



Blackboard

Smart steps to online learning

Government agencies save big with a well-planned online learning strategy

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management reports that over half of their current Senior Executive Service workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next three to five years, making it critical that agencies develop talent to take on these senior level roles.

Invest in your staff and transform your learning and development programs into an engaging experience.

Everyone has something to learn. Every agency has requirements for learning, training and professional development:

- Baby boomers nearing retirement have institutional knowledge to transfer
- Managers and supervisors must identify critical skills gaps and close them with strategic new hires
- Meeting needs of new generation federal employees that are used to technology-based learning
- Leaders have to find ways to better align learning with their mission and objectives

However, most government agencies are at a crossroads. While learning and development programs remain vital to achieving goals, budgets continue to tighten.

This is why more and more agencies are turning to the cost-effective, online learning environment to ensure training mandates are met while saving budget dollars. Not only is it more economical but, when blended with the classroom, online learning is now proving to be more effective than classroom training alone. You can make learning a collaborative, effective, and efficient—even enjoyable—experience for all learners.

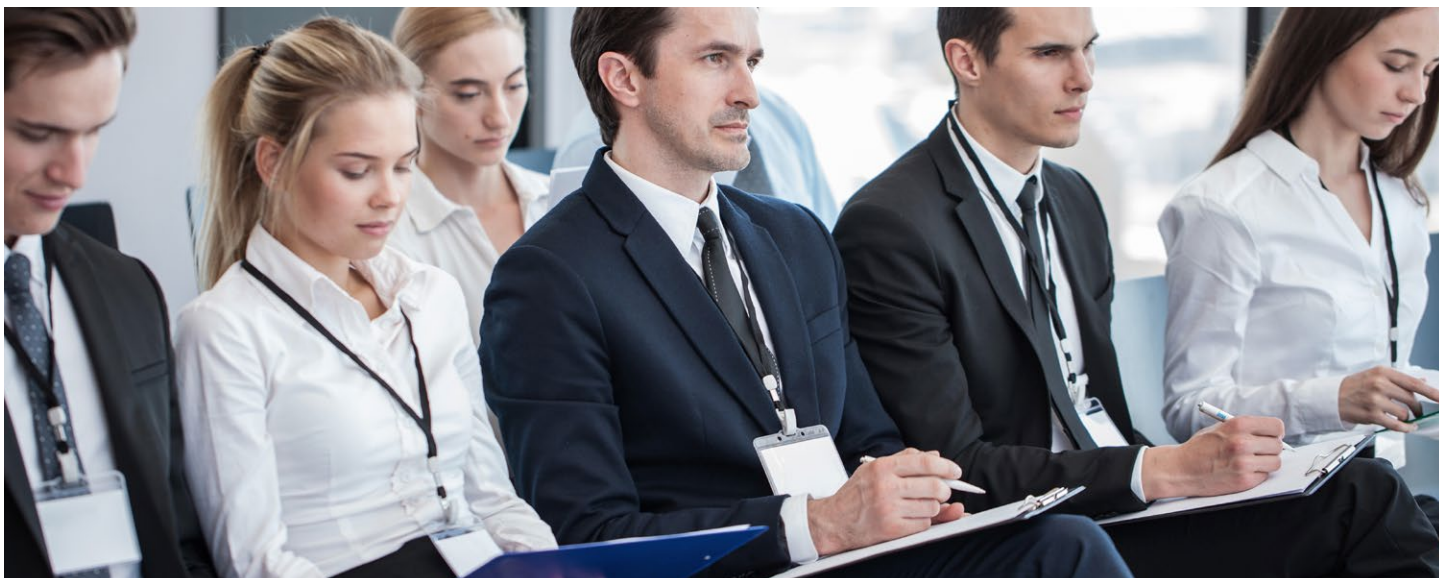
With social learning tools, competency-based learning programs, and mobile access, you're positioned to deliver a learning experience that captures people's attention, and, ultimately, boosts their performance. When you can update materials and create customized training just as fast as technologies change and policies evolve, no one will get left behind.

A SENSE OF URGENCY

In these days of sequestration, government shutdowns, battling congressmen, and looming budget crises, your agency is working with mandates to cut spending—or you might be facing a complete budget freeze. At the same time, government agencies across the nation are bracing for a looming skills gap. And it's no secret that administrators are juggling compatibility issues between existing LMS tools.

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Cost cutting while maintaining current, or better, level of learning and development	Enable convenient online learning as good as, or better than, face-to-face training, without travel or extended time away from job
Effective leadership and workforce development and retention	Accelerate pace of learning and provide opportunities for continuous learning without loss of productivity
Expensive, lengthy employee onboarding process	Facilitate onboarding completely online or blend online/ onsite with real-time or recorded sessions, scheduled or at employee's convenience
Mobile workforce that must work collaboratively and virtually on a global level	Enable employees to communicate and collaborate in regularly scheduled online meetings or ad hoc sessions accessible from desktop, laptop, or mobile device
Loss of institutional knowledge resulting from high turnover rates and aging employees	Allow professional development via online sessions, in real time, for cost-effective skills advancement and knowledge sharing
High costs for training facility, equipment, and personnel; lack of space	Increase capacity and leverage existing trainers with online participants who can join from where ever they are

These challenges may seem insurmountable. But, with the right online learning environment, you can strike these pain points down one by one.



THE TRAINING LEADER FOR FEDERAL AGENCIES

The Blackboard Learn™ platform has more than 5,000 installations and more than 20 million estimated users. Every year Blackboard invests millions in R&D for continued innovation, updates and learning excellence across all its product platforms. That's why many Federal government entities already use Blackboard Learn, such as:


- Social Security Administration
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- General Services Administration (GSA)

Achieve your goals by connecting learners

Federal agencies have traditionally addressed training through a combination of classroom

instruction with Learning Management Systems (LMSs). This approach is well suited to compliance-focused training in which administrative items such as registration and certification tracking are critical.

However, the traditional LMS is proving to be too limited for many agencies. They are unable to develop the archives needed to preserve the knowledge base within their institution. More importantly, it cannot address the needs of today's "connected learners." These are employees that have grown up online and are used to getting their information in numerous ways. In order to create success, it is key to meet their learning styles and expectations for professional development with greater interaction with the material, with instructors and each other.



“Research shows the greater the engagement, the better the learning outcomes.”

BLACKBOARD LEARN DELIVERS THE CONNECTION LEARNERS NEED

Top 5 government agency learning goals

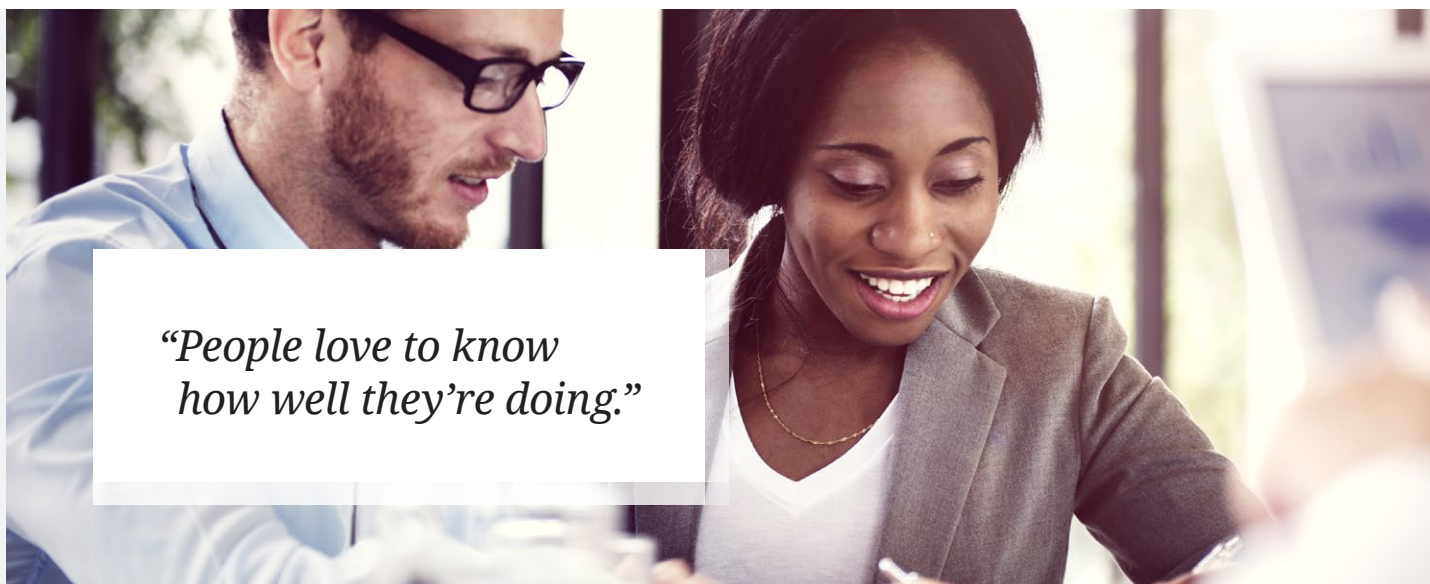
- Standardizing learning and training across the agency
- Producing replicable content
- Enabling learning with consistent results, regardless of audience, employee location, language, or time zone
- Shifting toward competency-based learning to match employees' skills with specific jobs
- Determining a learning budget for every employee

To meet the needs of a more robust training environment, numerous agencies have turned to the Blackboard Learn platform. It delivers a continuous virtual learning solution that is agile and flexible enough to adapt to today's learning challenges and those that may arise in the future.

In contrast to the traditional LMS, which can only deliver content to learners, the Blackboard Learn platform uses extensive collaboration and interactivity to fully engage learners with activities like group projects and discussions, wikis, blogs and the ability to incorporate a wide range of multimedia content. These elements facilitate continuous and social learning, which further heighten learner engagement. In fact, research shows that the greater the engagement, the better the learning outcomes.

Getting started with an online program

Thoughtful planning and organization is the key to ensuring your goals are met. We've outlined a step-by-step approach to launching a successful online program that will ensure you've left no stone unturned.



“People love to know how well they’re doing.”

STEPS TO PLANNING AND LAUNCHING A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PROGRAM

Moving from a traditional face-to-face classroom to an online education environment is a process that requires thorough planning. Government agencies can take steps to better ensure an online program’s success.

STEP ONE: Create a business plan

Understand your rationale: The critical first step to building an online program that works is to know why you need one. Take the time to examine your current situation and consider how it will or will not meet the future needs of your agency. Collect your thoughts into a meaningful outline with supporting facts.

Do the math: Calculate what starting an online program will cost in staff hours, technology resources, training and other start-up and maintenance expenses. Figure out whether the savings realized in both soft and hard dollars can offset costs. This can include costs associated with staff time off, travel and expenses as well as efficiencies that come with a streamlined system. Partner with a vendor whose experience creating online programs can help you examine this.

STEP TWO: Get leadership commitment

A critical step in moving forward is to convince upper management that a robust online learning and training program is a viable solution to solve for current challenges. In addition to providing financial proof points, you can use case studies and best practices from other government agencies to demonstrate the possibilities. For example, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid turned to Blackboard with numerous training challenges and were able to realize distinct benefits from restructuring training methods.

An online initiative is a significant undertaking that only can be accomplished with full support from leadership.



“Know what success will look like.”



The Department of Veterans Affairs is leveraging Blackboard at the facility, network, and national levels to provide a flexible learning platform that supports iterative course/content development and rapid deployment to the field. Programs include administrative training, human resources, clinical training and certification, program and process management, contracting professional programs, and more with delivery ranging from bite-sized learning nuggets to hybrid/blended courses to fully online and facilitated training programs.

STEP THREE: Designate a leader

Have one point person. This does not have to be someone who is trained in software, but you do have to have someone who takes ownership. Having such an “owner” will better ensure a consistent, well-paced approach and be able to answer questions.

STEP FOUR: Organize a team

When choosing team members to support your online initiative, be sure to include trainers, technical staff, and program leads. Additionally, be sure you’re getting input from staff and the people that will ultimately benefit from your program. The team will perform several key functions:

Design a program framework: The team must consider whether they will offer Web-facilitated courses that use online tools to enhance face-to-face instruction; hybrid learning that blend online and face-to-face delivery; or online-only courses with no face-to-face meetings. Each approach has different content, technology and training requirements.

Shop for technology vendors: Use the real-world experiences of others to give your online program the best chance at success. Talk to agencies that have gone online and get recommendations about which vendors make good partners.

Create a vision for a successful program: Know what success will look like. How do you plan to enhance the training experience? What are your goals? What will you expect of trainers in an online-delivery environment? This is the place where strategic thinking and operational steps must mesh. Be sure to keep committee members focused on the ‘big picture’ so they don’t get bogged down in specifics of content or staffing needs.



“You must have quality content ready to go online from the start.”

STEP FIVE: Understand your program needs

When starting an online program, it is critical to evaluate the technical aspects of the program. Some early questions to ask:

- What is your information technology budget? Can it grow as the online program expands?
- How robust is your network and server infrastructure?
- Do you have the technical resources to manage Web hosting?
- What is your existing technical support infrastructure, and can you handle the additional demands of employee tech support?

Be sure to partner with a vendor that has experience in each of these areas and knows how to support you along the way.

STEP SIX: Know your agency’s needs and how to reach internal and external audiences

Be sure to consider the needs of your learners and how your program will make learning easier

for them. The more you tailor your program to their needs, the more engagement and adoption of the program you will realize.

STEP SEVEN: Pilot an online offering

A best practice for many organizations is to start with one offering as a test program. This will prove readiness and viability. Once your pilot program has completed, evaluate the success of it and look for areas that you can improve. This will go a long ways toward future program growth.

STEP EIGHT: Be prepared to launch with high-quality material

Your pilot will help you ensure success when you are ready to go on day one. You must have quality content ready to go online from the start.

Your launch day is the moment when employees begin to form impressions about your online effort. Staff adoption is a critical feature of success so when you offer high-quality content, compelling instruction, appealing visuals and “human” interaction via Web-based delivery, employees will adopt online learning faster.

PARTNER WITH BLACKBOARD

Blackboard's vast experience creating online educational environments can help you deliver robust Web-based delivery that can enhance learning and meet the challenges that government agencies face in the ever changing climate.

Blackboard Learn delivers a social, online learning environment that meets your professional development goals within your agency's budget.

Blackboard Collaborate™ web conferencing service helps you meet your agency's training requirements through a shared, interactive and mobile training experience. Build virtual classrooms, offices, and meeting spaces that allow employees to fulfill their training from anywhere at any time.

Blackboard Consulting can help you increase efficiencies and knowledge, as well as help ensure your learning program is accessible to all employees. While you focus on your agency's mission, we'll work with you to plan online learning content, train your trainers, or implement a flexible educational technology ecosystem.

To find out more about how Blackboard solutions can help your agency, visit our Web site at blackboard.com/government or call (800) 424-9299.

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