Summary

"The Electronic Commons: a community led natural resource knowledge portal" is a project of the Wood Education and Resource Center of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry program. The USDA Forest Service is working with grantees of this program to support the use of advanced communications technologies (e.g. Web pages, videoconferencing, video streaming, chat rooms, etc) to share information and solutions on topics of concern to national forests and their neighboring communities. Of particular interest are projects that link geographically disparate national forest communities in the 32-state eastern hardwood region. The Center for Technology in Government will work with the grantees and the USDA Forest Service to leverage their investment by capturing key lessons learned from the projects funded by this program.

The project activities are designed to both provide guidance to grantees in information technology innovation and to capture the lessons learned by grantees through these projects,. Lessons learned will be presented in a Web-based report.

Publications & Results

Reports and Working Papers (1)

Knowledge Sharing Innovations in the Natural Resources Community: A toolkit for community-based project teams
Fri, 24 Aug 2007

The Electronic Commons: a community led natural resource knowledge portal was a collaborative program developed by the Wood Education and Resource Center of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, Northeastern Area States, and Northern Initiatives. The program was designed to increase understanding of the potential benefits of and challenges to using information technology for communication and knowledge sharing among natural-resource professionals and volunteer organizations, schools and communities neighboring national forests, as well as individuals interested in learning about natural-resource management. Eight project teams were funded to explore technology-based strategies such as Web sites and Webinars as tools for sharing knowledge on natural-resource topics of concern to their communities and to build communities of practice.

The Electronic Commons: a community led natural resource knowledge portal was a collaborative program developed by the Wood Education and Resource Center of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, Northeastern Area States, and Northern Initiatives. Eight project teams were funded to explore technology-based strategies such as Web sites and Webinars as tools for sharing knowledge on natural-resource topics of concern to their communities and to build communities of practice.This toolkit is the product of a ninth project funded through the Electronic Commons Program to produce a guidance document for future similar efforts undertaken in the natural resources community.

An ala carte approach to the Toolkit

This toolkit was written for two primary audiences – the first is project managers engaged in information technology-based innovations in the public and not-for-profit sectors and the second is funding agencies. While the full toolkit has value to both audiences, specific sections may be more suited to certain readers as a starting place.

Program or Project Managers

. . . managing multi-organizational, geographically separated teams, might start at:

- Chapter 5, Critical Success Factors, which focuses on the strategies the eight project teams found key to their success.
- Chapter 3 subsection, titled "Working in multi-organizational, geographically dispersed teams," which provides a sense of the obstacles project teams face in this context.

. . . selecting technology to support a multi-organizational, geographically separate team, might start at:

- Chapter 4 subsection, titled "Choosing the right technology for your teamwork — virtual or otherwise," which provides guidance to project managers on the kinds of questions a project manager should have the answers to before selecting technology to support communication and collaboration among team members.
- Appendix B, which identifies the technologies used in the eight projects and summarizes the related experiences of each team in selecting and using technology.

. . . selecting technology for sharing knowledge among geographically dispersed audiences, might start at:

- Chapter 4 subsection, titled " Choosing the right tools to share knowledge," which provides information on the issues in the environment project managers should pay attention to when selecting delivery tools.
- Chapter 5, specifically subsections "Align purpose with identified needs and capabilities of your stakeholders" and "Understand and be comfortable with the technology," which offers guidance on how to ensure stakeholders' needs and capabilities are taken into account when choosing technologies.
- Appendix B includes a set of tables organized around the characteristics of the various projects and of the technologies employed in each project.

. . . writing a grant proposal for technology-based knowledge sharing innovations, might start at:

- Chapter 6, which provides guidance on the grant proposal process collected from the eight grantees.

Funders

. . . awarding small grants aimed at technological innovation in the non-for-profit sector, might start at:

- Chapter 2, Assessing Impact, which highlights the value delivered to the natural resources community by the eight projects.
- Chapter 3, Environmental Complexity, which presents observations about the obstacles not-for-profit agencies face when engaging in innovation, technology or otherwise, and provides guidance to assist project teams in overcoming these challenges.
- Chapter 6 provides additional advice to funders on creating a set of conditions to increase the likelihood that funds provided to project teams will generate the expected outcome.

Press Releases & News Stories

Press Releases

UAlbany's Center for Technology in Government Releases Report on Knowledge Sharing Innovations in the Natural Resource Community
Thur, 13 Sep 2007

News Stories

Leveraging Investments in the Electronic Commons

Northeastern Area News Notes, pages 2-4

November 30, 2006

Partners

Government Partners
- USDA Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

Corporate Partners

- Northern Initiatives

Participants

- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University – Department of Forestry
- University of Minnesota, Natural Resource Research Institute
- The Nature Conservancy of Michigan and The Stewardship Network
- The Nature Conservancy of Indiana
- Northeast Minnesota Forestry Industry
- Shelburne Farms and Green Mountain National Forest, Vermont
- Nicolet Distance Education Network
- University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

Funding Sources

This project is funded by the Northern Initiatives on behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.

Original Scope of Work

The project has three phases. The first is focused on knowledge sharing with the Electronic Commons (EC) grantees. This first phase involves two 2-hour conference call consultations between each project team and CTG staff. Discussions will be used to orient grantees to the lessons learned activity and to sharing information about information technology innovations through the use of CTG's toolkits and handbooks. In particular, Making Smart IT Choices and Opening Gateways will be shared with grantees during these calls. The second phase will bring members from each of the EC teams together at CTG for a 1.5 day workshop. The primary goal of the workshop will be to identify a set of key lessons learned to share with colleagues engaging in similar efforts. The third phase is the development of a lessons learned document for distribution to relevant communities.

Brief Project Summaries

www.AugustaSprings.org

The objective of this project is to develop an interactive website to educate visitors of the Augusta Springs center. The website will facilitate on-line scheduling and communication with local school groups and enable school groups to prepare volunteers who lead groups through the site. The site also allows approved users (educators, teachers, etc.) to add their own content to the website.

Demonstration of a Community of Practice to Enhance Economic Development

The objective is to develop a community of practice for the NE MN Forest Products Action Team and the regional wood products industry using web-pages, on-line plant visit reporting forms, web-based seminars, chat rooms, e-newsletters, and archives as tools to accomplish sustainable economic development of the wood products industry in NE MN.

Web-based Learning and Technology Transfer of Inspection Methods for Historic Wood Structures

The objective of this project is to develop a community of practice for the historic inspection of wood structures using web pages, web-based seminars, video-streaming, chat rooms, e-newsletters, a marketplace and archives to provide direct assistance to owners of historic wood structures enabling better inspections, maintenance and safety of these structures.

Native Plants Learning Network: Propagating restoration through technology

The objective of this project is to develop a multimedia online learning network focused on native plant conservation and restoration. The goal is to maximize relevant information sharing while minimizing time and travel by using interactive information technology such as video-conferences, web sites and web chats.

Cooperative Weed Management Area Training for Eastern United States Midwest Invasive Plant Network

The objective of this project is to develop informational and training materials to be used for remote CWMA training workshops in Eastern US through 2 on-line training sessions and one teleconference.

Promise of Place Interactive Website

The objective of this project is to develop an interactive website, Promise of Place, that will serve as a forum for sharing curriculum, best practices and other information regarding place-based education models that address natural resource related issues in the northeast.

Forest Resources and Ecology: A Distance Education Network Model

The primary objective of this project is to develop an interactive educational program using the ITV technology for 7 Nicolet Distance Education Network (NDEN) school districts to inform teachers, students and parents about the issues facing the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Its goal is to prepare students and teachers for hands-on conservation education projects that will develop their skills to address forest issues and to allow them to share their knowledge and lessons learned through ITV and NDEN website.

Sustaining White-tailed Deer and Forests: An Electronic Resource Center

A year-long effort to develop and market a single web site that would help communities around national forests facing deer overabundance to carry on informed dialog and develop solutions.

Related Web Sites

Wood Education and Resource Center
http://www.na.fs.fed.us/ea/werc/werc.shtm

USDA Forest Service – Eastern Region
http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/

Virginia Tech – Department of Forestry
http://www.Augustasprings.org

Natural Resource Research Institute
http://www.nrri.umn.edu/default/

The Nature Conservancy
http://www.nature.org/

Shelburne Farms
http://www.shelburnefarms.org/

Green Mountain National Forest
http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/cnnf/

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension
http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/

Northern Initiatives
http://www.northerninitiatives.com/

Contact Information

Center for Technology in Government
University at Albany, SUNY
187 Wolf Road, Suite 301
Albany, NY 12205
(518) 442-3892 (phone)
(518) 442-3886 (fax)

Donna Canestraro

Project Manager

518-442-4813