"The New Brunswick/Prince Edward Island Educational Computer Network"

SUBMITTED TO THE
COMMISSION ON
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
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Submitted by the NB/PEI ECN Board of Directors

April 26, 2007

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Introduction

The goal of this brief is to inform the Commission on Post-Secondary Education of the existence of the New Brunswick/Prince Edward Island Educational Computer Network (NB/PEI ECN or the "Network"), a standing advisory committee of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), responsible for overseeing the longest-running inter-provincial educational computer network in the country.

This brief will provide the history of the NB/PEI ECN with specific emphasis on its shared services and joint projects, as well as discuss future opportunities.

The NB/PEI ECN, founded in 1970, connects all of the universities in New Brunswick (NB) and the universities and community colleges in Prince Edward Island (PEI). The primary service provided by the network is connectivity among its members and to the wider world. However, additional benefits are enjoyed by the members in the areas of joint purchasing and licensing, shared support services, professional development, and the delivery of network-based services and information exchange.

A new five-year agreement has recently been approved by the Board of Directors, effective May 1, 2007 (attached).

We believe that this initiative is an excellent example of "Collaboration with Differentiation".

Background

Following a pilot project in the late 1960's, the New Brunswick Educational Computer Network was formed in 1970 with the agreement of the New Brunswick Higher Education Commission, Mount Allison University, l'Université de Moncton, the University of New Brunswick, and St. Thomas University to share computer processing services.

In 1974, the newly formed Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) assumed stewardship of the agreement and in 1975, the University of Prince Edward Island joined as a full member, establishing the NB/PEI ECN. The signing of a five-year agreement, from May 1, 1992 to April 30, 1997, formalized the addition of Holland College as the next member of the group. A subsequent 5-year agreement (May 1, 1997 to April 30, 2002) witnessed the addition of the Maritime Forest Ranger School (now the Maritime College of Forest Technology), bringing the total number of institutions to eight.

A new five-year agreement takes effect on May 1, 2007. Current members are Mount Allison University, l'Université de Moncton, the University of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University, the University of Prince Edward Island, Holland College, the Maritime College of Forest Technology and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

The NB/PEI ECN is overseen by a Board of Directors, consisting of the Presidents of the member institutions and the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission. The overall

management and operation of the network and the associated services is the responsibility of a Network Committee consisting of the Directors' of Computing Services from each member institution.

Activities

In addition to providing connectivity among its members, the New Brunswick portion of the network also connects New Brunswick member institutions to the wider world through a shared connection to the Canadian advanced research network (Ca*net 4) and through Ca*Net 4 to the world. The Prince Edward Island portion of the network also has a direct connection to Ca*net4.

This approach (i.e. combining the needs and resources of the members to acquire, implement and operate a shared connection) has allowed all members to realize the benefits of a high capacity, high speed communications network at a cost affordable to all institutions, regardless of size. This approach allows the NB/PEI ECN members to take advantage of economies of scale not available to any individual member institution and ensures that smaller institutions receive the same level of service as larger ones.

In addition to sharing expertise and realizing economies of scale, an added benefit associated with acting as a collective is the ability to influence organizations such as CANARIE and the Federal government. By providing a united voice with respect to the collective needs of New Brunswick (and, in this case, Prince Edward Island) institutions, we become stronger on the national front.

The network infrastructure has continued to evolve and expand to meet the needs of the members institutions (i.e. increased bandwidth to meet the increasing demands of students and faculty) and at the same time provide a quality and high level of service at an affordable price.

As the demand for increased bandwidth continues to rise to address emerging opportunities (such as voice-over-internet-protocol, podcasting, on-line course delivery, etc.), it is critical that institutions continue to identify areas where collaboration and coordination result in the deployment of shared, cost-effective services and solutions to the members while at the same time allowing each member institution to address its unique needs and requirements.

With this in mind, the members of the NB/PEI ECN have most recently decided to build on each institution's strengths and expertise by joining efforts to solve common issues with the first project being the identification and implementation of a shared anti-spam service. This project will serve as a model for the definition and delivery of shared services to the members with a number of other service areas being discussed as potential shared services in the future.

In addition to the management and delivery of a shared "network" and the identification of potential areas for the implementation of shared services, the NB/PEI ECN also provides members with the opportunity to acquire site licenses and pursue joint purchases of common software. As noted previously, this allows the members to take advantage of economies of scale not available to any one individual member.

Future Opportunities

As has been illustrated, the NB/PEI ECN has provided its members with a number and variety of areas to pool resources and implement cost-effective and resource-efficient solutions to meet common needs.

Over the past few months, this discussion has expanded to include the NBCC/CCNB campuses. While these discussions are very much in a formative stage, the deliberations and possible recommendations resulting from the Commission on Post-Secondary Education may provide the impetus required to take these discussions to the next phase and bring the NBCC/CCNB into the NB/PEI ECN.

The members of the "Network" continue to work to identify other areas in which we can collaborate, pool resources and implement shared solutions in order to make the best use of all of our limited resources.

Conclusion

As the Commission on Post-Secondary Education develops a "new vision" for post-secondary education in New Brunswick, the role and value of information, communications and technology cannot be underestimated or undervalued. And with the availability of an existing framework that has proven itself effective, members that are committed to competing when appropriate and sharing when effective, the NB/PEI ECN looks forward to being part of implementing this new vision in support of collaboration with differentiation.