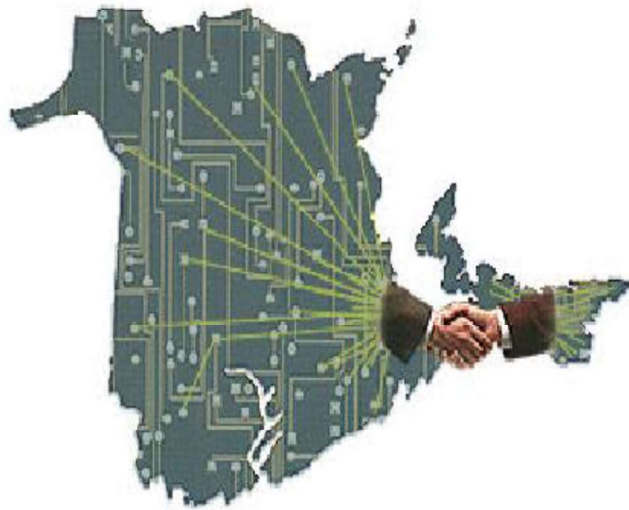# NB/PEI EDUCATIONAL COMPUTER NETWORK

Over 40 Years of Inter-Institutional Collaboration

Strategic Plan

2016-17 to 2017-18
(Board approved December 13, 2016)

MISSION

To ensure high quality Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services to all member institutions in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island

VISION

To apply our collective skills and resources to the betterment of the New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island higher education communities through the deployment of state of the art technology while saving money for our provinces and institutions

VALUES

Honesty
Collaboration
Collegiality
Openness
Trust

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary

For over 40 years, the ECN has worked collaboratively to provide member institutions with the best networking technologies and other shared services at the lowest possible cost.

In recent years, our focus has been on articulating and implementing a coherent strategy to advance shared IT services among our members. We've developed ECN's first multi-year strategic plan, of which this is the latest interation; we've deployed federated identity among all our institutions; we've acquired SharePoint, a collaboration platform that all members can deploy and use freely, yet not worry about service support and maintenance as it is hosted and supported at UNB. Finally, with the completion of the UNB data center renovation project, we are hosting IT infrastructure, data backups, and disaster recovery equipment for many members. In recognition of its pioneering shared IT services model, ECN was given the inaugural CUCCIO Collaboration Award in 2015, and is nationally known for its collegial and cooperative approach to solving common problems.

With an overall budget of approximately $1 million annually, the consortium's **priority** for the upcoming planning period is to **continue offering shared technical service offerings to members, including new initiatives in IT security**, as further detailed in section 2 on the next page. Additional priorities relating to scope, value and visibility are summarized in section 3.

2. Key Strategic priority: Shared IT services

The key shared service of the ECN is connecting member institutions via a high-speed, high-capacity research and education network. Members also jointly purchase and deploy anti-SPAM and anti-virus services, managed by UNB.

As a first step in determining the specific expansion projects to undertake as a consortium in shared IT services, the ECN hired Dell to perform an assessment of the technical infrastructure and processes both for individual member institutions and for the consortium (to identify new areas of collaboration for the group), completed in May 2013. This external assessment process benefited from a consortium RFP process and was funded by the ECN. The ECN Network Committee compared and contrasted the results, then combined them into a single set of recommendations - forming the basis of the current ECN strategy.

As a result of the individual and system-wide assessments, the following projects were identified as strategic priorities of the ECN between 2014-15 and 2017-18:

Data center consolidation and disaster recovery: The ECN agreed to contribute one-time funding of up to $150,000 to the costs of renovating the UNB data center in 2014-15. This strategic investment not only ensured the reliability and continuity of existing ECN shared services but recognized that, of all the computing facilities in the ECN, UNB's is the largest and most technically advanced. UNB now offers data center space to ECN members to house production or disaster recovery/backup systems and servers on a simple cost-recovery basis. Furthermore, the Université de Moncton upgraded its data center and provides space to ECN members for production or disaster recovery/backup purposes, thus further reducing the need for data center facilities at individual ECN locations.

Communication and collaboration tools: The ECN expanded its shared services by implementing SharePoint (a Microsoft software platform used for file sharing and co-editing, document and records management, and collaboration projects) at a single ECN site. After a successful trial period, ECN is providing long-term centralized SharePoint support, including as a dedicated employee at the host site (to develop and manage the Sharepoint site for all) and other staff with Sharepoint expertise at member institutions (to collaborate to produce SharePoint applications for ECN or individual institutions).

Consortium Security: With these initiatives well underway, ECN is ready to turn its attention to yet more collaborative activities. A common requirement among all of us is to keep our IT networks, equipment, and data secure from a host of external and internal threats. The 24/7, highly volatile nature of IT security strains the resources of all our members, and we are pressed to keep up with even minimal standards. As a consortium, we have limited ourselves to bulk purchasing of anti-spam and anti-virus solutions, but we know we can do much more. This initiative will explore the possibilities inherent in using our close relationships to further advantage, particularly as they may enhance our IT security posture, both collectively and individually.

3. Corporate Challenges/Priorities

The ECN will face challenges in the period ahead which will be addressed through careful management and priority-setting as noted below:

- Financial Constraints: The total budget for the ECN is approximately $1 million annually. The main source of this funding is Restricted operating assistance from the provinces. The universities in both Provinces have dedicated a portion of their Restricted operating assistance to fund the ECN each year. These amounts are topped up by direct contributions from the institutions each year. As with many publicly-funded entities, the ECN will likely face resource constraints which will force the consortium to find cost-savings and set priorities. Opportunities to leverage external sources of funding (CANARIE, ACOA, RDC, etc.) will be explored for expansion projects, as required. We anticipate continued reductions on internet costs, which will provide savings to be applied to strategic projects.

- Scope: The ECN currently includes Mount Allison University, l'Université de Moncton, the University of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University, the University of Prince Edward Island, Holland College, the Maritime College of Forest Technology and the MPHEC and most recently the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC), and le Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB).

- Visibility, Value and Communications: The ECN will continue to explore new ways of improving its visibility and communication with stakeholders. Those who have worked with the ECN are aware of its work; however, few are aware of the value it adds to the higher eduation system in the region. Examples of ways in which the ECN has tried to improve its visibility over the past few years include the ECN's 40th anniversary celebration, the announcement of the new ORAN, increased distribution of the ECN's annual reports, more frequent updates to the MPHEC Board and the Deputy Ministers in NB and PEI, and the development of this strategic plan for the consortium. The ECN is also currently exploring the development of indicators to further demonstrate the effectiveness of the consortium. Finally, we will be working with communications experts on our campuses to spread the ECN story to stakeholders and users alike.

Appendix – Summary of activities

ECN Service Area / Project	Objectives 2015/16	Objectives 2016/17	Objectives 2017/18
Connectivity	Partner with CANARIE in northern NB Internet Services contract renewal (expires: April 2016); 3 year agreement	NBCC/CCNB to implement Federated Identity	
Shared Services	Data Center Consolidation and Disaster Recovery project - Phase II - Hosting agreements Messaging and Collaboration project - Phase II - SharePoint expansion	Data Center Consolidation and Disaster Recovery project - Phase III – Expansion Messaging and Collaboration project - Phase II - SharePoint expansion cont'd ECN security initiatives: protect the network; build user awareness	ECN security initiatives: protect the network; build user awareness - Phase II
Joint Purchasing	Anti-SPAM contract renewal (expires: Sept 2018)	Anti-virus contract renewal (expires: July 2017)	Anti-SPAM contract renewal (expires: September 2018)
Professional Development	CANHEIT/AUCTC ECN Workshop	AUCTC ECN Workshop	AUCTC ECN Workshop
National Representation and Sharing of Information and Best Practices	NREN GC CIO Advisory Committee	NREN GC CIO Advisory Committee	
Organizational	Develop indicators	ECN contract renewal Telling our story	