

April 27, 2022

Need to Access Tech? CBAL's Got You Covered

The Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy implements a far-reaching project to bring tech to the public

(Columbia Basin) – These days, so many aspects of life rely on technology: a senior sends a message to her grandchild, a man checks in with his doctor online, an unemployed worker prints off a form to apply for Employment Insurance. With a wide-reaching project, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) is making tech more readily available to people in the region, along with the know-how to use it.

“Digital literacy has grown over the years as a piece that people need in order to be able to live in a modern world and fully participate,” says Desneiges Profili, Executive Director, CBAL. “Technology has become a more rampant kind of medium that people use to communicate information, connect with one another and access services.”

For 20 years, CBAL has been helping people across the region boost their literacy abilities, from reading and math to digital skills. With Columbia Basin Trust support, it is now greatly increasing the latter.

The first step was to question, “What do we need? What do we have? What are the biggest gaps? What’s going to be beneficial for each community?” Profili says. To fill these gaps, the solutions are as varied as the communities themselves. “There’s not one size that fits all.”

Some CBAL offices will gain equipment like computers and printers that anyone can come use, along with necessary furniture. Some computer stations will get private spaces built around them, enabling confidential use. For some remote areas, CBAL will create a lending library of equipment that will travel to each community, which people can borrow. In other spots, CBAL will partner with organizations like food banks or libraries to place tech in their locations.

Even if there’s already accessible equipment in one place in a community, CBAL may add more in another. “You want multiple touchpoints in the community for people to access technology,” Profili says. “Whatever door people walk through is the right door.”

Several years ago, the Trust introduced support to help communities and non-profit organizations increase the quality and availability of technology. Basin residents told the Trust that high-speed internet is important to them, and up-to-date equipment is an essential aspect. Plus, the Trust works with communities to help them address their needs, such as having residents thrive when it comes to digital demands. To view the most recent projects, [click here](#).

Having equipment, however, doesn’t necessarily mean knowing how to operate it. That’s why another part of CBAL’s project focuses on supporting users. Whether in a CBAL office, lending library or food bank—or even in a community that already owns its own tech, but can’t provide instruction—a CBAL staff member will be available to answer questions. In addition to drop-in times, CBAL will continue to offer scheduled one-on-one tutoring and group programs. On its website, new training modules will be available to guide people on using iPads and Windows.

The pandemic, of course, shifted a lot of CBAL’s teaching online, which has allowed it to “reach more people, no matter where they are,” Profili says. To boost the quality of these programs, CBAL is also using the grant to upgrade the tech in its offices by adding items like smartboards and conference systems.



High-tech equipment isn't only practical, it enhances well-being. Take the senior messaging her grandchild. Activities like that are "the things that make people feel independent. They help people feel connected, less isolated," says Profili. Adding so much technology and support "is a great opportunity. We're really excited to be able to offer this in communities."

Columbia Basin Trust supports the ideas and efforts of the people in the Columbia Basin. To learn more about the Trust's programs and initiatives, and how it helps deliver social, economic and environmental benefits to the Basin, visit ourtrust.org or call 1.800.505.8998.

- 30 -

Columbia Basin Trust operates in the unceded traditional territories of the Ktunaxa, Lheidli T'enneh, Secwepemc, Sinixt and Syilx Nations.

MEDIA CONTACT

Claire Samulak
Columbia Basin Trust
1.800.505.8998
csamulak@ourtrust.org

