
PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Interactive Technology for Trainings and Meetings

Virginia

Summary

The Center for Quality Health Care Services at the Virginia Department of Health uses interactive videoconferencing technology for conducting trainings and staff meetings. District Health Department offices with convenient locations throughout the state provide accessible viewing locations for home-based surveyors.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Virginia's interactive videoconferencing program, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering the use of interactive technologies for training or meetings. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff and review of documentation supporting the program.

Background

Virginia's 41 long-term care surveyors are home-based and telework. The agency has one central office, located in Richmond. Providing training and information to this dispersed workforce posed logistical and budgetary challenges, with some surveyors living six to eight hours from the central office. Statewide trainings and meetings were expensive in terms of both time and travel. Surveyors also were dissatisfied with the need for long drives to the central office location. Due to a lack of sufficient meeting space to accommodate all surveyors, the agency had to incur the additional expense of renting off-site locations for large meetings. The need to efficiently and cost-effectively reach surveyors across the state compelled the agency to explore technology options for conducting training and meetings.

Intervention

Through an Intranet connection, state survey staff participate in live videoconferences for training

purposes and quarterly staff meetings. The videoconferences may incorporate data and information from slides such as PowerPoint presentations or software demonstrations using ASPEN. Bridging technology allows participants at all connected sites to see and hear one another in real time. Speakers are featured in the center of a viewing screen and participants at the other sites are featured along the perimeter of the monitor. On the monitors of the remote participants, the view shifts to focus on the individual speaking, with the speaker always shown in the center of the screen. The presenter's screen remains constant with the presenter in the center of the screen and the remote sites identified along the screen perimeter.

Thirty-eight local Health Department district offices located throughout the state serve as videoconferencing sites. The teleworking surveyors travel to the site closest to their home base to participate in the videoconferences. Travel times to the district offices vary, with the longest travel times approximately 1½ hours, compared to up to eight hours of travel to the central office. Videoconferences can be saved on videotape or to multimedia (Windows Media Audio format) computer files for on-demand viewing.

Required equipment for the district offices is housed on a media cart that can be transported from room to room. The equipment includes single or dual 32-inch LCD displays and a video camera. Some district offices have a dedicated

videoconferencing room where equipment remains set up. Health Department IT staff provide technical support to the district offices, although agency staff indicate that the technical requirements for linking the district offices to the videoconference are not complex, particularly after the initial set up of equipment.

The agency utilizes the videoconferencing system's connections, wide-area network, and equipment in place at the Health Department. The Health Department conferencing manager coordinates access to the statewide system and links the remote sites on the day of scheduled videoconferences. The state agency coordinates with each local Health Department office to ensure room and equipment availability. The agency paid \$5,000 for equipment that builds upon the existing technology previously purchased by the Health Department. Recently, all equipment was transferred to the new Virginia Information Technology Agency.

The survey agency utilizes interactive videoconferencing for multiple purposes. For example, home health surveyors conduct quarterly staff meetings and quality assurance activities via videoconference. In addition, the technology has been used for training long-term care surveyors on Life Safety Code deficiencies, multiple ASPEN and MDS issues, and new employee orientations, with plans to conduct Principles of Documentation training via videoconference in the near future. Videoconferencing also is utilized for focused refresher training for individual surveyors and parts of new employee orientation. New staff who live a significant distance from the central office and begin their employment mid-week will travel to the closest Health Department district office and begin their training via videoconference, before receiving the full three- to four-week orientation at the central office.

Conducting trainings and meetings via Web-based videoconferencing has presented new challenges to trainers accustomed to face-to-face teaching. Agency management encourages trainers to experiment with new teaching and presentation techniques to maximize the utility of this communication format. Equipment is easy to

use and is activated simply by turning on the monitor.

Implementation

The agency has been utilizing videoconference trainings and meetings for one year. The state Health Department had an existing videoconferencing network with bridging technology that allowed the connection of multiple remote sites. When the state survey agency decided to implement videoconferencing, the agency was able to utilize the capabilities of the existing system and needed only to purchase additional hardware that tapped into the existing network. The system is easy to use and district Health Department staff provide basic instruction to surveyors about the equipment's operation.

Impact

Agency staff estimate quarterly cost savings of \$7,000 to \$8,000 due to videoconferencing, for an annual savings of \$28,000 to \$32,000. In addition to cost savings, staff also note that videoconferencing allows the agency to conduct more frequent and timely trainings. Videoconferencing also is credited with facilitating more timely responses to individual surveyor problems or issues, which were previously addressed during quarterly staff meetings.

Lessons Learned

Agency staff advise that successfully implementing an interactive technology program requires strong and committed IT support. Staff also note that it is valuable to encourage trainers to experiment with the technology and that trainers should have support for their attempts to assimilate innovative approaches to training and education. Although presenters initially may encounter technical challenges using the videoconferencing equipment, most presenters quickly adapted to the new approach and were interested in learning how to use a new communication medium. It is important to provide sufficient instruction to presenters and surveyors to ensure the agency takes full advantage of the videoconferencing technology.

Contact Information

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This document is part of an issue brief on the use of interactive technologies for trainings and meetings in state survey agencies. The issue brief is one of a series by the Division of Health Care Policy and Research, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in state survey agencies. The entire series is available online at CMS' Website, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurvCertPromPractProj>. The issue briefs are intended to share information about practices used in state survey agencies and are not an endorsement of any practice.