



Client Profile:

University of Minnesota Extension

The University of Minnesota Extension is a major outreach arm of the University of Minnesota, a land grant institution with a mission to serve the public through applied research and education. Extension works with citizens to strengthen communities and the systems that affect them, including political, economic, civic, natural resources, education, and health systems. Extension brings University of Minnesota expertise to bear on the complex challenges and opportunities communities face.

Sector/Industry

Government, Education

Situation

The University of Minnesota Extension reached the conclusion that the business needs of the organization were not being adequately met by its existing technology and infrastructure. They recognized a number of areas of critical unmet organizational needs including the need for better management of project delivery, connecting the separate silos of technology that had grown up over time, better understanding how technology could be more effectively applied to their business problems and improving the management of their network infrastructure and application development process. The Dean's Leadership Council recognized that there had been an underinvestment in IT and a reexamination was needed.

Solution

To address the situation, the Information Learning Technology (ILT) Steering Committee was created and charged by the Dean to develop both short term and long term goals and directives for ILT. Following a period of information gathering from Extension staff and consultation with IT leaders and professionals outside of Extension, the steering committee contracted with Meritide to assess the current status of their technical infrastructure, including the management of problems and incidents, and application development capability and environment.

Approach

Meritide performed a Business Systems Assessment for Extension. Representatives of Meritide met with ILT Steering Committee members to understand the requirements and challenges faced by the Extension. Meritide team members met internally to develop an approach, to define potential technology solutions and to match talent/skills and experience to the challenges defined. The Meritide team separated the challenge into separate but connected phases to deliver immediate value, create credibility and learn the culture, business and management environment of Extension.



Approach continued...

Meritide's approach addressed operations and applications and the alignment of ILT with the business needs of the University of Extension. The phases included in-depth information gathering and review of processes, technology infrastructure, services objectives and metrics, project management methodology, and finally recommendations for bringing the IT organization in alignment with the needs of Extension.

Meritide's approach followed our methodology for improving operational processes that blends the utilization of current systems/software with the use of 3rd party tools and components including open source software, and custom software development (if required). This approach resulted in some recommendations that could be implemented with systems and software already installed at Extension.

Results/Benefits

The assessment revealed concerns and issues with the core mission of ILT, network operations and the application development environment. The projects review revealed overlap among the applications and inconsistency in development practices, deployments, technologies, and architecture. Meritide's specific recommendations included leveraging enterprise application functionality for things like integration and analytics and reporting in a way that would provide functionality for multiple applications from a common system base while at the same time reducing the inconsistencies and overlap. These recommendations were implemented and have allowed for greater functionality in applications and shortened development times. The operations review included recommendations for a Help desk application staffed and managed appropriately to meet the needs of Extension's users. The implementation of the help desk solution has resulted in staff available to answer and log calls, improved client communication, competent technical support, and increased knowledge at the support level and performance metrics to measure service levels.

Why Meritide

Meritide was selected for the project because we offered a proposal that indicated that we understood the problems and would be able to develop a solution. Meritide showed not only technical competence but the skill to communicate with non-technical people. Extension liked Meritide's "advisory role" approach and the development of a solution through partnering with their IT team rather than replacing the organization.