

# Digital Champions' Handbook

Digital Champions for  
Community Success

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



[www.digitalchampions.community](http://www.digitalchampions.community)



Project number: 2018-1-UK01-KA204-047986

Programme: Erasmus+

In partnership with Germany, Italy, Cyprus and the UK

Project Coordinator United Kingdom



Project partner United Kingdom



Project partner Germany



Project partner Italy



Project partner Cyprus



This project has been funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

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## What skills do you need?

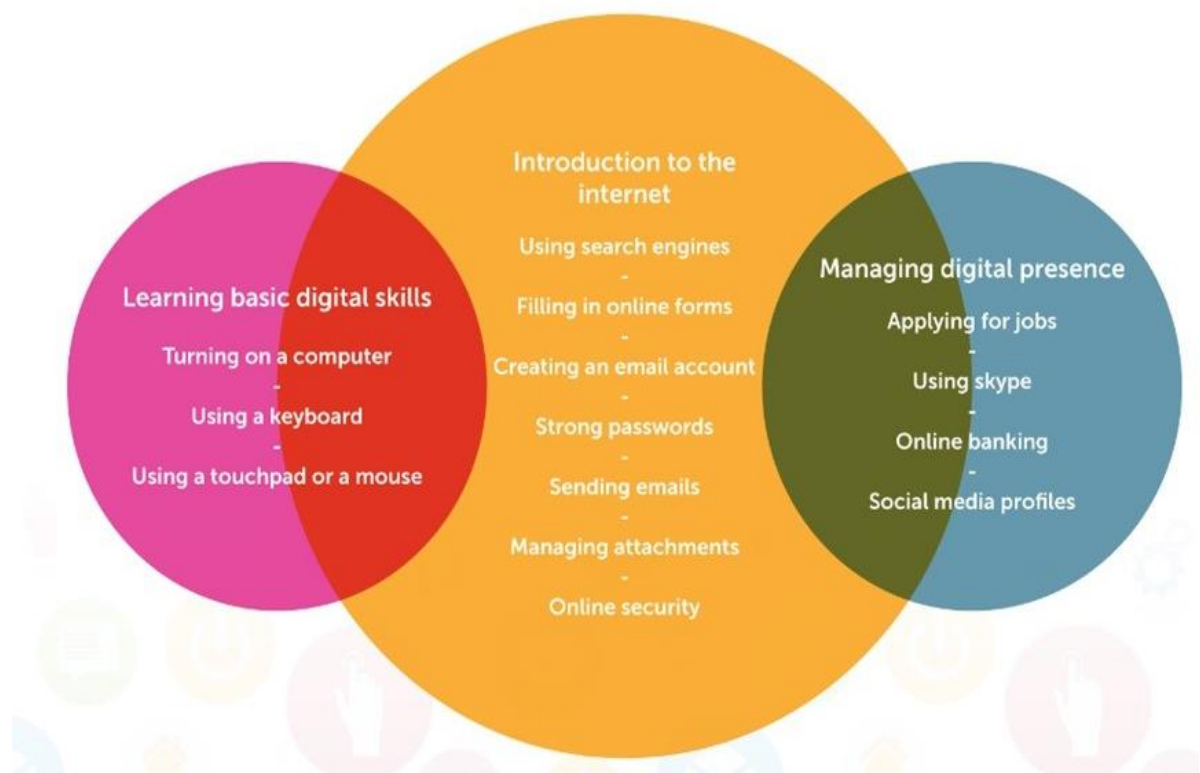
A community digital champion is a volunteer or individuals who are motivated to help others learn and benefit from having digital skills. Good communicators and active listeners, they are patient and helpful and understand the need to build rapport with learners.

„You certainly don't need to be an IT guru, simply someone who is willing to help others, is patient and a good communicator, has some digital skills and a willingness to learn and help others do the same.”

John Thompson, voted Best Volunteer Digital Champion 2019 (U.K.)

## Digital Champions need to have the following skills:

- Basic digital skills
- Have a knowledge and understanding of the barriers that prevent being online and some knowledge of how to overcome those barriers
- Can answer basic access questions
- Be committed to sharing and recording information about learners' progress



# Your Guide to Being a Digital Champion

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## 1. Introduction

### What is a Community Digital Champion?



**Awareness of services  
available online.**

Be enthusiastic, patient and a good listener.

**Have basic computer skills**

Able to clearly communicate

**Adapt to individual needs**

Awareness of referral & signposting options

#### You don't have to know everything

One of the main fears of new Digital Champions is that they don't know enough to help others. Don't worry if your knowledge isn't perfect. You can also learn when you're helping someone - just sit next to them and go through the process together. You can also use peer-support so your learners can help each other.

Eventually, you'll develop your confidence and knowledge and will be able to answer more computer-related questions than before.

There may be some restrictions that won't allow you to help a person with a disability. For example, if the facilities aren't right. Don't worry about that - you can always refer your learners a specialist centre in your area.

### Who do Community Digital Champions support?

A Community Digital Champion is someone who supports friends, family colleagues, anyone in the community to enjoy all the benefits that having essential digital skills can mean. It can mean saving money, finding price comparisons, saving time and keeping in touch with friends and family and combatting loneliness by bringing people together as a group with a common goal.

## What do Community Digital Champions do?



Community Digital Champions provide learning support in both group sessions and 1-1 in a relaxed, informal setting. They are not teachers; instead, they provide person-centred support which is learner-led. They are more like a coach; their role is to empower learners to gain skills based on their efforts. It is all about empowering people. It is not about doing things online for people; instead, it is about sharing the tools they need to do it themselves.

Community Digital Champions must have a strong commitment to equality and diversity and understand the safeguarding rules for the country and community in which they work.

## 2. Basic Principles about Communications.

A common saying about communication is that it is “a two-way street.” This analogy is not useful in the context of Community Digital Champions as it places the burden of the communication equally on both the Champion and the learner. A better view would be that all the responsibility for the dialogue about digital skills rests with the Digital Champion. The Champion has to have a flexible approach to any discussions to ensure the learner understands the message.

Communication is the response you get.

A Champion may have more advanced communication skills than a learner. Active listening is a skill all Champions should cultivate to ensure they hear learners’ concerns.

## What are the critical steps of active listening?

- Pay Attention. Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message
- Show That You're Listening
- Provide Feedback
- Defer Judgement
- Respond Appropriately

Community Digital Champions listen for clues about the fears learners have and offer support.



Communication is not only about speech. In communication, a speaker's words are only a fraction of his efforts. The pitch and tone of his voice, the speed and rhythm of the spoken word, and the pauses between those words may express more than what is being communicated by words alone.

Further, his gestures, posture, pose and expressions usually convey a variety of subtle signals. These non-verbal elements can present a listener with essential clues to the speaker's thoughts and feelings and thus substantiate or contradict the speaker's words.

The most commonly and casually cited study on the relative importance of verbal and nonverbal messages in personal communication is one by [Prof. Albert Mehrabian](#) of the [University of California in Los Angeles](#). In the

1970s, his studies suggested that we overwhelmingly deduce our feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about what someone says not by the actual words spoken, but by the speaker's body language and tone of voice. Prof. Mehrabian quantified this tendency: words, tone of voice, and body language respectively account for 7%, 38%, and 55% of personal communication. Some people disagree with these findings, but it is important to listen to how something is said as well as the words. Tone and body language can alter the meaning of words.

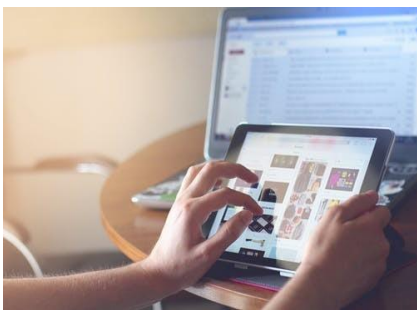


### 3. Learning Styles

How we take in information.

Human beings take in information via their five senses. Adults rely less on taste and smell than children. Adults use their three primary senses to take in information. That is their eyes, ears and touch. Mapped to learning styles, become visual, auditory and kinaesthetic styles. Everyone uses all three styles to learn, but most individuals have preferred learning style and recognising a learner's preferred style can help you to connect with a learner.

#### Visual learning style



A visually-dominant learner absorbs and retains information better when it is presented in, for example, pictures, diagrams and charts.

#### Auditory learning style



An auditory-dominant learner prefers listening or reading to what is happening. He or she responds best to voices and words, for example, in a lecture or group discussion. Hearing his voice repeating something back to a tutor or trainer is also helpful.

#### Kinaesthetic learning style



A kinaesthetic-dominant learner prefers a physical experience. He or she likes a "hands-on" approach and responds well to being able to touch or feel an object or learning prop.

## 4. Supporting Learners

We learn more from mistakes than we do if we get everything correct so we should be positive when learners make errors. If you are English speaking and want to know more about the neuroscience of learning register with [www.iDEA.org.uk](http://www.iDEA.org.uk) and in the Citizen category try the Brain Hack Badge [Link](#)

Digital champions are usually not formally trained teachers or educators or focused on group learning or academic qualifications; instead, your role is to encourage learners to develop their skills and competences. The role's emphasis is less on imparting information and more on the Digital Champion asking questions to help the learner raise their awareness, take responsibility, think through options and decide upon their course of action. It is about empowerment rather than instruction.

The skills and knowledge needed to be a Champion alter depending on the context and location in which you are.

The following are generally accepted:

- Necessary and/or specialist digital skills
- Knowledge and understanding of the barriers to people being online and how to overcome them
- How to help people with access questions
- An understanding of relevant policies and procedures
- Have completed online or face to face training courses in helping people to develop their digital skills
- A commitment to sharing and recording information about the progress of learners



Barrier	Examples of response
'I'm not interested	Tell me more about your interests; the internet has something for everyone, whether you're interested in TV shows, shopping, knitting, saving money or finding out about your local football team. Why not give it a try and see for yourself?'
'I didn't do well at school, and I'm worried about feeling stupid.'	'You don't need to go anywhere near a classroom. There are lots of people still learning, and there are lots of places that are set up, especially to help. The sessions are informal with friendly tutors and volunteers there to help you learn at your own pace.'
'I'm too old.'	You're never too old to learn. Just think how much new information you take in every day – you're always learning. My neighbour is 80 and uses the internet for free to speak to family and order her weekly shopping.'
'I don't know how to use a computer	'There are lots of places in your local community where you can go to learn more about computers and the internet. You could even join one of our sessions, or we can explore where else you can go.'
'I can't afford it.'	Some cafes and other venues offer free or low cost internet access; you can connect to the internet using your smart phone (just make sure your tariff allows you to do this)
'I'm scared I'll break it	'Unless you drop it, It's tough to break a computer or the internet!'
I am worried about safety	' That's a valid concern, but with a little bit of knowledge you can use the internet safely'

Output and outcome information enables learning projects to assess the impact of the work they are doing.

Outputs are the products, services or facilities that result from an organisation's or project's activities. For example, in a programme to improve well-being amongst older people, outputs might include the different types of interventions offered by projects, or the numbers of people overall participating in activities under the programme.

Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides. For example, for the same well-being programme, outcomes might be improvements in clients' physical or emotional health, or projects' improved ability to extend their reach to different client groups.

Impact is the broader or longer-term effects of a project's or organisation's outputs, outcomes and activities. For example, in addition to an understanding of the extent to which projects funded by the well-being programme have achieved their outcomes, there might be a longer-term change in the way some projects work with their clients, new partnerships may have developed, or policy may have altered at a local or broader level.

## 5. Start with the Individual Learner (not the subject)

Shelle Rose Charvet is an international expert on how to change attitudes, and she says:

*"To get people to go somewhere with you, you need to meet them where they are and not just pretend they are already where you want them to be." Go to their bus stop," and from their bus stop, invite them on the bus and take them to where you want them to be."*

What this means in practice is most learners have a problem they want to solve. That is why they have sought you out. It might be how to use Skype or how to shop online. You need to help solve the problem, and then you can explain why knowing more would be beneficial.

Projects offering a mix of digital skills support are most successful. These can include drop-in sessions where learners can pop in with a particular digital query or regular meetings. Learning can take place one to one or can be in a group. An informal approach to learning is vital, especially in the early stages of gaining new digital skills. Open source e-learning enables learners to have individual learning goals while being part of a group. The approach is useful as the learner will be engaging with all three learning styles - they see the screen read the words and then touch the keys or the screen.

The second stage is you carry out a skills assessment to find out the level of skills your learner have if any. Most organisations will already have their own initial assessment forms, but if you need to create one, there is no need for it to be complicated, a simple checklist will do.

Then you need to get started, and there are two choices. Either an e-learning package or a package you or your organisation has created.

In the community, we use open source e-learning packages as one method of delivery in one to one in a group setting.

How does this work? We gather a group of diverse learners together in one space at a set time for a digital learning session. Our sessions are usually either 90 minutes or 2 hours in length. The session takes place in a public setting or community setting, not a classroom. Learners may choose to bring their equipment or borrow equipment from us for the length of the session. Each learner has a personal e-learning plan; they log on and start their customised learning. We as Digital Champions watch, listen and support the learners as required, so they can progress in the learning that has been agreed with them. It is useful for Digital Champions to work in teams of at least two, so one Champion is always observing the group to ensure everyone gets the support they need. This sort of delivery is learner-centred and about enabling the learner to study for themselves rather than a traditional teaching model.



We find that this approach has some significant benefits:

1. The session allows learners of mixed ability to come together in one place and at one time. This diversity can encourage and support social interaction. It can also enable family members from different generations to come to the same session.
2. Learners are engaged because they are working on the problems and topics, they want to know / access.
3. It is nothing like school which for some learners was not a pleasant experience.
4. You do not need to be a teacher. The computer is the teacher. Coach or mentor is a better description of a Digital Champion (a teacher can, of course, be a Digital Champion).
5. Learning becomes a relaxed and social occasion.
6. Learning is self-paced and can be done away from the session, even at home if there is online access.

## 6. Repetition matters

“Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action.” (Zig Ziglar)

Think back to when you learned to ride a bike, drive a car or play a new sport. First, you needed to learn essential skills. Then it was all about practice and more practice until you increased your confidence, improved your speed and became skilled. The experience will be the same for your learners.

There are four stages in learning; usually, learners are at stage two when they find you they are consciously incompetent. They know, they don't know how to do somethings online, that is why learners seek you out even if they say something else. The most effective e-learning platforms allow learners to repeat modules at any time. Practice is how learners gain confidence.

As Digital Champions, we often practice the online learning we are asking learners to do. This practice helps us to be confident that we can support them if they get stuck.

## 7. Professional Boundaries

All community workers and volunteers are expected to uphold boundaries to protect themselves, their clients and the organisation they work for. These boundaries are meant to ensure that relationships between Digital Champions and clients remain professional, even when working on very personal and challenging issues. The organisation that recruited you should offer training and have policies about professional boundaries.

### Remember to keep boundaries to your role

Sometimes it can be hard to decide whether you should help a person or refer them. If you feel you don't have the right knowledge, then it's best to refer a person.

Remember to think about your own safety too. If you feel that the venue or time of day isn't right to deliver classes, think of an alternative option. Observe your learners' mood and behaviour and try to adjust your behaviour to make them feel comfortable.

## What are the boundaries?

These are a few of the major boundaries that may have implications for your behaviour.

- **Client Focus.** You are expected to place the needs of service users on your caseload at the centre of any decisions that you make about them and their lives.
- **Self-disclosure.** If possible only limited information about yourself and your personal life should be shared with learners. It may not be possible to adhere to this rule in small communities where you are already known. In our experience, you have to share a small amount of information if you want learners to trust you.
- **Dual relationships** can create problems, so if possible, the only connection you have with the learners would be Digital Champion. The important thing is you set boundaries and make sure learners know what they are. For example when and how learners can contact you. In our practice, we share our work email with learners and explain we will only respond in-office hours.
- **Working within your competence.** You should be aware of the limitations of your role and your capabilities, and when to refer to other professionals or to seek further support and advice for yourself and your learners.

### Avoid giving specialist advice on non-related matters

Digital Champions can be seen as 'go to' people for all sorts of questions. We may want to help someone genuinely and wholeheartedly. If the enquiry is outside the Digital Champion role, the best thing we can do as Digital Champions is to refer them to a professional or an organisation that can help with their questions. We can also help them search online and explain which online resources should be trusted.

- **Looking after self.** It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in a fit state to do the job that you are required to do. It is also your responsibility to ensure your safety. Sometimes it can be hard to decide whether you should help a person or refer them. If you feel you don't have the right knowledge, then it's best to refer a person. Remember to think about your safety too.
- If you think that the venue or time of day isn't right to deliver classes, think of an alternative option.
- Observe your learners' mood and actions and try to adjust what you do to make them feel comfortable.
- Digital Champions may be the 'go-to' people for all sorts of questions. We may want to help someone genuinely and wholeheartedly. If the enquiry is outside the Digital Champion role, the best thing we can do as Digital Champions is to refer them to a professional or an organisation that can help with their questions.
- We can also help them search online and explain which online resources should be trusted. One of the main fears of new Digital Champions is that they don't know enough to help others. Don't worry if your knowledge isn't perfect.
- You can also learn when you're helping someone - by sitting next to them and going through the process together. You can also use peer-support so your learners can help each other. Eventually, you'll develop your confidence and knowledge and will be able to answer more computer-related questions than before.
- There may be some restrictions that won't allow you to help a person with a disability, e.g. if the facilities aren't right. Don't worry about that - you can always refer your learners to a specialist centre in your area.

## 8. Conclusion

Helping members of a community you support become more proficient in digital skills is an important and rewarding thing to do. Being online helps people interact with central and local government, save time and money and stay in touch with friends and family across the world. Bringing people together to learn in any setting encourages personal social interaction and therefore, community cohesion. Personally, as Digital Champions, we get a buzz when one of our learners achieve their goal. Be the person who makes a difference in your community.

# Good Luck and Enjoy being a Digital Champion

# Digital Champions Handbook

