

The Effective Practices and Solutions Service: A Big Hit

“I can’t believe how many calls and e-mails I’ve had about our effective practice—and not just from small, liberal arts colleges!” So reported Roberta Lembke, director of Information and Instructional Technologies at St. Olaf College, within a few days of the launch of the EDUCAUSE Effective Practices and Solutions (EPS) service last June. Lembke was one of dozens of EDUCAUSE committee members who entered practices into a prototyped database during the months leading up to the public start of the service.

Lembke doesn’t mind being contacted about the “time-tracking” practice she contributed. She is gratified to know that through her answers to questions about the practice, others may benefit from her IT department’s experience. Lembke added, “What’s really great is that I am also learning from the people who contact me and getting to know colleagues who share some common problems.”

The EPS Process

When you visit this popular new Web-based service, you can readily find IT-related practices and solutions through a general keyword search. But you can also search by specific topic, since the database uses the same taxonomy as other EDUCAUSE electronic information services. And you can also view all of the practices listed by the name of the contributing institution.

The process of contributing a practice to the service is straightforward as well. Contributors are guided through a template that requires the entry of a statement of the challenge that prompted the practice, a description of the practice

itself and its benefits, and an estimation of the cost of implementation and replicability. URLs of Web sites that provide related information are also requested. Completing the template is not difficult and does not require a lot of time—most contributors say they needed only from thirty to forty-five minutes from start to finish.

Reviews and Enhancements

A Web survey conducted last fall included the question, “What specific features of the current EDUCAUSE Web site do you find particularly valuable?” The Effective Practices and Solutions service was among the most frequently named features. One especially enthusiastic survey respondent commented that the EPS service alone would justify bookmarking and making repeated visits to the EDUCAUSE Web site: “Instead of another dreary read, I found short, to-the-point articles addressing real-life scenarios. This looks to be real collaboration for real people. . . . Pardon the gushing, but this is great!”

Special thanks are due to members of the EDUCAUSE Current Issues, Recognition, Publications Advisory, and Member Services Committees, who provided periodic input to ensure the quality of the service during its developmental stage. EDUCAUSE staff members continue to capture and act on EPS service users’ comments and suggestions submitted through a dynamic feedback link at the site. For example, one soon-to-be implemented enhancement is an anniversary-date update of practices. Contributors will be asked to review the practices they submitted last year, noting any changes made and adding any “lessons learned” since their original contribution.

The Benefits of Contributing

There are many reasons why, if you haven’t already made a contribution to the EPS service, you should give it serious consideration—or why, if you have already made a contribution, you should think about making another!

EDUCAUSE staff and program committee members are finding the database valuable in identifying “who is doing what” in challenging areas. As a contributor of an innovative practice or solution, you could be invited to present your experience at an association meeting or seminar or to develop the description of your practice more fully for a “Good Ideas” article in *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*.

Contributing a practice or two is also a great way to get some visibility for your institution. For example, the University of Virginia leads all member campuses with its nine contributions—from a description of its “Abuse Team/Responsible Computing” initiative to its “Web Certification Training” program.

If you don’t have time to contribute a practice, why not give this assignment to an up-and-coming staff member in your department? Articulating an effective practice or solution could be a challenging but low-key professional-development opportunity for someone who may not be quite ready to write an article or make a professional presentation.

To find some good IT-related ideas for your campus or to share a practice that you have implemented, visit <<http://www.educause.edu/ep>>. It’s worth the trip!

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