

CASE STUDY

Powering Research and Academic Excellence in British Columbia

For 30 years, BCNET, a nonprofit shared services organization, has provided British Columbia's colleges and universities with all the IT services they need, from Internet connectivity to network storage and hardware and software procurement.

Core to BCNET's mission of helping member institutions drive down costs, maximize efficiencies, reduce service management duplication, and maximize their negotiating power is ensuring that members have a say in what solutions and services are available, says Dean Crawford, BCNET Director of Shared Systems and Technology.

The BlueJeans virtual meetings platform is key to BCNET's ability to bring its members together to share feedback and offer input on the IT services they find most valuable.

When BCNET first conducted an evaluation of video conferencing solutions a decade ago, BlueJeans was still in beta. At that time, BCNET was using a Polycom system that was complex and expensive. They wanted something more flexible — and the fact that BlueJeans was a cloud solution when the cloud was in its infancy did not intimidate BCNET. Early adoption is in their DNA. "We take risks on new technologies," Crawford says, adding that it's BCNET's job to stay up on the latest technologies so they can offer members what they need for their students and faculty to achieve their full potential — whether it's conducting research with academic partners overseas, dissertations with committees and experts attending remotely or convening senate meetings to discuss the business of university oversight.



Industry: Higher Education

Challenge: Needed a flexible, easy-to-use way to conduct face-to-face meetings spread out over a geographical expanse which made meeting in person cost-prohibitive and time-consuming.

Solutions: BlueJeans Meetings allows BCNET to convene video meetings on demand, and makes it possible for BCNET to offer the service to its 25 member institutions.

Results: BCNET saves thousands of dollars on travel expenses and increases its own teams' productivity with face-to-face collaboration.

BlueJeans Command Center allows BCNET to track video meeting usage, address last-minute quality issues, accurately bill members and plan for the future.

We are pleased to enable our member institutions' vital research by connecting researchers who are separated by great distances.

– DEAN CRAWFORD, BCNET DIRECTOR OF SHARED SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY

BCNET evaluated a number of virtual meeting solutions before selecting BlueJeans. The feature that first captured everyone's attention was the integration with Skype. Most of the faculty were already using it, so it was easy to tap into the existing workflow and provide their users a better experience. This became even more attractive when BCNET determined that BlueJeans offered the most flexible and cost-effective option, without saddling BCNET or member institutions with onerous video meeting hardware requirements.

BCNET became BlueJeans' 29th customer and wasted no time putting the video conferencing capability to work. "At one point we had over 40 working groups to develop and manage BCNET service offerings," Crawford says. The groups were comprised of representatives from member institutions from all over the province — which, at 364,764 square miles, is so large that bringing everyone together in person is not only prohibitively expensive, but simply too time-consuming. Video meetings dramatically reduced the need for travel, saving thousands of dollars while enabling face-to-face collaboration.

Interoperability and Flexibility Make Adoption Painless for All

All BCNET meetings — from ad hoc discussions to periodic board meetings — are hosted in BlueJeans. Adoption by

BCNET members was driven from the top down: BCNET used it internally for their board meetings, then the university presidents started using it, which cascaded down throughout BCNET member institutions. BCNET members have used BlueJeans in numerous applications — to convene meetings of the academic senates that govern the universities, connect graduate students with far-flung subject matter experts, and even allow students' family members who live on the other side of the world to watch them present their dissertations in real time.

BlueJeans' interoperable solution clears one more potential adoption hurdle — by providing a solution that works seamlessly with existing member institution room system hardware. Using the functionality of BlueJeans Command Center, Crawford has given each member institution its own unique ID so he does not have to create individual accounts for users at member sites. Because each institution has a unique ID, Crawford and his team can monitor and evaluate usage, assign the appropriate chargebacks, and plan accordingly for the coming year. Each of the 25 member institutions is a little bit different — but they all appreciate the flexibility BlueJeans offers.

Crawford can also view and report on global connectivity — allowing BCNET to demonstrate the positive impact that the organization's technology

choices make in supporting its members' global research. BCNET especially appreciates the ability to analyze call quality and identify last-mile connectivity issues so they can help improve users' overall ability to connect.

BlueJeans also supports BCNET's efforts to enable its members' innovative approaches to higher education. Crawford expects more members to start using BlueJeans to offer multimodal learning — that is, more than one way to attend classes, whether students show up in person, attend virtually via BlueJeans (some professors use an iPad on a swivel in the room and it pans to whoever is speaking so remote students can feel like they are there in person), or watch a video recording of the class at a later time.

Collaboration Fuels Innovative Research

Just as BCNET member sites feel like valued members of a consortium, Crawford says his longtime relationship with BlueJeans has allowed him the opportunity to be part of the evolution of BlueJeans. And BCNET helps them do everything they can to improve education.

BCNET is committed to helping enable the huge array of research and postgraduate work conducted in BC's institutions of higher learning, including TRIUMF, which is Canada's premier particle accelerator center, and the University of British Columbia's Institute for Oceans and Fisheries. "We are pleased to enable our member institutions' vital research by connecting researchers who are separated by great distances," Crawford says.

ABOUT BCNET

BCNET is a nonprofit shared services organization that represents the interests of its members — colleges, universities and research institutes in British Columbia. It engages with members to explore, evaluate and develop solutions that meet their unique needs while enabling collaboration, driving down costs, maximizing efficiencies, enhancing service quality, and helping members further their missions.