

HLABC CE Webcasting/Webconferencing Pilot Project

Final Report: July 13, 2011

*Compiled by the project evaluation committee: Anne Allgaier, Ursula Ellis and Devon Greyson,
on behalf of the Health Libraries Association of British Columbia.*

With thanks to: the HLABC Membership, for support and willingness to experiment; our webcast participants and survey respondents, for feedback; and the CHLA/ABSC Board for funding this project through a Chapter Initiative Fund grant.

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Project Summary

Background

Like many CHLA/ABSC Chapters, the Health Libraries Association of British Columbia (HLABC) has a geographically disparate membership. While the majority (54%) of our membership hails from Vancouver, and a not-insignificant portion (11%) from the surrounding metro area, over a third (35%) of our membership is more than an hour away.* The attendance at HLABC CE events and chapter meetings, which are generally held in Vancouver or inner suburbs, reflects the barriers posed by distance that many of our members experience. Attempts at remediation via video conferencing at specified regional facilities have been largely unsuccessful.

Most of our distant members require boat and/or air travel to attend any Vancouver-based CE in person, and our current travel fund can only support a couple such trips per year. Additionally, in the current economic climate, many employers, unions and professional development funds are unable or unwilling to pay for travel or even registration fees. Such cutbacks disproportionately impact our distant members. That same portion of our membership, however, is arguably the sub-population with the greatest need for professional association CE, due to fewer opportunities for professional development in their less-populous locales.

By offering online access to CE events and participation in chapter activities, HLABC aimed to "lead health librarians toward excellence through professional development [and] networking" by enabling HLABC members who have previously been unable to attend the bulk of the CE events and meetings to participate remotely. Providing professional development, networking and chapter leadership opportunities through our CE events and meetings is a primary emphasis of HLABC's annual activities, but prior to this pilot project, these opportunities largely benefitted the Metro Vancouver based portion of our membership.

Objectives

The purpose of the CIF-Funded *HLABC CE Webcasting/Webconferencing Pilot Project* was to assess the feasibility and value of using web-based technologies in order to improve access to chapter sponsored CE events and meetings, particularly for our rural and remote members.

The objectives were:

1. To offer web-based participation options for: a) all four of our annual CE events, b) all 4 of our annual membership meetings, c) all 4 of our annual executive board meetings; and
2. To assess the value of webcasting/webconferencing software as a permanent option for HLABC.

*Data from 2009 HLABC membership records.

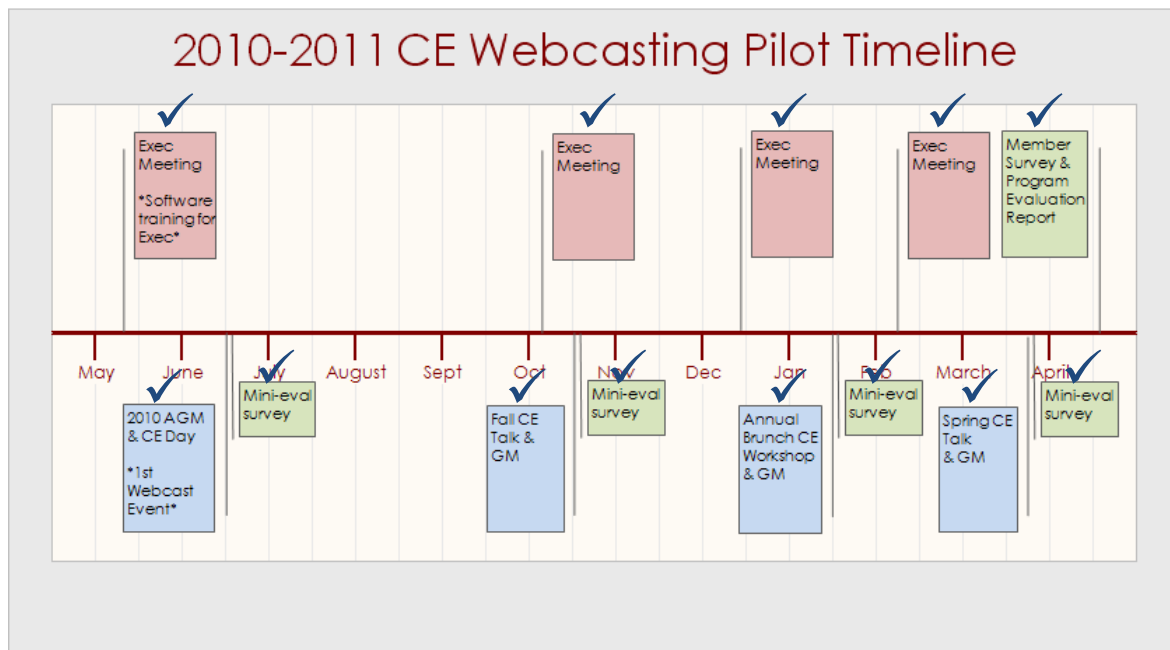
Delivery on Objectives

Objective 1: Offering web-based participation options for chapter events

During the Pilot Project, from June 2010 to May 2011, we met all of our project objectives, and more.

From May 2010-April 2011, we webconferenced:

- All 4 of our annual CE events
- All three of our membership meetings (including our 2010 AGM; the fourth meeting was cancelled for reasons unrelated to the webcasting project)
- Three of our four Executive meetings (one had no participants requesting remote access; two were entirely webconferenced with no in-person face-to-face, one was mixed)
- Our first online journal club for chapter members (an idea suggested by a regular remote attendee of pilot project webcasts)



Beyond the end of the pilot project year, the HLABC executive elected to build on the momentum of our pilot year and use chapter operating funds to extend our WebEx subscription.

In June, 2011, we webconferenced:

- The morning (research in geriatrics) and afternoon (screencasting technologies and best practices) CE sessions
- Our 2011 AGM
- An additional Executive board meeting
- A second online journal club meeting
- 3 focus groups for the joint NAHLA-HLABC CIF-funded “Research-Embedded Health Librarians” research project

Objective 2: Assessing the value of webcasting/webconferencing software as a permanent option

During the pilot year we collected post-event data from remote participants via confidential online surveys. These were quick “post-mortem” questionnaires focused on the success and value of the specific web-delivered program.

The HLABC Exec also discussed the progress of the project at every meeting, and reported to the membership at each membership meeting.

Our final evaluation was a web-based survey open to all HLABC members, regardless of their remote or in-person attendance at the year’s events.

Ongoing Questionnaires

Post-event questionnaires were voluntary and anonymous. We collected 28 completed surveys over the course of the year, some of which were undoubtedly repeat participants evaluating multiple events. Nine of these were evaluating executive board meetings, while the rest (19) were CE events and/or meetings open to the entire membership.

Most respondents were **already regular attendees** of HLABC events (mean was 2.8 chapter events over the past 2 years), although 3 respondents who attended CE sessions had not attended any chapter event in at least 2 years.

Given that the intent of the pilot project was to reach out to members outside the lower mainland (“Metro Vancouver”), **we were surprised to find that 61% of respondents who identified the region in which they lived were from Metro Vancouver**. This number drops to 41% if you exclude Exec meetings, as the 2010-2011 HLABC Exec was all from the lower mainland, but is still a substantial proportion. The **financial savings of web delivery ranged** from minimal for locals to hundreds of dollars for long-distance attendees who might have travelled to attend.

Overall, we found that the majority of remote participants who evaluated the webcast program:

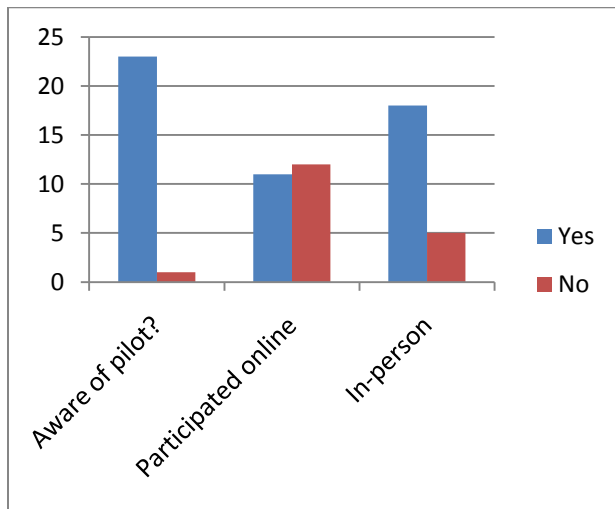
- would **not** have attended the event in person (60%)
- found the experience to be **user-friendly** (mean 4.3 on a scale 1-5) & of **good a/v quality** (mean 3.75 / 5)
- felt fairly well **included** (4.26 / 5)
- had **overall good** experiences with the webcasts (3.96 / 5)
- **would attend again** via web-delivery (96%) and **would recommend it to a colleague** (89%), and
- found it a **good value for money** (88%)

Final Survey Results

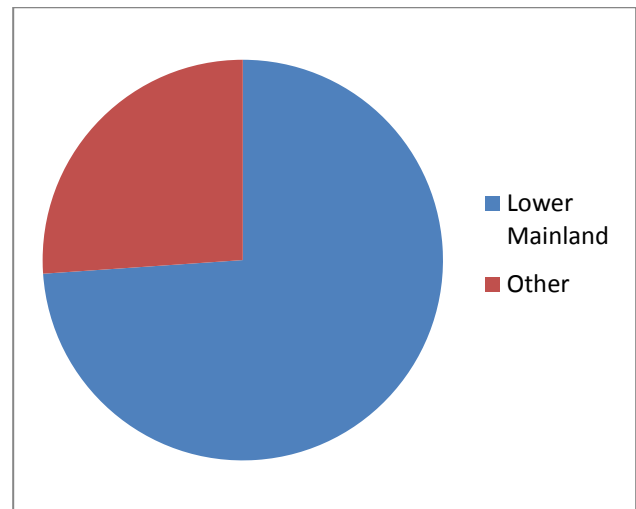
Upon completion of the pilot time period, we invited all HLABC members - regardless of their participation in HLABC events online or in-person - to participate in a short online survey to evaluate and provide feedback on the pilot project. We sent out this invitation via our members-only listserv, and had a 27% response rate (n=24). None of the survey questions were mandatory, and thus our results do not all add up to 24.

All but one of the respondents were aware that the pilot project had been going on. Nearly half of all respondents had participated in one of the online events, which is a far greater proportion than in the entire membership, indicating non-response bias in our sample: those who had experienced a webcast during the pilot project being more likely to voluntarily respond to the survey. The great majority of respondents had attended a chapter event in person during the pilot period, which is also higher than the proportion in the general population and thus indicative of non-response bias among those who are less involved in chapter CE events. Survey respondent locations were fairly representative of the general membership, however, with almost ¾ of respondents who gave their location hailing from the lower mainland.

Survey Respondent Awareness & Participation

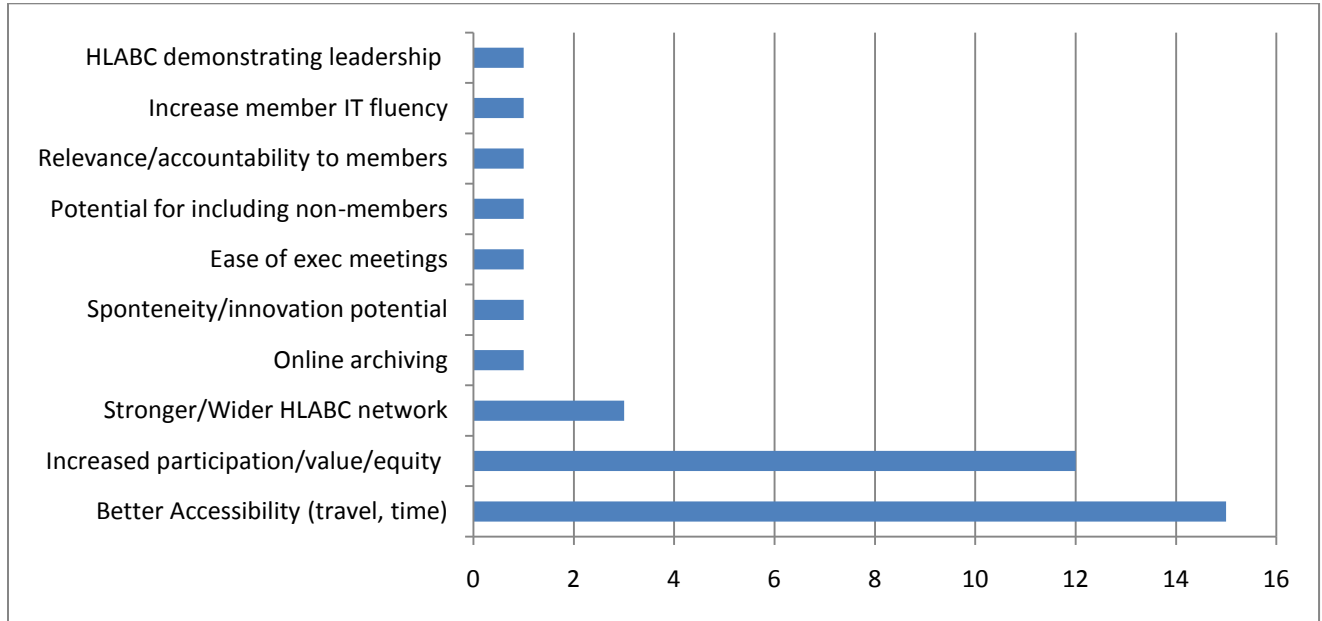


Respondent locations



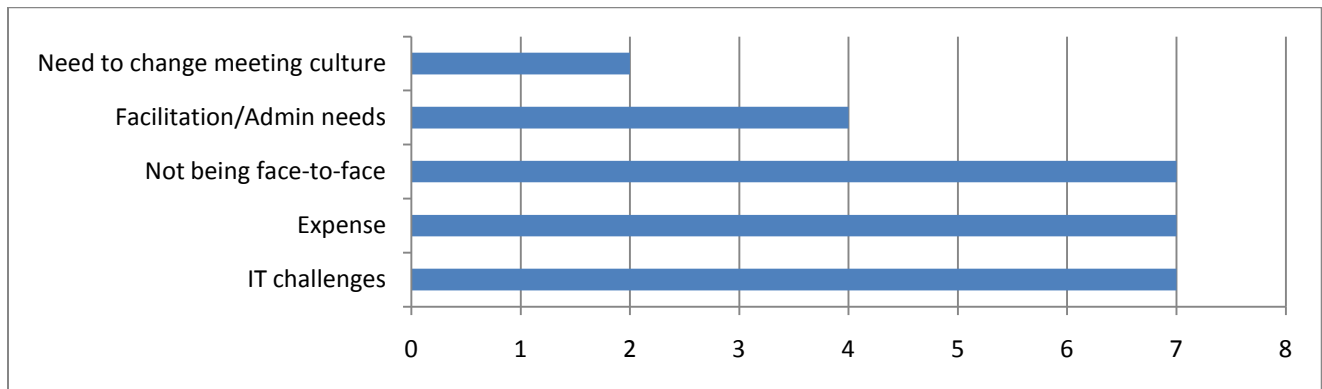
Survey respondents were asked to supply in their own words a response to the question “What, if any, do you see as the benefits of webcasting HLABC events and meetings?” The most commonly cited benefits fell into the categories of better accessibility (in terms of time, travel, costs) and increased equity in terms of participation in and value of HLABC events and membership. Three also mentioned development of a stronger or broader chapter network, and many other benefits were mentioned by just one respondent each.

Benefits of Webcasting



Respondents were subsequently asked to supply in their own words a response to the question “What, if any, do you see as the drawbacks to webcasting HLABC events and meetings?” These results were more unified, with cost, technical difficulties, and the relative godness of face-to-face meetings being equally cited. Multiple respondents also mentioned the requisite “staffing” needs to administer and facilitate webcasts, and the challenge of changing meeting culture to fully include remote participants.

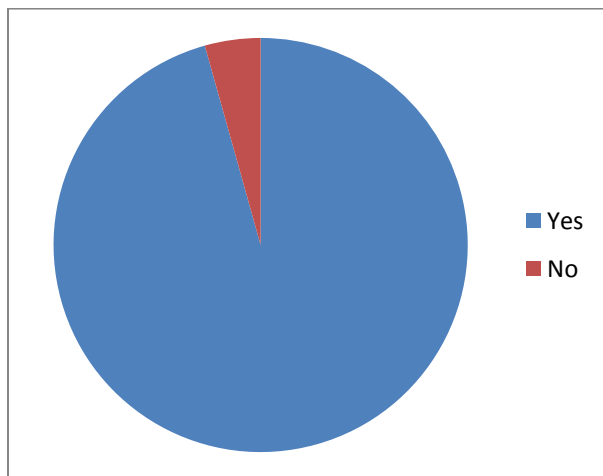
Drawbacks to webcasting



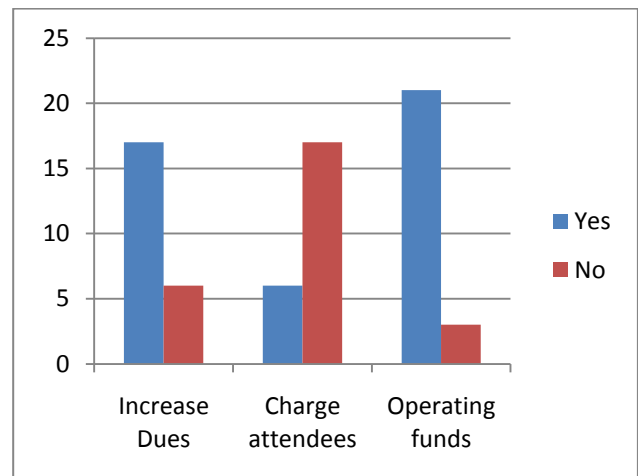
Survey respondents were reminded that HLABC was considering offering web access to our chapter events on a permanent basis, and asked if they would support that idea. All but one responded that HLABC should adopt webcasting of our events on an ongoing basis. It may be interesting to note that the one who respondent who did not think we should continue webcasting was outside the lower mainland, but had not participated in any pilot project webcasts.

This question was followed by a series of options for how HLABC might pay for the cost of webcasting, if we should choose to do so. Estimated costs were given at \$800/year and response categories were not mutually exclusive. Options were: with a dues increase, by charging virtual attendees, by using our saved-up operating funds, or other (fill in the blank). Nearly all approved of using some of our operating funds (HLABC has a “cushion” due to profits from the last CHLA/ABSC conference we hosted) Almost ¾ approved of a dues increase to cover at least part of the costs. About ¼ of respondents thought we should charge webcast attendees.

Should we continue webcasting?



If we continue, how should we pay for it?



“Other” ideas included joining forces with a local purchasing consortium or another health library association in order to cost-share with them, and seeking corporate sponsorship of the webcasts. There were conflicting views on the ethics of charging web attendees. We had anticipated comments to the effect that charging web attendees would be a disproportionate burden on non-lower mainland members, and we received some of those:

“Cannot really charge virtual attendees unless the 'in person' attendees are also charged the same amount.”

“Charging virtual attendees would be penalizing people for not living in Vancouver. That's not really fair.”

However, one respondent pointed out that the in-person attendees are often charged for attendance at a meeting, and thus a small fee for remote attendees might not be out of line:

“Physical attendees are 'charged' for the meeting, for the cost of food ("lunch"), even if they can't eat the food delivered. All I can have is one coffee (\$15). To me, each meeting has this 'cost', and people seem willing to pay it. I pay the 'meal' charge in order to be allowed to attend the meeting. If I'm willing to pay this, perhaps a small charge would be feasible for people attending via webcast. “

The final portion of the evaluation survey was an open text box for respondents to provide any other feedback for the evaluation committee regarding the pilot project. Besides comments on the relative fairness of charging remote attendees, these comments were primarily kudos for the project, including the following comments:

I think it is great that you have initiated this project and have tried to reach out to your members wherever they are.

This is a fantastic project that has greatly enhanced what HLABC can offer its members. The journal club is an excellent case in point.

Thanks for taking the initiative to try out this new way of meeting. This is very forward thinking.

I love it. Thank you so much for looking into this. I would really hate to lose it now!

Thank you for all your hard work in pursuing this timely project!

This is a superb way of sharing important presentations. Well worth spending HLABC money on it. Thanks!

I applaud the movers and shakers of this project. It was a huge success from my standpoint! Congratulations and thank you for all your hard and dedicated work!!!

Project Evaluation

Overall, HLABC has been quite pleased with the outcomes of this project. While there were certainly bumps along the road (e.g., when our microphone died during one of the events, or with tech support for our first iPad attendee), we have achieved the objectives of our project. We were able to webcast not only each one of our scheduled chapter Executive meetings, Membership meetings, and CE events, but also additional events: our new online journal club and focus groups for a CIF-funded joint research project with NAHLA. We were able to assess the feasibility of webcasting as an ongoing solution to meeting inaccessibility through survey and discussion within subgroups and the entire chapter membership.

Lessons we've learned

Inevitably, we have learned some lessons about webcasting over the course of the pilot year. We now know that we must always plan for extra time – ideally a full hour – for **tech set up and troubleshooting on site of any event**. No matter how much preparation we do, there may always be variables of the specific room, internet service, or equipment that may necessitate immediate attention.

We have also learned that **a change of meeting culture is necessary** in order to fully integrate web attendees. While we improved on this over the course of the year – for example developing procedures for web voting at meetings – it is an ongoing process, and one that involves not only the meeting host and chair, but each and every guest speaker we invite and the participation of all in-person attendees. Details such as repeating audience questions before answering them, and limiting a speaker's physical roaming around a room greatly improve the webcast experience, and an investment in professional-quality a/v equipment seems necessary if we are to webcast on an ongoing basis.

Finally, we have learned that **as we begin to incorporate the ability to webcast and webconference into our thinking, new opportunities for chapter activities begin to arise**. While the virtual platform can create distance and exclusion if not well-managed, it can also **engender spontaneity and innovation**, bringing people together. We saw this with the creation of our new online journal club, which grew out of a member suggestion this spring, as well as with facilitation of online focus groups for the Research-Embedded Health Librarian joint research project. We are also aware that there is the **potential for webcasting to create a new revenue stream** for the chapter, allowing us to more nimbly provide CE to an external audience on a fee-for-service basis. These ideas have only recently started to arise, as we have started to become comfortable with and accustomed to webcasting.

Looking Forward

At our June 17 AGM, we presented our project final summary to the HLABC membership, and recommended that HLABC adopt webcasting as an ongoing practice for chapter events. **The HLABC membership voted in favour of raising dues by \$5/person** (excluding free student and lifetime memberships), effective in the 2012-2013 fiscal year (as 2011-2012 renewals had already been received), **to help defray the cost of webcasting into the future.**

The amount of money expected to be raised by this dues hike is roughly equivalent to 50% of total projected costs of webcasting (or the equivalent of the software subscription alone). The other 50% (equivalent to estimated hardware costs) will come from operating funds (primarily revenues from CHLA/ABSC conference hosting), and we are exploring other revenue sources, including fees for webcast CE offered to non-members. During the transitional 2011-2012 fiscal year, costs of webcasting will be paid entirely out of existing HLABC operating funds.

We are currently in the process of **writing up a program description article** to submit to JCHLA and are exploring opportunities **to provide a webcast of our experiences** to other interested parties (e.g., other provincial library groups with geographically disparate memberships) as an additional dissemination route. We will continue to webcast our coming year's Meetings and CE to HLABC members, and we **will also be investigating collaboration opportunities with other CHLA Chapters for hosting joint CE webcasts.** We are training our new Communications Director to take on the role of WebEx meeting host for the coming year, and are looking forward to seeing where our new era of mixed-mode chapter activities takes us.

We thank CHLA/ABSC for the Chapter Initiative Fund seed money to make this pilot project a reality, and are excited to help lead our association into this new era of improved access to CE and leadership opportunities via online technologies.

Budget Report

CHLA/ABSC Chapter Initiatives Fund Budget Worksheet

Date: July 13, 2011
 Chapter Name: Health Libraries Association of British Columbia
 Project Title: HLABC CE Webcasting/Webconferencing Pilot Project

EXPENSES		Estimate	Actual	Notes/Comments
Webconferencing Software	WebEx Meeting Centre: year's subscription, single host	524.16		
Subtotal		524.16		
Webconferencing Hardware	Speakers	22.33		
	Microphones + Webcameras	120.93		
	Laptop Computer	--		In kind donation/loans
Subtotal		143.26	0	
Total Expenses		667.42	0	
REVENUES		Estimate	Actual	Notes/Comments
Chapter Contribution		143.26		From Operating funds
CIF Contribution		524.16		
Total Revenues		667.42	0	
NET PROFITS/LOSS		0	0	