

FORREX's 2012 Clean Energy Community of Practice Needs Assessment

Ajit *Krishnaswamy*, FORREX; Samantha *Charlton*, Simon Fraser University

A knowledgeable and skilled workforce of clean energy professionals is critical to energy efficiency and conservation. It is necessary that this workforce undergo continuous learning, in order to remain innovative and to be adaptive to new energy sector technologies, products, and requirements. One manner in which this workforce can be supported is in the development of a Clean Energy Knowledge Exchange (CEKE). This tool would be a forum where professionals could learn with and from each other, and as a consequence become more effective and efficient in energy management.

In February this year, FORREX conducted a Clean Energy Community of Practice (CE-CoP) Needs Assessment, the results of which demonstrated a proven need for a CEKE. A community of practice (CoP) is a group of professionals with a common interest, who commit to learning with and from each other in order to become more effective in their particular field of practice.

In February 2012, an online survey was sent to 1,838 individuals (mostly from British Columbia), all of whom had energy-related responsibilities in the public sector (including federal, provincial, local, and First Nations government; crown corporations; health authorities; and school districts) or the private sector (including industry; medium or small business; consultants; and non-profits). General information about the respondents was gathered: information about how they access clean energy related information; respondents' needs and preferences relating to a CE-CoP and an online CEKE; and, their topical extension needs.

The 110 people who responded represented all the energy-related work sectors that the survey had targeted; however, there was an uneven spread of responses from different sectors. A large proportion of responses came from individuals who identified themselves as working for local government (20%) or as a consultant (13%). Twenty-five percent of the respondents identified themselves as a policy- or decision-maker.

An overwhelming majority (79%) of the survey respondents said that an online CE-CoP would be of value to them (see Figure 1). Survey findings indicated that there are a large number of potential participants for a CE-CoP, and it would be useful to support their professional ability to stay current with emerging information through an online CEKE. When asked if they would participate in a moderated forum such as the proposed CEKE, a majority of respondents (82%) said they would do so, especially if there was an exchange of high-quality information (See Figure 2).



The majority of respondents (75%) identified themselves as “somewhat able” or “not able” to keep up to date with emerging information in the energy management field. This indicates that there is a knowledge gap in the field of energy management for a significant proportion of respondents. Reading websites was the predominant method of accessing information about energy management across all work sectors. This indicates that people from all work backgrounds would be most comfortable with a web-based CEKE.

Fifty-six percent of respondents chose time as a constraint to staying current with information related to energy management. Since time is a major constraint, an online forum where professionals could access information at their own convenience would be most suitable. The identification of time as a common constraint also indicates that the information presented should be brief, targeted, and clear.

Survey respondents emphasized that an online forum should be efficiently moderated so that the information being exchanged is relevant and of good quality. Thus, an online CEKE needs to be carefully designed for structure, content, and functionality. The online forum would be more useful if designed with participation of and in consultation with potential users, as several respondents were interested in providing input to a proposed CEKE. The Needs Assessment indicated that emerging information is needed on a wide variety of topics related to energy management, efficiency, conservation, and innovation. Bioenergy was clearly the most often identified topic when respondents were asked to prioritize renewable energy topics.

Survey responses demonstrated that sub-groups catering to different work sectors and topics would be useful, but not to the extent that these resulted in information silos. Needs Assessment respondents emphasized that clean-energy innovation and knowledge overlaps across different sectors, and that it is important not to lose an interdisciplinary, inter-professional dialogue. Social media should only be used in moderation and remain optional on any online forum due to differences in desire and comfort levels of those who use it professionally.

Organizations and workplaces are at different stages in adopting clean energy innovations. Thus, there is great potential for mutual learning between organizations. Many groups have implemented energy savings and clean energy innovations, and those that have not could learn from their experiences. Thus, it is important for a CEKE to have information available for all participants, regardless of where they are situated on the continuum of implementation of energy management innovations.

The CE-CoP Needs Assessment strongly indicates that there is a large pool of potential participants for a CEKE, as respondents indicated that they would like to keep up to date with emerging clean-energy information, and that doing so is a critical part of performing their job effectively. Respondents also expressed a desire to network and to learn from others within the workforce. As a follow up to the findings from the Needs Assessment, FORREX is currently looking for funding and partners to start an online CEKE.

For more information on the CE-CoP Needs Assessment or the CEKE, please contact Ajit Krishnaswamy.

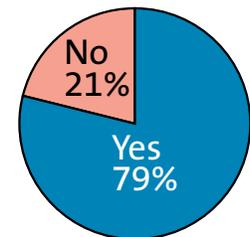


Figure 1: Would an online CE-CoP be of value?

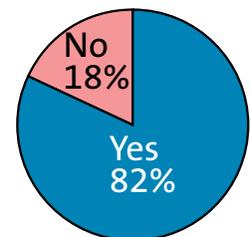


Figure 2: Would you participate in online moderated forums on clean energy topics?

Author information

Ajit Krishnaswamy – FORREX Socio-economics Extension Specialist, c/o Simon Fraser University School of Resource and Environmental Management, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6. Email: ajit.krishnaswamy@forrex.org

Samantha Charlton – Master’s in Resource and Environmental Management (MRM) student, Simon Fraser University. P.O. Box 986, Masset, BC V0T 1M8. Email: R.S.Charlton@gmail.com

