

Shared Source ECNY Update:

Pilot Test Findings October – December, 2013

Shared Source ECNY is a web-based platform that offers a variety of cost savings, tools and services to help New York child care providers raise the quality of their programs while saving time and money.

The NYS Early Learning Advisory Council (ECAC) funded this project in fall, 2012, making New York the eleventh state to offer such services to early learning providers nationally. ECAC funding covered the development of the branded New York web site as well as two years of operating costs. A pilot test of the site was conducted from October-December, 2013. The formal launch of the site is scheduled for April, 2014. It is projected that up to 2000 providers can be supported in this first phase of the program. The NYS Association for the Education of Young Children (NYSAEYC) and Early Care and Learning Council (ECLC) are the managing organizations overseeing the initiative.

Why is Shared Source ECNY important today?

Despite the demonstrated value of early care and education, many programs struggle to achieve the outcomes for children that we seek due to the limited availability of program and operational resources. The web site will provide users with easy access to a broad range of resources including financial management, human resources and marketing tools; cost saving opportunities on office supplies, insurance and child specific needs, e.g. children's furniture; training for staff; and communication forums for providers. Shared Source ECNY will help providers address this challenge.

The following report describes findings from a pilot test conducted with a representative group of New York early care and education providers to inform the introduction, marketing and future adaptation of the web platform.

Key findings include:

- Users find the site to be user friendly: easy to log on to, navigate across menu categories, and download resources and/or link to other web sites
- Users can readily access information relevant to their role on Shared Source ECNY
- Resources downloaded vary among users, demonstrating that a range of tools and information can be accessed serving diverse interests and needs
- Users believe the site will be useful to a range of stakeholders, particularly teachers, administrators and other staff.
- 96% would recommend Shared Source EC NY to a colleague.

Pilot Study Overview

Prior to formally launching Shared Source ECNY, a six week pilot study was conducted involving a representative group of early care and education professionals from across New York State. Participant feedback was sought to inform future practices in introducing the web platform to new users, marketing the web platform and identifying adaptations that would best serve New York users, e.g. establishing additional links to New York State and New York City web sites.

Two surveys were distributed to participants during the pilot. The first, sent out two weeks into the study, sought information on the ease of use of the platform for the new user. The second, sent at the conclusion of the study, focused on the utility of the web platform for participants.

Thirty one early care and education providers agreed to participate in the pilot. Twenty seven responded to Survey 1; seventeen responded to Survey 2. Participants included a mix of child care, group, and family care providers; teachers; administrators; a Head Start director and Head Start consultant; and providers of technical assistance and professional development. This group included members of the NYSAEYC and staff from ECLC programs. All 31 providers were given a one year subscription to the website in appreciation of their participation.

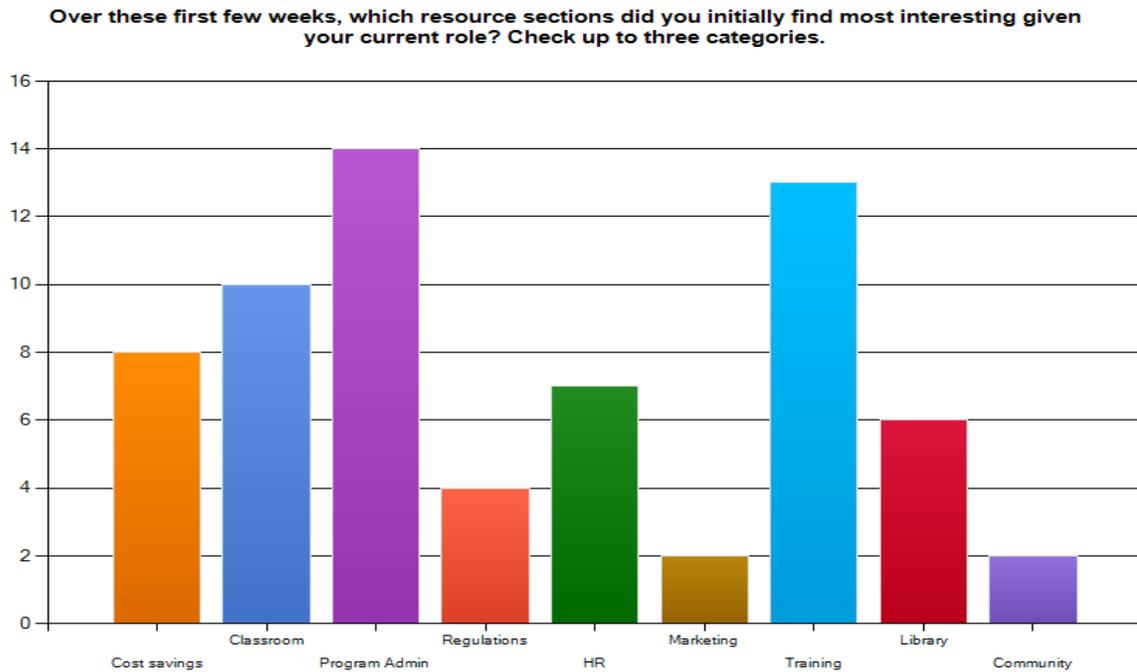
The Shared Source ECNY Advisory Committee, including representatives from a range of early childhood stakeholder groups, provided the managing organizations with input regarding the design, implementation and evaluation of pilot findings.

Findings

The first survey of pilot participants sought feedback on the ease with which brand new users can use the web platform. We learned:

- Brand new users find the web platform user friendly.
 - 92.6% find it easy to log on to the site.
 - 100% find it easy to navigate across menu categories.
 - 100% find it straightforward and user friendly to locate resources relevant to their current roles.
- More than 3/5 of participants downloaded material from the web platform within the first two weeks of use. They were most likely to download fact sheets (29.6%), policies (29.6%) and forms (22.2%). (Figure 1.)
- Program administration (51.9%), training (48.1%), classroom (37%) and cost savings (29.6%) were the resource menu sections of greatest interest initially to pilot participants.
- Almost 90% of new users accessed other web sites through linkages provided on the site without challenges. (Others had yet to try connecting to other web sites.)

Figure 1



Survey 2 sought information from pilot participants on the usefulness of the platform once they were more familiar with the site. From this survey we learned:

- Users found web platform information useful to their roles (Figure 2)
 - 94.1% found it easy to download resources
 - 94.1% found it easy to find resources
 - Over 80% found the quality of information useful to very useful
 - Over 80% found content relevant to their needs
- Resources downloaded by users varied.
 - When asked to identify a few resources they had accessed, the following were cited: articles, board best practices, classroom curriculum, employee application, family survey forms, handbooks, job descriptions, polices posters strategic planning, and toddler daily schedule and template. No single resource was cited by more than a few participants.
 - 80% of responders indicated they plan to return to the site to access resources at a later date.
- Participants were most likely to use linkages provided to access NYS, NYSAEYC and group discount web sites

Participant comments:

"I find the site very easy to navigate to find the content I am looking for."

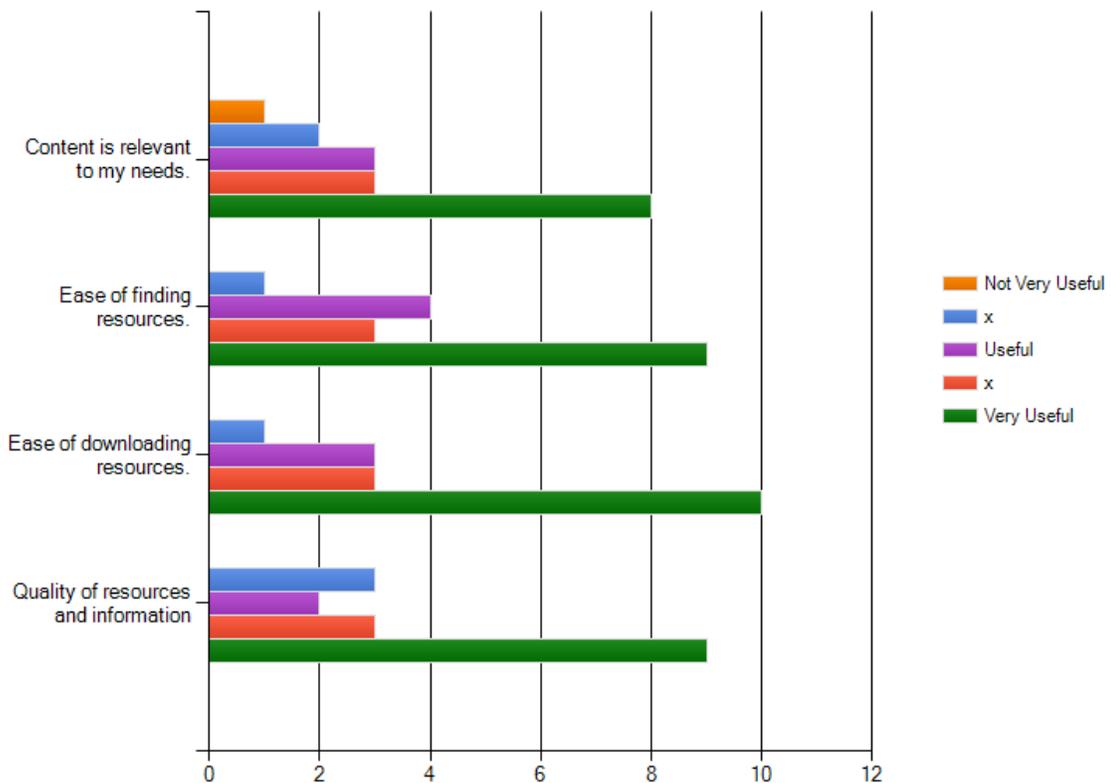
"The templates will be very useful for a new program as well as an existing program."

"The resources and information are the most useful pieces to me."

"I am trying to get into the habit of looking here for information before I do my own search."

Figure 2

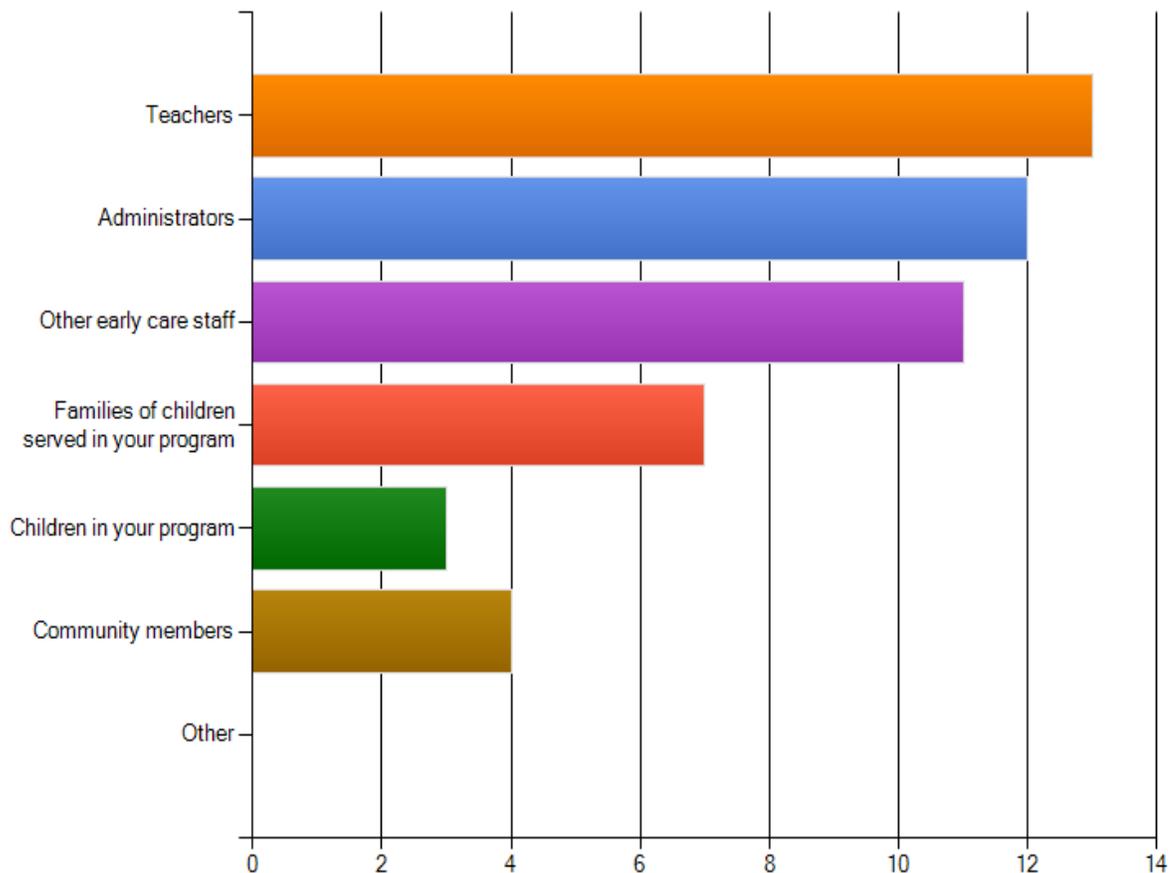
Overall, how would you rate the usefulness of the information found on Shared Source EC NY in your current role?



- 75% of users experienced no obstacles in accessing the web site during the pilot.
- Time issues were the challenges affecting some users during the pilot.
 - Work demands limiting time to access the site (18.8%), unexpected time demands (18.8%) and plans to access web resources at a later date (12.5 %) were noted by some participants.
- 70% of pilot participants were most likely to access the web site during the workday.
- Users believe the web platform is valuable for other stakeholders (Figure 3), particularly teachers, administrators and other early care and education staff.
- 93% would recommend the site to a colleague

Figure 3

Have you found resources that would be useful to others connected to your organization?



Participant comments:

"I can hardly wait to start sharing this information with providers!!!"

"All the helpful information at their fingertips."

"It's a site that combines many aspects of the EC world and can save time and money."

Web Site Strengths

Pilot participants identified the following as strengths of the web site:

- Web design: Information was all in one place and easy to use. Clear links were provided to a wide range of information and documents.
- Resources available will appeal to administrators, directors and teachers.
- Quality information
- Diverse and valuable resources are available
 - These include customizable forms and templates, e.g., newsletters, policies and job descriptions; handbooks, regulatory information and links; assessment information useful for QualityStarsNY; human resources information; classroom support and program management resources.

Users suggested ways to improve the site:

- Add more resources
 - For example, more discounts for general and targeted groups, e.g. family care providers; more linkages to childhood related web sites, including PreK and Common Core; food source options; more creative resources; teacher resources; and parent resources.
- Improve content
 - For example, contacts to others in similar work roles; more web trainings QualityStarsNY; regulatory alerts; provide more than one style of some forms or more entries for content areas; add disclaimer that sample material may not provide all needed information necessary for a specific company.
- Expand offerings based on user feedback