

# Newfoundland and Labrador's Public College Gives Blue Straight “A’s” for Efficiency and Functionality

**Client:** College of the North Atlantic

**Challenge:** Situated all over the province, the Institutional Research and Planning team needed more efficient online tools for conducting vital research for the whole college

**Solution:** Blue/Surveys, an online feedback gathering and analysis system that is easily integrated with in-house systems

**Benefits:**

- Maintained consistent response rates of 63-69% for larger, college-wide surveys
- Increased productivity: over 30 surveys conducted in one year
- Eliminated full days from data gathering and report creation process
- Realized new insights with more sophisticated reports and analysis
- Introduced tighter security by keeping data in-house
- Collaborated on survey projects from various locations

**Quote:** “With Blue, you just push a few buttons, and it all comes out in a great-looking report that you can send immediately. For the long surveys, the reporting features have literally saved us days of manual work.”

— *Carla Cooper, Policy, Planning and Research Analyst at CNA*

by Anne Coyle, eXplorance

The Institutional Research and Planning team at College of the North Atlantic (CNA) is an energetic bunch. They need to be. CNA is one of the largest post-secondary educational and skills training centres in Atlantic Canada, with 17 campuses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador serving an area over 400,000 square miles.

The college continues to expand accessibility to quality programs with more distance learning courses and global offerings, such as a campus in the Middle East State of Qatar and articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions in China.



CNA's Engineering Technology Center

## Surveys were complicated

As the college grew, the team wanted to be more efficient in managing their feedback gathering and analysis. They used to rely on other survey software, but found the system didn't quite fit their needs. "The old system wasn't very user-friendly – we found it pretty complicated," says Carla Cooper, Policy, Planning and Research Analyst at CNA.

Indeed, the software was so complicated they often turned to free online survey software to supplement their needs. But these had important limitations too.

"Security is extremely important to us. While we still want the convenience of online software, we prefer to keep our data on our servers," says Stephanie King, Institutional Research Data Analyst at CNA.



## Blue/Surveys elected for broad capabilities

The team considered other options before deciding on Blue/Surveys – a Web-based survey software system that provides feedback from within a connected, integrated environment.

"We considered the major survey software vendors," says Stephanie. "But seeing that Blue also offered course evaluation software that we could bring in-house tipped the scales."

Blue's platform features an integration layer that plugs easily into any systems the school is using – in this case, PeopleSoft – so survey forms already come complete with basic information such as name and title. Reporting is also easier and more powerful.

It took the team less than two months to go from implementation to completing its first survey. "We went big with our first survey – 1,400 people," Stephanie says. "Everything went without a hitch."

## Response rates surpass 60%

The team regularly beats industry standards on its bigger surveys with response rates in excess of 60%.

"Many of our college-wide surveys have received response rates between 63% and 69%," Stephanie says. "That's fantastic by any standard."

The team gives a lot of credit to Blue's flexibility and features like automated, personalized reminders.

"The reminders are key for increasing response rates. We love having the flexibility to go in and change them as we need to," says Carla. "Another big response booster is the ability to save an incomplete form and go back to it later – this is especially good for busy administrators."

## Blue/Surveys raises productivity

Over the course of a year, the team has already completed an impressive 30 surveys.

"There are so many great features and options, and reporting is simplified," says Carla. "The data can be presented in many different ways."

"Even very long surveys are straightforward," says Paula Gillam, Policy, Planning and Research Analyst. "We can do wonders with it."

## Doing more in less time

The team is saving time with easier and more sophisticated report creation. "Our previous survey software could generate tables, but they didn't look good, so I would have to export the data into a spreadsheet application and do it all over again," Carla explains.

"With Blue, you just push a few buttons, and it all comes out in a great-looking report that you can send immediately. For the long surveys, the reporting features have literally saved us days of manual work."



### **CNA's Prince Philip Drive Campus**

That saved time has been put to greater productivity and more analysis. “Now we have the time to do extra analysis,” says Paula. “You might see something interesting that you hadn’t expected and decide to dig deeper to look at the data in different ways.”

### ***Making their clients happy***

The team has observed other positive effects, from the entire community especially.

“We’re getting feedback from a lot of employees saying, ‘thanks for the opportunity to respond,’” says Stephanie. “People are giving their opinions on decisions that the college is making — it’s helping them feel they have a say in these decisions.”

The team is continually finding new ways to improve its processes with Blue/Surveys.

“There’s always something new we can do with the software,” says Stephanie. “For instance, we collect requests for data from the community through an actual survey form available online. We then generate a report to manage these requests. The reports help us quickly identify if this request has already been completed or if similar requests are being made – so we don’t have to duplicate effort in fulfilling them.”

### ***eXplorance gets top marks***

The team had glowing comments on the sales and support they’ve received from eXplorance. “Their support is excellent,” Stephanie says. “Questions are usually answered within a half-hour. For more complex issues, the eXplorance team works closely with us until we find a solution.”

Says Carla, “We even requested options we’d like to see in the software, such as cross tabulation. They listened to our suggestions, and are adding them to the next release. We really appreciate things like that.”

The college has decided to extend its activity in Blue with Blue/Evaluation, a powerful online course evaluation system that has the same platform advantages as Blue/Surveys. The pilot is scheduled for early this year.

Asked to sum up their experience in one sentence, the response was simple. “It’s just wonderful,” says Paula. “Every day we come up with a new way we can use it – we love it.”