

IRELAND

Training and information

Location

County Clare

Programming period

2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 3 – Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

Measure

331 – Digital Training

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 32 000
EAFRD 14 400
National/Regional 17 600

Project duration

2014 – 2017

Project promoter

Clare Local Development Company (CLDC)

Contact

info@cldc.ie

Website

www.cldc.ie/home/digital-clare

Digital Clare used training, mentoring and regular online exchanges to improve digital skills in rural County Clare and create a locally recognised name for digital innovation and networking.

Summary

Digital Clare employed a digital facilitator to provide various types of social media and internet training in order to improve local digital skills and enable businesses, organisations and individuals to take better advantage of digital opportunities.

The project also created and promoted online networking possibilities aimed at all sectors of

the local community using #DigitalClare. This created new connections, new business opportunities and an ongoing digital community who will continue to explore digital opportunities in County Clare.



Results

- Improved skills and awareness of digital opportunities amongst residents, business owners and members of local interest groups in County Clare.
- Businesses and community groups have reported new opportunities and connections thanks to the Digital Clare networking activities
- “Digital Clare” brand has become a locally recognised name for digital innovation and networking providing a framework for future digital activities
- A small independent group has now been formed with the aim of developing new Digital Clare projects in the future.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Digital skills programmes can be a very affordable way of developing digital business opportunities, even in predominantly rural areas
- Do not let poor broadband connectivity in an area be an excuse for not developing digital capacity among local stakeholders.
- Build flexibility into community-based programmes to allow participants to a) take some ownership of the project and b) help determine the preferred outcomes.
- People need time to understand the objectives and gain basic skills. Once they come about, numerous opportunities can result.
- Developing a motivated community group can ensure continued activities and progress

Context

Digital skills are increasingly important for rural actors - including businesses, community organisations and individuals - to thrive in the modern economy.

The Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) and other local organisations recognised the growing need to develop digital skills across all sections of the local population.

The CLDC also realised that there was room to improve the digital connectivity between locals and encourage people and organisations to connect, collaborate and develop opportunities together online.

Objectives

Through the Digital Clare project, the Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) sought to improve digital skills and connectivity across the county of Clare. More specifically, it aimed to:

- demystify fear of social media and increase online engagement of all sections of the community;
- help all local stakeholders make the best use of digital tools
- have an actively and regularly engaged community interested in developing online opportunities; and
- provide a wide variety of benefits consistent with other business and social development plans for the area.

Activities

CLDC worked with a range of local stakeholders to develop a plan of action. It procured a digital expert to act as the project's digital facilitator, providing all the training and facilitation services of the project. The only costs of the project were the digital facilitator who charged €50 per hour for mentoring/training/facilitation services.

During the first six-month phase of the project, the digital facilitator:

- Provided 28 digital training courses;
- Conducted 60 hours of one-to-one in-person mentoring with over 90 business owners and community group representatives;
- Organised 8 face-to-face networking sessions among participants;
- Promoted more than 20 Tuesday-night online Twitter chats using #DigitalClare

The training and facilitation sessions covered an array of related topics including:

- Setting up Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn profiles
- Managing social media wall posts
- How to create content for social media
- Using photo-sharing platforms such as Instagram/Pinterest

Participants in the 'DigitalClare' project were recruited from across a range of stakeholders in the county. The CLDC invited clients from across all their programmes including LEADER, SICAP and other programmes. The CLDC also used its database of over 5 000 individuals, businesses and organisations to spread the word.

During the second phase of the project, the digital expert worked to develop a self-sufficient network of people who could champion the project going forward. A successful launch event was attended by 180 people who have supported and/or got involved with the Digital Clare project, representing a broad cross-section of the community.

The second phase also saw new participants wishing to get involved. Once the initial events were organised then local newspapers, radio and word of mouth became very important in spreading awareness of the initiative.

A closed Facebook "group" was also set up as part of the project to help coordinate activities. The Facebook group now has 688 members and is used to promote events and provide a safe space for participants to ask questions and collaborate with like-minded individuals within the community.

Whilst the digital expert continued to provide classroom-based training, face-to-face networking and online training courses during the second phase, the Tuesday night Twitter chats had built up sufficient momentum to ensure they could happen without the facilitator.

"The most interesting aspect of the project was the number of people who engaged in it. There was a wide variety of people there representing many different businesses and local interest groups along with people from different age groups and backgrounds who all came together for a common goal.."

Agnes O'Shaughnessy, CLDC

Results

- Improved skills and awareness of digital opportunities amongst residents, business owners and members of local interest groups in County Clare.
- There is a footprint in place now that shows Clare is definitely a more connected county online than it was before the project. This is evidenced by the amount of new Twitter accounts and Facebook pages from Clare businesses and communities
- “Digital Clare” brand has become a locally recognised name for digital innovation and networking providing a framework for future digital activities
- More than 50 Tuesday-night tweet events have taken place now without the need for a coordinator – providing ongoing networking opportunities for people from all backgrounds across the county.
- Numerous businesses who participated in the project said they derived new business through the upgrade in skills and networking.
- Community groups involved have reported an increase in local connectivity and volunteerism for a variety of causes.
- A small independent group has now been formed with the aim of developing new Digital Clare projects in the future. This group will work independently from CLDC but leverage the financial and non financial support they can provide.

“When Digital Clare first set up I had just started my own business, Miword, I attended the launch night and was impressed with the buzz it created... I have had a significant number of client referrals through the network.”

Martina Neylon, Digital Clare participant



Lessons

- Do not let poor broadband connectivity in an area be an excuse for not developing digital capacity among local stakeholders.
- The Digital skills programmes did not require more finance than the cost of an expert digital facilitator.
- Strong community engagement can be key to keeping costs down e.g. through the use of local buildings, volunteers and other local resources free of charge.
- It is important to build in flexibility to the programme and allow participants to a) take some ownership of the project and b) help determine the preferred outcomes of the project.
- Patience is key for this type of community initiative. People need to be given time to understand the objectives and gain basic skills and once they come about, numerous opportunities can result.
- The need to effectively manage expectations and rapidly increasing demand was another important lesson.
- Developing a group capable of taking the Digital Clare initiative forward is seen as key for providing a long-term platform for developing further digital opportunities in the area.

Additional sources of information

www.clarepeople.com/2015/01/21/digitalclare-a-new-network-for-digital-marketing-in-clare/

www.clarechampion.ie/tweet-taste-of-success-for-digital-clare/

www.facebook.com/ClareLocalDevelopmentCompany

<https://twitter.com/CLDC>