Creating and Using Web-based Evaluation Tools

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This demonstration will focus on the development and use of a web-based data collection tool that was designed by a collaborative team of university professors and program evaluators. The demonstration will include an overview of the process that was used to design the site and an opportunity to see the data collection options that are being used in evaluating a federal grant.

Collecting and disseminating quantitative data has become an imperative for grantees regardless of the funding agency. Stipulated within the framework of “No Child Left Behind” is a mandate for researched based design and evaluation. However, issues of budget and time often confound project directors and evaluators as they seek to balance what is required with what is achievable. Often this results in findings being reported with a less than optimal data set.

As the presenters struggled with the need to collect data from a diverse group of individuals across the width of the state, it became apparent that the old pencil and paper method of data collection was not providing the flexibility required. In an effort to maximize the data collected within our allotted budget we designed and implemented a process for collecting data on the web.

Like any successful venture, it became apparent that the team that would be working on this project had to have a clear goal, precise objectives, a collaborative spirit, and a willingness to make mistakes and learn. A project team was assembled that was representative of the issues of concern. A measurement and evaluation expert designed and piloted the instruments, a content specialist validated the material, and a quantitative researcher provided input on what tables and statistics would need to be generated. Finally, and key to the project success was the designer who was willing to build the plane while flying it. In addition to designing the data collection the designer would also have to train the participants who would be using the system. The designer also had to ask the right questions so that what we got in the way of results was what we really needed. The team member who assumed responsibility for designing the site had no prior experience in developing a web-based tool but was willing to listen and learn.

After purchasing the server space and a site name, the team worked closely on the design and function of the site by testing the various features and making suggestion for improvement. The site was fully operational in September of 2002 and is being used by teachers, professors, and students who are participating in a Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technology (PT3) grant.

The resulting web-based tool allows the grant participants (teachers, professors, and students) to complete surveys, evaluate workshops, and maintain a log of their project related hours at their home or office computer, at any hour of the day or night. The first year of the grant we depended on pen and pencil surveys and workshop evaluations. This resulted in missing data when participants failed to complete paperwork and the risk of errors as a result of data input as we hand entered survey results. With the ease of access afforded by this system we have collected more data and this data is accurate because the participants themselves enter it into the site. In addition, built into
the system is a mechanism for reminding workshop participants who may have forgotten to complete their survey to do so. Finally, because the project owns the site we are able to control the data management. This allows the project director to activate and deactivate surveys and questionnaires so data are collected in a timely manner, and reports can easily be generated directly from the site at any time.