

Utilising an Online Data Collection Platform for the Development of a Community Engagement Database: A Case Study on Building Inter-Institutional Partnerships at UWC

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Abstract : The community engagement unit at the University of the Western Cape was tasked with establishing a community engagement database. The database would store information of all community engagement projects related to the university. The wealth of knowledge obtained from the various disciplines would be used to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration within the university, as well as facilitating community university partnership opportunities. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore electronic data collection through the development of a database. Two types of electronic data collection platforms were used, namely online questionnaire and email. The semi structured questionnaire was used to collect data related to community engagement projects from different faculties and departments at the university. There are many benefits for using an electronic data collection platform, such as reduction of costs and time, ease in reaching large numbers of potential respondents, and the possibility of providing anonymity to participants. Despite all the advantages of using the electronic platform, there were as many challenges, as depicted in our findings. The findings suggest that certain barriers existed by using an electronic platform for data collection, even though it was in an academic environment, where knowledge and resources were in abundance. One of the challenges experienced in this process was the lack of dissemination of information via email to staff within faculties. The actual online software used for the questionnaire had its own limitations, such as only being able to access the questionnaire from the same electronic device. In a few cases, academics only completed the questionnaire after a telephonic prompt or face to face meeting about "Is higher education in South Africa ready to embrace electronic platform in data collection?"

Keywords : community engagement, database, data collection, electronic platform, electronic tools, knowledge sharing, university

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