

Training Priorities in Turbulent Times

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Ryan Chao, Executive Director

Running an effective nonprofit organization in a down economy can be tough, especially if staff members are struggling to communicate clearly. Some nonprofits don't invest in writing skills training because they've made it a low priority, have limited resources and staff, don't understand the importance of strong written communication, and/or don't believe that writing can be improved with instruction.

But Satellite Housing's Executive Director, Ryan Chao, and Director of Human Resources, Miriam Benavides, recognized that their staff's inconsistent writing skills were lowering productivity and costing money: “The standard of writing varied among staff. As an organization our professional image was impacted by writing limitations.” Sometimes staff disregarded the basic rules of professional business writing. They sent out confusing e-mail messages, buried the main point at the bottom of long memos, and didn't take the time to proofread documents well. So, Chao and Benavides made training a priority.

“We experienced a lot of resistance when introducing the series of trainings to staff, but that all changed about five minutes into the first workshop when employees saw how relevant and engaging the training was going to be,” says Benavides.

Chao and Benavides believed that for Satellite Housing to provide increased services to more residents without increasing operating costs, they had to “improve the communication skills of [their] managers and make them more efficient communicators.” Satellite Housing retained Write It Well to deliver four workshops, and individual writing skills coaching. They also distributed Write It Well's book, *E-Mail: A Write It Well Guide* for employees to use as a self-paced training manual.

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**Miriam Benavides,
Director of Human Resources**



About Satellite Housing

Satellite Housing provides affordable, service-enriched housing that promotes healthy and dignified living for people with limited options.

Since 1966, Satellite Housing, has been a leader in the development of affordable housing for low-income populations. We provide a unique service-enriched environment and maintain a long-term commitment to residents through quality property management.

To prepare for the workshops, Write It Well assessed the organization's needs through a series of interviews and an analysis of writing samples. This process guaranteed that the content of the program would be job-relevant and engaging; all examples and exercises were based on the participants' real situations.

The first workshop, Professional Writing Skills, was delivered three times and customized each time to meet the needs of the separate departments. This workshop reminded participants how to think about their message from the reader's point of view; how to focus on their main point; why correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling are important; how to format a message for busy readers; and how to use clear and concise language. The second workshop, How to Write Reports and Proposals, focused on how to plan a winning proposal, write persuasively to sell the organizations strengths, and respond effectively to RFPs.

Cindy Heavens, a Project Manager at Satellite Housing, participated in the training program: "Write It Well's program was extremely effective. It helped me organize my thoughts for the many letters, emails, and funding applications I write. The program helped me edit and proofread my work."

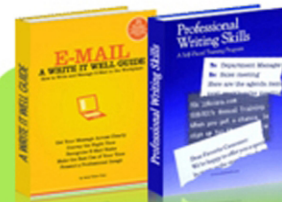
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Project Manager**

This was just the type of outcome Director of Human Resources, Miriam Benavides, hoped for when she retained Write It Well to help people improve their written business communication: "The most significant transformation that we have seen since is an overall greater awareness of the importance of good writing . . . I immediately saw an improvement in the professionalism of people's writing. In the past, I spent an enormous amount of time correcting structural and grammatical errors before I could focus on the content. Now it is very refreshing to dive right in and focus on content."

High-stakes writers were invited to participate in individual coaching sessions that were designed to develop their skills and confidence. The assignments and agenda for the coaching sessions were tailored to fit the learning objectives and scheduling restrictions of each participant. This multi-touch approach was a success. Says Benavides, "we choose the group trainings followed by the individual coaching because the writing that these individuals perform determines if our projects and programs get funded. In short, their writing is critical and we wanted to provide them with greater training."

Benavides sums up the success of the program when she says, "I have an opportunity to review everyone's writing and style. I used to review them and then return them with red marks all over them. Now people are surprised to get their documents back without red marks. They thanked me for it. My response to them is "thank YOU!"



About Write It Well

Write It Well, formerly Advanced Communication Designs, Inc., was founded in 1980 to help people in the workplace communicate clearly and work together effectively. Our goal is to provide practical, relevant information, techniques, and strategies that people can use immediately to improve their business writing skills. Visit www.writeitwell.com for more information.