

Case Study

GroupSystems Success Story: Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Indoor Air and Radiation

The Office of Indoor Air and Radiation is part of the Environmental Protection Agency and was formed to protect the public health and environment from the risks posed by indoor air quality and radiation. The group works with other government agencies, as well as industry and environmental public interest groups to improve its protection program. As part of the program, the office conducts future trends analysis related to pollution prevention and radiation protection.

The organization is involved in long-term planning projects which involve looking 25 years into the future, developing a vision, and then, establishing goals and guiding principles that will help make that vision a reality. The Office of Indoor Air and Radiation has been using GroupSystems group collaboration tools since 1997 to collect better data faster and to use that knowledge immediately in ways that were not possible before.

Renelle Rae, Project Manager for the Future of Radiation Project for the Office of Indoor Air and Radiation, explains, "One of the critical parts of the planning process involves collecting vast amounts of information from multiple sources quickly, categorizing it and feeding it back to a large group for comment. Unfortunately, when we tried standard tools of data capture like group sessions with flip charts, too much information was lost. There was no efficient mechanism for categorizing and feeding information back to the group for discussion and consensus."

GroupSystems in Action

Recently, the Office of Indoor Air and Radiation in partnership with the Institute for Alternative Futures customized a focus group methodology built on GroupSystems to increase the breadth and depth of the knowledge it was collecting from diverse groups. As part of the data collection process, six focus groups of 15 people each were held to discuss issues of concern to the radiation protection community and to record their thoughts.

"Because the GroupSystems tools enabled everyone to comment simultaneously, our agency was able to both collect more information quickly and to gain more complete thoughts," said Rae. "In addition, the GroupSystems tools were able to categorize opinions and enable the focus group facilitators to immediately pull up graphs and charts to show the direction of ideas and group consensus."

"This kind of knowledge was simply not possible before, and the results were far superior to what we had achieved previously." Rae also believes that by allowing participants to remain anonymous, they were able to obtain candid opinions that led to major breakthroughs.

As a next step, the Office of Indoor Air and Radiation is planning to use GroupSystems for other focus group and data collection and analysis activities. "By using tools that systematize some of our key knowledge-based activities, we can be more efficient and produce higher-quality results," Rae concluded.

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Renelle Rae, Product Manager
-Future of Radiation Project

Customer

Environmental Protection Agency

Business Benefits of GroupSystems

- Ability to collect more information and gain more complete thoughts.
- Capability to create graphs and charts on the spot to show direction and flow of ideas.
- Simple and easy categorization of generated ideas and opinions.