

Launching, Implementing, and Maximizing your LMS

Award Winning: USDA AgLearn
LMS Implementation

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ADAYANA.COM

P: 703-564-7100

F: 703-564-7104

7389 LEE HIGHWAY, SUITE 301
FALLS CHURCH, VA 22042



Situation

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's enterprise-wide learning management system (LMS), named AgLearn, manages training for more than 30,000 USDA employees, partners, and contractors. AgLearn's around-the-clock accessibility (www.aglearn.usda.gov) provides users the ability to search, identify, and register for quality learning solutions offered nationwide by USDA and other affiliated organizations.

Since its inception in 2004, AgLearn has undergone several improvements that support all usage levels. These improvements come not only from technology updates, but also from better coordination with the USDA training community. Additionally, the USDA adopted new policies that support the use of AgLearn and help ensure that USDA can gain value from dollars spent.

First, the USDA's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) contracted with Adayana to implement very unique customizations and technical features that support many facets of system use. These include:

- Custom administrator and user splash pages and home pages that make relevant and critical information more readily accessible.
- On-demand performance support through pop-up tip windows covering subjects such as catalog browsing, printing certificates, and managing external training request forms.
- Informative pop-up ads to announce course offerings and program requirements.
- LMS administrative role customizations that more closely align with job positions and duties. Eighteen new roles that address job duties such as Item Management, User Management, Registration Management, Schedule Management, Performance Management, and Master Reporter.
- Online administrator training courses covering critical topics for each defined role. Online training is part of a blended strategy that includes performance support job aids and virtual classroom sessions to facilitate user and subject matter expert collaboration.
- Online training courses on how to create and submit external training requests, implement Individual Development Plans, navigate the user interface, and other courses which provide instruction on supervisor capabilities and responsibilities within AgLearn.
- Two USDA-formatted courseware development templates that ensure a proper configuration for AgLearn online content deployment.

- An administrator's tool-kit containing over 300 illustrated pages of job aids and forms for all administrators. This indexed and bookmarked PDF document will eventually be developed into a dynamic and searchable Web offering.
- A help desk ticketing system for administrators that is also tied into existing USDA help desks. This streamlines the right information to the correct help desk for resolution.

Second, Adayana provided outreach and marketing services to the USDA training communities. The purpose of this effort was to help USDA agencies better communicate AgLearn's value to their organizations, to entice the many training programs to use AgLearn for their program deliveries, and to assist these communities with better management and reporting on training program results. This was accomplished through:

- Briefing many Deputy Administrators for Management on AgLearn's value proposition.
- Creating communication plans that address different media already available at USDA including: email, online Website, splash screens, posters, post cards, welcome pop-up ads, and e-cards.
- Delivering semi-annual strategic workshops to the training, human resource, and technical audiences to not only provide information on AgLearn's capabilities but also to better understand user needs.
- Implementing OPM Leadership and IT competency-based models.
- Collaborating with agencies to deploy competencies for mission-critical job positions and assist them with this deployment through existing AgLearn IDP capabilities.
- Conducting several Webinar sessions to communicate information about AgLearn throughout the USDA.
- Working with agencies to deploy over 300 custom courses that meet critical training needs.
- Making available over 4,000 COTS courses through licensing agreements with SkillSoft to include: Business Libraries, IT Libraries, Environmental, Safety, and Health Libraries, and over 900 on-demand Leadership Development video programs offered through Books 24x7. These programs consist of short, topic-focused videos presented by leading industry experts.
- Conducting several communication and outreach webinars for field training personnel on various topics to better incorporate AgLearn offerings into training plans across USDA.

- Attending agency-specific conferences to deliver information on the value of AgLearn for their agency needs.
- Establishing clear and detailed processes for mandatory training deployments that include several levels of content testing and validation as well as a communications plan covering what is expected from users.
- Developing and delivering informative newsletters on AgLearn activities to key administrators and agency management.

Third, Adayana helped the AgLearn program establish distinct business practices so that costs for services could accurately be measured and charged appropriately to the USDA sub-agencies and offices. This was accomplished through the establishment of AgLearn under a working capital fund that included a list of core mandatory services with associated service fees as well as optional services that could be purchased annually or on an ad-hoc basis.

Additionally, AgLearn established clear standards for operational processes to include key administrator roles and responsibilities as well as responsibilities for sub-administrators. Finally, the USDA set policies related to the use of AgLearn to ensure that the USDA can benefit from AgLearn's offerings and obtain a positive cost-benefit ratio. These policies include:

- Mandatory use of AgLearn for all online training deliveries.
- Mandatory use of AgLearn for maintaining all training records.
- Mandatory use of AgLearn's online external training request (SF-182) form and approval processes.
- Mandatory 1st stop for training needs. Agencies must first review online training in AgLearn to verify that the course is not available prior to buying equivalent classroom training or other online instruction.

As a result of these efforts, AgLearn has seen nearly 3,000,000 online course completions since its inception. Additionally, discretionary training through AgLearn increased by 600% from FY06 to date in FY08. The AgLearn program office also measured the increase in course participation. For courses announced through the User Welcome Pop-up, AgLearn found a 291% increase in course completions and a 2,205% increase in course participation. The AgLearn program is also ahead of schedule with its planned deployments based on the 2004 business case, but has operated with a budget that is \$13 million less than what was expected. The AgLearn program was also able to identify an agency training cost savings of nearly \$8,000,000 in FY08, and is currently projecting a cost avoidance of nearly \$23,000,000 in FY09. Finally, through AgLearn, the USDA was able to complete its annual mandatory Cyber Security and Privacy training requirements with a completion rate of 99% in FY08.