- 3. The OCWTP will develop and implement training for trainers on skill-building strategies.**
- 4. The OCWTP will determine its role in developing and implementing basic technology skills training for PCSA staff.**

Training is not currently available on the use of electronic strategies. Without training in the use of these technologies, OCWTP could create frustration and resistance among trainees and trainers, rather than improve and enhance training.

- 5. The OCWTP will collaborate with ODJFS Management Information Systems and counties not networked with ODJFS regarding technology-related issues.**

This will enable the OCWTP to resolve compatibility and security issues. All seven counties with internal networks will also be involved in these discussions about computer-based training technologies.

- 6. The OCWTP will continue to enhance the development and utilization of the OCWTP website and the RTC web pages to provide access to needed resources.**

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The RTCs understand that the OCWTP website is an underutilized resource. They reported a variety of suggestions for increasing its use. The OCWTP will develop plans and timelines for the increased utilization of the web site.