

The **Electronic Commons Program** was created to fund knowledge sharing projects; in particular projects related to natural resource-related training, technical assistance and community building using advanced communication technologies. As is the case in most projects, each stakeholder in the **Electronic Commons Program** had unique but related questions they were hoping to address. From the perspective of the project sponsors, the Wood Education and Resource Center, their questions related to the impact of their investment:

- Can small grants to community-based organizations make a difference?
- Did each of the project teams have the capability to achieve their objective?
- What obstacles would the project teams face? And did the sponsors have the ability to help the project teams mitigate these obstacles?
- Can the sponsors leverage this investment in eight technology based knowledge sharing innovations to provide value to future projects teams? Can they use the experiences of this first cohort of funded projects to give future teams a running start?

From the individual project team's perspective, their questions were more focused to their individual projects and team development:

- Did the project teams, in their specific environment, with their current set of resources, tools, and experience, have what it takes to meet their objectives?
- Did they have the organizational and technical capability to meet their objectives?
- Would the technology work as expected?
- Can they get the partners to work together toward a common goal?
- Would the expected users be able to use the new knowledge sharing system?

Throughout the year-long project all eight of the project teams overcame many challenges to create Webinars, launch new Web sites, and to develop new training materials. The individual teams found they did have what it takes to be successful. Each team achieved their overall objective and successfully created and used technology-based innovations to share knowledge about natural resources management. Along the way they found that many of the obstacles they faced had to do as much with the challenges of multi-organizational, collaborative efforts as it did with limited understanding of the technologies under consideration. They found their success relied as much on their ability to adapt known project management and communication skills to this new environment as it did on their efforts to build understanding about how technology could be leveraged to support the goals of their various partnerships.

For the project sponsors, they also found evidence that their small investments in community-based efforts to employ technologies in new and innovative ways in support of knowledge sharing did make a difference in how information is shared with and used by geographically dispersed and disparate communities. They created a group of colleagues who would now be the first generation resource for grantees of the future.

While the toolkit is specifically directed toward natural resources practitioners in government, academic, and not-for-profit settings, it also provides valuable lessons for any organization involved in community-based collaborative knowledge sharing activities. The insights from the project team members provide guidance for government and not-for-profit program managers whose responsibilities include the sharing of knowledge among diverse and sometimes geographically dispersed communities. The toolkit is a roadmap of sorts for organizations and individuals who are working in new ways, using new tools and techniques in pursuit of knowledge sharing objectives.

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two presents an overview of the impact of the Electronic Commons Programs. Chapter three provides an overview of the environment the eight project teams worked within and the nature of the challenges stemming from this environment. Chapter four discusses how to reduce the risk of failure in information technology innovations, based on the conference calls with the participants, along with a discussion of the tools used by the project teams. The factors found to be critical to success by the participants in the eight project teams are presented in chapter five in the form of recommendations to project teams, together with vignettes from the projects. Advice to colleagues in the form of tips relative to each factor is also included. Chapter six concludes the toolkit with a set of recommendations to organizations funding similar projects, as well as advice to potential grantees on writing successful grant proposals involving community-based knowledge sharing and technological innovation. The appendices include a number of related resources and detailed information about the projects themselves.