

# Report on the Survey of the use of Online Communities within the Community Education Network

## Social Economy and Sustainability, Subnode 6 (Communications)

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In this report I concentrated my analysis on frequencies and cross tabulations from the survey of members of the Community Education Network. In total there are 17 cases in the dataset used to produce these results. Two of those 17 cases had all missing values. I used the Pearson Chi square test when analyzing relationships with cross tabs. There is an issue with low respondents and the reliability of the relationships. Because of this issue I had to recode several questions in order to produce more reliable results.

One of the central themes of the report is the issue of how to stimulate contribution to online communities. There is evidence that some people prefer to observe i.e. lurk, instead of contribute to their community.

### Survey Questions

1. *What Voluntary Gateway communities are you a part of?(Circle all that apply)*

The Community Education Network Collaborative received 58.8% of responses which makes it the highest concentration of positive answers out of all of the communities.

2. *Which of these Voluntary Gateway communities do you use the most? (rank your top three, with 1 being your top choice and so on) (n= 11, 7, 6 respectively)*

The most used Voluntary Gateway community is the Community Education Network Collaborative. It scored a 35.3%. Other communities chosen are Communities in Schools, CEN Employment Assistance Services, Community

Youth Network and Community Action Committee. The second most used community is the Community Action Committee with 17.6%. The third most used community is the CEN Leadership Group with 11.8%.

3. *How often do you log on to one of the Voluntary Gateway online communities?(Recoded)*

Choices	Percentage
Once or more a week	17.6%
Once or more a month	41.2%
Never	29.4%

This question is an important one to analyze closely because the Voluntary Gateway is not and never will be effective unless we motivate people to log on. Most people login to the Voluntary Gateway once or more a month (if ever). People are tending not to use the Voluntary Gateway as frequently as was hoped. Upon testing, the relationship with how often people log on and the most used community (CENC), I found that 60% of people within the CENC login to the Voluntary Gateway Once or more a month. Perhaps there is a lack of activity in the CENC which is bringing down the overall use of the Voluntary Gateway. Another valuable relationship to consider is the one between how often people login to the Voluntary Gateway and the general usefulness of online communities. Unfortunately the chi square test deems this relationship unreliable however there were some interesting concentrations of results. People who find online tools in the workplace useful log into the Voluntary Gateway the least. 41.7% of people who find online tools useful log in once or more a month and 33.3% never log in. Another relationship that is consistent to what would be expected is between this variable and how much one contributes to the Voluntary Gateway. The Chi Square test shows a significant relationship here. 66.7% of people who contribute content once or more a month also log in to the Voluntary Gateway once or more a month. Another interesting concentration of data is found in the relationship between this variable and if people have experienced problems with the Voluntary Gateway. 85.7% of people who log in to the Voluntary Gateway once or more a month have not experienced any trouble with the Voluntary Gateway.

4. *From where have you logged on to the Voluntary Gateway?*

41.2% of people log on to the Voluntary Gateway at work. This finding is interesting because it shows that it is possible to integrate the Voluntary

Gateway into a regular work routine. 23.5% of people use the Voluntary Gateway through a combination of home and work.

5. *Have you logged on to the Voluntary Gateway during non-work time?*

52.9% of people have not logged onto the Voluntary Gateway during non-work time. This finding is consistent with the people who use the VG from work only. An interesting relationship can be found between this question and “would you log onto the Voluntary Gateway if not encouraged.” Unfortunately the chi square test is unreliable however the data was concentrated in a certain area. As expected, 55.6% of people who do not log on to the Voluntary Gateway during non-work time also would not use the Voluntary Gateway if it was not encouraged.

6. *If the use of the use of the Voluntary Gateway was not encouraged, would you still use it?*

The response to this question was negative. 35.3% of respondents would not use the Voluntary Gateway if it was not encouraged and 41.2% were not sure. Even though the Chi square test is unreliable in the relationship between this question and the question ‘In general, rate the usefulness of online tools in your work?, there seems to be a concentration of responses. Of the people who generally find online tools useful, 41.7% of them would not and 41.7% are not sure if they would use the Voluntary Gateway if it was not encouraged.

7. *In general, rate the usefulness of online tools in your work? (recoded)*

Choices	Percentage
Useful	70.6%
Not Useful	5.9%
Not Sure	11.8%

70.6% of people find that online tools in the workplace are somewhat to very useful. Perhaps we need to look deeper at what these people find useful about online communities in general. This could perhaps be a line of questions during the qualitative portion of the study. Even though Chi Square is unreliable, 50% of people who find online communities useful have not yet contributed content to the Voluntary Gateway. This could be those people who use the communities to check up on Current events and other features i.e. Lurkers. Lurking is mentioned in the article “**Sociability and usability in online communities: determining and measuring success.**” A stream of

questions could be asked concerning lurkers during the qualitative study. 91.7% of people who generally find online communities useful feel that their ability to use the internet is average.

8. *What do you primarily use the Voluntary Gateway online communities for? (Check off your top three uses, with 1 being the top use, and so on.)*

Of those who responded, people chose 'seeing what events are upcoming' for their first and second primary uses of the Voluntary Gateway. 29.4% of people who never chose 'seeing what events are upcoming' for their primary use chose it for their second. The third primary use is reading reports. This finding suggests that people spend more time lurking than contributing to their community. Lurkers are people who spend more time observing the events happening in their community instead of contributing content.

9. *How often do you contribute content to one of the Voluntary Gateway online communities? (recoded)*

Choices	Percentage
Once or more a week	5.9%
Once or more a month	35.3%
I have not yet contributed	47.1%

Most people have not yet contributed content to the Voluntary Gateway. This finding supports the evidence of widespread "lurking." Perhaps this result is related to the encouragement factor or their primary use of the Voluntary Gateway. Perhaps we need to consider how to stimulate interest in the Voluntary Gateway in order for them to contribute more. How to stimulate interest can be a line of questioning in the qualitative study. The paper "**Establishing online trust through a community responsibility system**" talks about trust and how people contribute to Online Communities. Maybe people have an issue with contributing content because they do not know for sure who will be viewing their comments so they are more hesitant to contribute. The paper goes on to discuss how to stimulate trust in online communities. Another paper which discusses under contribution is "**Using Social Psychology to Motivate Contributions to Online Communities.**" This paper discusses two social concepts to help understand under contribution. One is social loafing, the other is the collective effort theory. Another article which considers online

contribution is **“Increasing participation in online communities: A framework for human-computer interaction.”**

10. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most positive score what are the benefits of using the Voluntary Gateway communities, in terms of completing work-related tasks?

Choices	1	2	3	4	5
Doing reports is more efficient	0%	5.9%	23.5%	0%	35.3%
Getting access to past reports and minutes of meetings is more efficient	5.9%	11.8%	23.5%	0%	29.4%
It makes it easier to take part in work-related discussions	5.9%	17.6%	11.8%	11.8%	23.5%
It increases my knowledge about what is going on in the CEN	29.4%	11.8%	5.9%	11.8%	11.8%
I can communicate easier with co-workers in the CEN who are in other locations	0%	29.4%	11.8%	5.9%	23.5%
It has increased my knowledge of CEN goals and activities	0%	17.6%	17.6%	11.8%	23.5%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

On the most part, people do not tend to find the Voluntary Gateway beneficial when it comes to work related activities. The most positive finding found is that 29.4% of people who chose ‘It increases my knowledge about what is going on in the CEN’ felt that this is the most beneficial part of the Voluntary Gateway as far as work is concerned. Increasing knowledge is important of course, but if people do not contribute then the knowledge gained is limited.

11. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the most positive answer, what are the benefits of using the Voluntary Gateway online communities, in terms of social interactions?

	1	2	3	4	5
My sense of belonging to the CEN has increased	11.8%	11.8%	11.8%	5.9%	29.4%
I have a better sense that my comments and contributions are valued	0%	11.8%	23.5%	11.8%	23.5%
I have been able to get to know my co-workers in other locations better	0%	11.8%	5.9%	17.6%	35.3%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Most people do not feel that the Voluntary Gateway fosters any social interactions within their respective communities. Again, if people are not contributing then social interaction is limited.

*12. The following chart has a list of possible characteristics which may reflect your experience with the Voluntary Gateway. Please rate whether you agree or disagree with the statement.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have enough time to use the online communities	0%	17.6%	17.6%	29.4%	23.5%
I have received enough training to use the online communities effectively	0%	47.1%	5.9%	11.8%	11.8%
I am interested in using the online communities	11.8%	23.5%	47.1%	0%	0%
I feel that my data is secure when I am using the online communities	11.8%	52.9%	5.9%	5.9%	0%
I think that the	0%	41.2%	17.6%	17.6%	0%

online communities are user friendly					
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Many people feel that they do not have enough time to use the Voluntary gateway. 47.1% of people are not sure if they are interested in the Voluntary Gateway. Upon studying the relationships between this question and the Social benefits of the Voluntary Gateway, I found that many relationships could not be commented on because the distribution of answers are too great. Perhaps in discovering this issue we can change some benefits and increase interest.

*13. Are you aware that help to use the Voluntary Gateway online communities is available through e-mail?*

52.9% of people are not aware that help is available through email. Email is probably the quickest and most efficient way to get help on a topic especially if both parties are busy. Perhaps more marketing is needed to make people aware that help is available through this format.

*14. What could we do to improve the available support for using the Voluntary Gateway online communities?*

- Make training a more inclusive part of the website. Follow up reminders to use the site. E-newsletter to highlight activity on the website.
- Interactive chat room, similar to MSN messenger. Is this possible??
- It was very valuable to have a staff person dedicated to the promotion and support of the Voluntary Gateway. In my particular situation, I have a staff of over 50 and it would have been very difficult to dedicate the time needed to get everyone trained to use the technology. I will face the same dilemma in September when my new staff are hired. Without the resources of a staff person, I am doubtful adequate training and support will be available to ensure new staff are trained in how to utilize the Voluntary Gateway.
- Not sure, have really not used it, have not really had any need. Often work is too busy to use some of the online resources available, even when they are good resources.
- I am surprised that such a resource exists. Definitely need more advertising.
- Easy access to assistance for more infrequent users (via e-mail or by phone) Ongoing tech support
- Better orientation into using the online community.

There are two relevant articles in the literature review called “**Stimulating Social Engagement in a Community Network**” and “**Assessing Needs and Evaluating Communities**” **Online Communities: Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability** . These articles discuss how to stimulate interest in online communities. They may be helpful in developing a line of questioning on the topic for the qualitative study.

*15. Have you experienced any problems while using the Voluntary Gateway online communities?*

66.7% of people have not experienced any problems.

*i. What were they?*

- Couldn't find my group
- Not being able to log on
- There were a number of glitches initially. My staff attempted to get access to the Gateway, but passwords were never issued. This was quickly addressed through the Voluntary Gateway staff and everyone eventually got on. Also, in order for me to be able to cut and paste from on-line reports, I needed to be provided with administrative privileges. I was the manager of the community, so that was not a problem, but it would have been impossible for any other member of the community to cut and paste for their own purposes.
- Not sure how to access or most effectively use the service

*ii. Were the problems corrected?*

- Yes
- Some problems were corrected
- In-person help was provided

*iii. Were you satisfied with how it was corrected?*

- Yes
- The staff person we had hired was fabulous. All issues were quickly responded to in a very professional manner.
- Yes

*iv. Are there any ways that we can correct the problems more efficiently?*

- No
- Ongoing information and support



16. *On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being unskilled and 5 being highly skilled, how would you rate your ability to use the Voluntary Gateway online communities when you **began** using the online community?*

When people began using the Voluntary Gateway, no one felt they were highly skilled with using it. Most people, 35.3% gave their abilities a 3 out of 5. This result is understandable because new technologies tend to take awhile to adopt.

17. *On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being unskilled and 5 being highly skilled, could you rate your ability to use the Voluntary Gateway online communities **today**? \_\_\_\_\_*

The results of this question suggest that most people feel their ability to use the Voluntary Gateway is a 3 out of 5. The distribution of the data seems to be leaning towards an increased ability when compared with when they first began.

18. *Is there any way that we could make the transition from new to experienced user of the Voluntary Gateway online communities more efficient?*

- One on one training at the worksite. e-newsletters with links to make more user-friendly. I really forgot this project was still ongoing because I never hear from the website or other staff encouraging using/visiting site.
- Workshop with computers running through all the applications for the Voluntary Gateway
- Again, the availability of a staff person to provide one-on-one training was invaluable. I do not think I would have continued to pursue this technology if I had not had someone there to help me along. I was questioning it's functionality initially and it was only when I had someone sit down with me and walk me through it that it made sense and I could see it's usefulness for our organization.
- regular visits and orientation with users

19. *Have you ever used the online tutorial for the Voluntary Gateway online communities?*

47.1% of people have not used the online tutorial. I wonder if there is a relationship between those who have not used the tutorial and their ability to use the Voluntary Gateway today. 37.5% of people who have used online tutorials rated themselves as a 4 with their ability to use the

Voluntary Gateway today. The 37.5% is the highest concentration of results in this relationship. Chi square deems this relationship unreliable.

*20. Was the online tutorial helpful?*

Because of the high amount of people who have not used the online tutorial, there is a high amount 64.7% of people who this question does not apply too. Of those who this question does apply too, 11.8% of them agree that the tutorial helped.

*21. Have you ever had an in-person tutorial (someone explained the Voluntary Gateway online communities to you in your office)?*

52.9% of people have not had an in person tutorial. As would be expected, and Chi square says it is reliable, 66.7% of people who completed the survey before November 1, 2007 has had an in-person tutorial and 66.7% of people who completed the survey after November 1, 2007 has not. Perhaps these in-person tutorials have a greater effect on peoples experience with the Voluntary Gateway than we think.

*22. If yes, did you find this tutorial helpful?*

This question does not apply to 47.1% of people. However for those who did get an in-person tutorial, 35.3% did find this tutorial helpful.

*23. What is your opinion of the level of activity in the Voluntary Gateway online communities?*

Choices	Percentage
I'd like to see more	41.2%
Just right	0%
A little too much	0%
Way too much	0%
I don't know	47.1%

Everybody either does not know or would like to see more.

*24. In the following chart, please indicate which aspects of the Voluntary Gateway online communities you use the most?*

	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely	Never
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About Us Notes	0%	5.9%	0%	17.6%	58.8%
Events	17.6%	23.5%	5.9%	11.8%	23.5%
Discussions	5.9%	17.6%	11.8%	17.6%	29.4%
Working Document Folders	0%	17.6%	0%	23.5%	41.2%
Final Document Folders	5.9%	17.6%	5.9%	17.6%	35.3%
Library Article Folders	0%	5.9%	0%	23.5%	52.9%
Image folders	11.8%	17.6%	5.9%	11.8%	35.3%
Recent Postings	11.8%	23.5%	5.9%	17.6%	23.5%

As you can see from the chart above most people never use many of the aspects of the Voluntary Gateway. The most used aspect of the Voluntary Gateway seems to be the events. This area is perhaps the most updated therefore it makes sense that it would be the most often checked. This finding again alludes to the concept of lurkers. In the literature review, there is an article discussing virtual relationships and the factors which determine them. The article is called **“Factors shaping the form and participation in virtual communities.”** This article may be useful when considering how people interact with the Voluntary Gateway.

*25. In the following chart, please indicate how useful, in general, you find the following types of content on the Voluntary Gateway online communities.*

	Always useful	Sometimes useful	Not sure	Rarely useful	Never useful
Working documents	0%	29.4%	41.2%	0%	11.8%
Coming events	47.1%	0%	17.6%	5.9%	11.8%
Discussions	17.6%	23.5%	23.5%	5.9%	11.8%
Post minutes	5.9%	29.4%	29.4%	5.9%	11.8%
Weekly or monthly reports	5.9%	23.5%	35.3%	5.9%	11.8%
Pictures	29.4%	17.6%	17.6%	5.9%	11.8%
Final documents	11.8%	17.6%	35.3%	5.9%	11.8%
Library articles	0%	11.8%	47.1%	5.9%	17.6%

From the chart above we can see that many people find the content on the Voluntary Gateway Sometimes to always useful.

26. *What is your Age?(recoded)*

Age	Percentage
15-44	76.5%
45 and above	11.8%

The age group that has the highest concentration of people is the age between 35-44.

27. *What is the size of the community in which you live? (recoded)*

Choices	Percentage
0 to 2,000	23.5%
2,000 and up	64.7%

The highest concentration of people lives in a community is between the size 2,000 but less than 7,000.

28. *What is your current role in the Community Education Network?*

They are all employees.

29. *Do you:*

Choices	Percentage
Share a computer with others in your office	11.8%
Have access to a computer used by you alone	70.6%
Have a personal computer in the home	5.9%
Use a shared computer outside of your office	0%
Other	0%

70.6% of people have access to their own computer.

30. *How would you rate your ability to use the internet?(recoded)*

Choices	Percentage
Novice	76.5%
Average	11.8%
Expert	0%
Not sure	0%

The highest concentration of answers is 76.5%. They are found in the novice category.

*31. How much time do you spend a day using e-mail? (recoded)*

Choices	Percentage
0 to 2 hours	88.2%
2 hours or more	0%

*32. How much time do you spend a day surfing the internet? (recoded)*

Choices	Percentages
0 to 2 hours	82.4%
2 hours or more	5.9%

*33. Is there anything that we can do to increase your usage of the Voluntary Gateway?*

- E-newsletter
- Not really
- No, I think it's a waste of time and I am too busy to even be filling out this questionnaire. I was constantly getting emails that had nothing to do with me and it annoyed me greatly. Logging on was an issue as well.
- Because the technology is so new, I forget to use it. It sometimes seems easier and more familiar to just use email. Especially now, many of us are on summer holidays, or just returning from holidays. I have not been on the Voluntary Gateway in quite some time. I am not sure what the answer is. It was much more motivating when everyone was using it consistently and I was receiving notifications through my email that posting were being made. I have not received any such notifications recently, so very few people must be using the Gateway. I found I checked it more often when I knew people were posting
- Not sure that I would use it unless it was absolutely essential for work purposes. I am often so busy and thought there are many great online resources, I seldom have the time to explore and participate in them all.
- Advertise

- Ongoing assistance (via e-mail)