NPS Common Learning Portal (CLP)

SUCCESS STORY

Revamping the EPAP to Include Peer Coaching Through the CLP

AJ Lapré
Branch Chief of Interpretation
Grand Canyon National Park

AJ Lapré is the Branch Chief of Interpretation for Grand Canyon National Park, where he manages a staff of up to 100 individuals (depending on the season) across four districts of the park. AJ's staff leads the interpretive programming for Grand Canyon National Park, helping visitors discover and understand the meaning and significance of the park's resources through a variety of channels including: formal and informal interpretive programs, exhibits, waysides, signage, visitor centers, information desks, demonstrations, social and digital media, youth-based and curriculum-based programs, and a summer camp.

Challenge

In 2015, AJ initiated a peer review program for interpretive programming that relied on face-to-face communication – for example, an employee might give an interpretive program, which another staff member evaluates. Depending on where park staff are located though, they can be very isolated from their colleagues, which can make getting feedback or help on programs near impossible for many of them. AJ had begun using the CLP early on to forge connections with others across the NPS and access interpretive resources. He began pointing his staff more and more to the CLP for information and soon realized it could also serve as a mechanism to help his employees share their programs, exchange feedback, and get to know each other better in the face of being geographically distributed.

> "No matter what, the CLP is highly beneficial because it's scalable to all sizes. You can find something that will work for you and fit for you, even if you are a park of three people because you now have a larger community to work from."

Solution

AJ viewed an opportunity for the CLP to help bolster his team's skills in creating and executing visitor programming and other interpretive products through engaging in peer reviews on the CLP Commons. He introduced the concept of using the CLP Commons as a way for staff – especially those individuals located across the more remote North Rim and Canyon districts – to participate in the peer review program. While participation in the CLP Commons was optional the first year, AJ has been taking a phased approach to integrating CLP participation as a requirement into all of his employees' Employee Performance Appraisal Forms (EPAP).

He began by including CLP usage as a requirement for seasonal staff, and slowly integrated it into all frontline staff's EPAPs. Originally, CLP usage was included in a couple of performance standards. For example, for an employee to gain a "Fully Successful" ranking, they would have had to post one program on the CLP for feedback. In order to gain an "Outstanding" ranking, they would have had to use the CLP "regularly" – a term that he has revisited and revised with his employees to find alignment on the expectation. Over time, AJ has worked to tweak the CLP requirement to better address individual employee's needs and preferences, and provide more flexibility for those who aren't comfortable with the CLP peer feedback process. AJ is a firm believer in meeting people where they're at. While his staff are required to receive peer coaching, he now gives people latitude on whether the coaching is done in their locality or on the CLP Commons. All the while, they are still required to use the CLP to access information (e.g., interpretive resources, workbooks, trainings).

Outcome

AJ acknowledges that there was skepticism among staff at first around using the CLP to receive feedback. Most people have come around to it as they see the quality of feedback they receive from their colleagues and are using that feedback to enhance the visitor experience. When asked what advice he would give others looking to evolve their staff's EPAPs and include CLP usage as a requirement, AJ has several recommendations: 1) Communicate and help staff understand the benefits of using the CLP; 2) provide people with training in order to be successful on the CLP, and then hold them accountable to fulfilling this responsibility; 3) keep the CLP on people's radar (e.g., navigate to information on the CLP during staff meetings, have supervisors check in regularly with their staff to answer questions they might have); 4) phase in any type of EPAP change incrementally; and 5) acknowledge that people will have different preferences and comfort levels with using technology – work with them to find ways to provide flexibility in how they can meet evolving EPAP requirements.