

The Population Council offers international collaboration in real time with WebEx

About the Population Council

Headquarters:

New York, NY

Number of employees:

More than 520

Industry:

Nonprofit research organization

Line of business:

Research on HIV/AIDS, poverty/gender/youth, and reproductive health

Target market:

Over 65 countries, most in the developing world

WebEx services:

- WebEx Meeting Center™
- WebEx Support Center

Customer since:

2006

Summary:

The Population Council needed to deliver effective online outreach and training for its 18 offices across the developing world and chose WebEx for the job. WebEx has since played a key role in numerous Council projects at multiple sites around the globe. As a result, the Population Council has created new opportunities to make specialized services available Council-wide, enhanced its credibility as a leading international research organization, and significantly reduced overseas travel.

Founded by John D. Rockefeller 3rd in 1952, the Population Council is the premier international organization conducting biomedical, public health, and social science research on population issues. The Council has been instrumental in the design of health products, service-delivery programs, and public policies that make a positive difference in people's lives. With programs in more than 65 countries, most in the developing world, the Council's practical, relevant research identifies sustainable approaches to enhancing people's health and well-being.

The Challenge

In 2006, the Population Council deployed a new Web financial reporting system to its 18 offices. "In order to help these global offices generate their own financial reports, we needed to train financial staff and country office managers in using the reporting tool from both the application and the procedural perspectives," recalls Deborah Boccio, a supervisor in the Population Council's IT department. "The ultimate goal was to put current information into their hands when they needed it, without their having to rely on staff in the New York office headquarters to run reports for them." In order to deliver effective training across multiple time zones while keeping travel costs low, the Population Council also needed to find a solution that would extend the organization's geographic reach as reliably and cost-effectively as possible.

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— Deborah Boccio, IT Supervisor

The Solution

After surveying a number of online training options, the Population Council IT department determined that WebEx offered the most intuitive and reliable solution for online training. "We saw that WebEx offered very mature technology on a robust physical network," says Boccio, "and we knew that it would help us overcome some of the geographical challenges we face in communicating with our offices."

Using WebEx Meeting Center, the roll-out team—with members from the IT, accounting, and international programs departments—conducted highly successful two-hour interactive training sessions with each international office. Post-training support was offered through WebEx Support Center, which enabled IT staff to view users' desktops and diagnose usage, program, and technical issues quickly and easily. The response from users was so positive that the Population Council began implementing WebEx-supported projects at multiple sites around the world.

One of those projects revolves around the development and deployment of specialized software that elicits more accurate responses during interviews on sensitive subjects. “Some of the Population Council’s work involves research on sexually transmitted infections in developing countries,” explains Boccio. “Many people are reluctant to speak openly about their sexual behaviors to another person, but they tend to be far more relaxed when communicating with a machine. So we’ve developed software that enables interviewees to input their answers into a computer, which eliminates face-to-face interviews and improves the accuracy of the results.” With WebEx, IT team members in New York can train onsite support staff in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Americas, troubleshooting as necessary to ensure that this aspect of the Council’s research efforts goes as smoothly as possible.

WebEx is helping the Population Council get maximum results from its circuit rider program. Circuit riders are technology experts who handle users’ questions and concerns and address systems issues within a particular region—for instance, the Population Council’s IT team member in India might offer assistance to offices in Bangladesh or Vietnam. “It’s very difficult for our New York office to provide real-time support to Bangladesh because of the time difference,” says IT Director Stan Mierzwa. “But with WebEx technology, we can empower our office in India to offer dynamic desktop support from virtually the same time zone. Before, we might’ve flown a New York team member to Bangladesh to troubleshoot technical issues, but now we’ve created a far more efficient system for quick and effective IT response.”

The Population Council also uses WebEx to train medical personnel and researchers during clinical trials, making it easier for all participants to understand key procedures and requirements. “Online training helps ensure that the information distributed to clinical trial personnel is as consistent and accurate as possible,” says Boccio. “WebEx has been an exciting new tool that has added to the successful deployment and support of these projects. That’s why I’ve become such a big cheerleader for this technology. We continue to encourage our staff to make WebEx a standard part of their communications toolkits.”

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— Deborah Boccio, IT Supervisor

The Benefits

WebEx promotes communication and collaboration while significantly reducing unnecessary trips overseas. “We don’t underestimate the impact of travel in our organization,” says Mierzwa. “Traveling to South Africa or Ethiopia is a grueling experience that can swallow up two whole business days. That’s a huge loss in productivity. So when you consider that a WebEx meeting can offer almost as much hands-on interactivity and real-time collaboration as an onsite presentation, it’s win-win for us.”

WebEx makes it easier for the organization’s international offices to participate in meetings and outreach campaigns. “This technology offers our users a greater sense of community and team involvement,” observes Boccio. “WebEx is very empowering. By creating more opportunities for our offices in Egypt or Pakistan, for example, to participate in our day-to-day operations, we’re sending

a signal that we value the important part that they play in our organization. WebEx makes it easier for us to operate as a global nonprofit.”

WebEx enhances the Population Council’s credibility as a world-class international organization. “Our corporate donors understand that we work in diverse locations,” says Boccio. By using this technology, we send a very clear message to them that we’re using cost-effective tools to break down geographical boundaries, and that we’re using their funds efficiently to serve our audiences and improve health worldwide.”

The Future

WebEx has already proven a major benefit to the IT department at the Population Council. “We’re still in the first stages of implementation, but we would like to see this technology become part of our organization’s culture,” says Boccio. “I think that as more and more people understand the value that WebEx adds, they’ll start to use online meetings as readily as picking up the phone. I’m excited to see just how much this technology will impact how we interact as an organization.”

Highlights:

- WebEx improves communication and collaboration among the Population Council’s 18 international offices while significantly reducing unnecessary trips overseas.
- WebEx enables the Population Council to access its knowledge base regardless of where it resides.
- WebEx enhances the Population Council’s credibility as a respected international organization, sending a message to donors that cost-effective tools are being used to break down geographical boundaries.



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