

Innovative Ideas- East Carolina University

Category: Public Service

Project Name: ECU Connect

The Idea: ECU Connect is an online resource center for communities and organizations in eastern North Carolina. Individuals or organizations can request assistance from East Carolina University (ECU) through the ECU Connect online portal.

Project Execution: Established in 2003 as a part of ECU's Community Engagement program, ECU Connect is a relatively inexpensive operation both in terms of set-up cost and operation. Costs associated with the portal revolve around personnel, software, and web space on the University's server. The timeline needed to implement the project should be about 3 months. A rough schematic is as follows:

- Month 1 Planning Meeting with Outreach and Information Technology Staff
- Month 2 Develop, Design and Troubleshoot the actual Portal
- Month 3 Go Live, Advertise the Portal

The greatest cost incurred is that of faculty and staff time associated with maintaining the portal, responding to the requests, and traveling to meet with community members and/or organizations. Roughly 10% of a single staff member's time should be needed to respond to requests, a one time cost of 50-70 hours of staff support will take place in developing the portal, and 10 to 20 hours of staff support each semester will be needed for portal maintenance.

External Impact: ECU Connect has served as a bridge between the university and the community. In doing so, this portal has helped ECU in its ability to document the types of external services provided to the community at large.

About 60 community requests per year are received through the portal. This number is likely to increase annually as more and more people learn about the service. Individuals tell us they see ECU Connect as extremely user-friendly, are pleased with the accessibility of the portal, and are impressed with the prompt response given to their queries. No formal evaluation of the service has been conducted.

Internal Impact: Saving time and creating a greater ease of access to information characterize the key internal benefits of ECU Connect. This project has made the gathering of and response to community requests more manageable and easier to handle. The portal serves an inexpensive way to connect with the community and has proven able to communicate clearly the types of services the university can and cannot provide. In creating a similar initiative, it is important to get buy in from the university departments being asked to respond to collected requests.

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