

1. *Describe your knowledge sharing activity - what did you do? – how did you do it?*

We utilized the Conferencing on the Web (COW) website to conduct a “virtual” board meeting in fall 2001. The software is available through the University of Michigan and at very low cost. This “electronic” meeting allowed people to log into a website and enter comments on applicants. Participants were able to see all the comments, and we hoped to replicate a process that was similar to what we were used to at our face-to-face meetings.

Instructions for using COW were sent to board members in advance with deadlines for posting their comments on the site.

2. *Describe your motivation / rationale / value proposition / business case for the initiative – why did you do it? – for whom?*

Travel was restricted because of September 11, so we needed a way to communicate with our board members about the application review that was as similar as possible to meeting in person. Each board member was given a user name and password to access the system. (It’s possible to adjust the settings in COW so that it’s accessible only to those with the password.) In this way, our “meeting” was still confidential.

3. *Describe the results of the effort – who and/or what was impacted and how? – what are the benefits?*

The result of using the COW, as opposed to having conference calls or reviewing applications via e-mail, was that all the board members could read comments on the applications from everyone, in addition to being able to add their own comments, and the meeting was confidential. This made the “virtual” meeting seem more like a real meeting, since there was an ongoing dialogue. However, this was successful only because the board members knew each other from previous meetings; some of the subtleties of their dialogue would have been missed had they never met in person. Also, the dialogue wasn’t nearly as rich as it is in our in-person meetings; people did not go into as much detail in their review of applicants as they would have normally.

4. *Describe any future implications or issues related to the initiative, e.g., what plans are in place? What current constraints or challenges are you facing? How is the initiative being sustained / maintained? How can it be replicated or scaled up?*

While it is more productive to have “real life” advisory board meetings, using COW is a great way to accomplish the task of reviewing applications if travel isn’t possible. It would not have been practical to put off the review until a later time, so we really needed a solution. Using COW is not something that we’re doing on a regular basis, but now that we’ve used it, and other staff are aware of and are familiar with it, it can be a backup plan when meeting in person isn’t feasible or it can also be a way to review applications where decisions need to be made immediately to fill a special position.

Still, it’s always more productive to have a face-to-face meeting with our board members as some of the larger and very important issues about our program were not addressed during this “virtual” meeting.