



# **Region 1 Information Management Center**

## **Technology Plan 2013-2015**

**Creation Date:  
December 17, 2011**

## **Introduction**

This technology plan is written to satisfy the requirements of the Minnesota Department of Education, School and Library Division (SLD) and FCC for E-rate funding and other technology grants or aids that require a Minnesota approved technology plan.

### **Executive Leadership, Organization and Collaborative Entities**

#### Executive Leadership

With general direction from Robert Wheeler, the Executive Director, and the Joint Powers Board of Region 1, Russ Matter, Network Administrator, and Joe Ramsey, Technical Services Support, provide organization-wide leadership as it pertains to technology.

#### Joint Powers Board

The Region 1 Joint Powers Board is comprised of nine (9) members that are elected school board members from school districts that are members in the Region 1 joint powers collaborative. Joint Powers Board member terms are three years.

#### Joint Powers Board Annual Election Timeline

First half of November – nominations for expiring positions are requested.

Second half of November – ballots are mailed to member districts.

December – election results are tabulated.

January – new Board terms begin.

#### Organization

Region 1 is one of five regional information management centers (RMICs) in Minnesota, which offer a variety of technology and information resources to school districts and other educational services entities. Its primary focus is on delivery of administrative software hosting and support services for school districts and other educational services entities. Region 1 is a nonprofit joint powers entity, not directly funded by State of Minnesota, and derives its annual revenue primarily from providing hosted administrative software solutions and technical software support services on a fee for services basis. Its primary service areas fall into four categories – financial, HR/payroll, student information management and library management. Region 1 also provides support services for other additional unique applications, in a non-hosted manner, such as software to manage the school district's cafeteria meal plan accounts.

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#### Collaborative Entities

Region 1 provides services to seventy member school districts (see Appendix A) and over thirty other education related service entities, primarily in northwest Minnesota. The member school districts form the

joint powers collaborative that governs the activities of Region 1. Region 1 also collaborates with four (4) other regional management information centers (RMICs) in the state on specific software development projects for the benefit of school districts and education services entities throughout the State of Minnesota.

NW-Links Northwest Minnesota Special Access Network is a separate not for profit consortium housed in Region 1 offices. The consortium consists of 70 public school districts and four regional public library systems located in northwest Minnesota (see Appendix B).

### Provision of Services

As mentioned in the Organization section above, Region 1 provides administrative software hosting services for its member school districts and other education related service entities. This centralized hosting structure is a much more efficient method of software administration than each entity providing the services locally. Not only is it more cost effective, it has opened up a wider array of administrative software applications that would not be available to them due to technical infrastructure deficiencies or technical staffing limitations within their organization.

The common denominator amongst the entities served in our geographic area is the availability of a reliable, high speed telecommunications infrastructure coordinated by NW Links. Utilizing the telecommunications infrastructure in place, school districts and other educational entities can subscribe to a number of available administrative software solutions that are delivered in a hosted ASP environment at a lower overall cost. The integrity of the telecommunications network is vital to the delivery of software applications in this hosted deployment, as high availability and quick access speed are critical.

### **Technology Planning Steering Committee**

Robert Wheeler, Executive Director of Region 1, heads the technology planning steering committee with contributions and implementation from the following Region 1 staff:

Network Administration, Russ Matter  
Technical Services Support, Joe Ramsey  
NW-Links Consortium, Robert Wheeler  
Finance Coordinator, Wayne Miller  
HR/Payroll Coordinator, Carol Wessman  
Student Services Coordinator, Cheryl Solum  
Student Services Coordinator, Mike Kunde

Input from district staff, including superintendents, business managers, technology coordinators and finance, payroll and student information personnel are continually sought and evaluated in conjunction with the ongoing development of technology offerings.

#### **I. Organizational Objectives**

- ❖ Continue to keep abreast of current technology trends and apply that technology in a manner that benefits the school districts and education services entities served.
- ❖ Maintain a well trained support services staff to provide a timely and comprehensive support environment for the school districts and other educational entities served by Region1. Apply for E-rate on the telephone and cellular phone costs related to providing the support environment at Region 1.

- ❖ Continue to work jointly with NW Links in monitoring, and improving the performance of the delivery of the administrative software hosting services through the telecommunications infrastructure. In addition, identify current and future telecommunications infrastructure needs in our geographic area based upon evolving software application needs and hosting services requested by the school districts and educational service entities served.
- ❖ Data traffic on the NW-Links Northwest Minnesota Special Access Network is monitored regularly for all school districts and libraries using data available from 702 Communications. NW-Links reaches out to school district and public library members to ensure bandwidth is sufficient to provide education and library services. Also, NW-Links will continue to apply for E-rate and state telecommunications/Internet access aid to reduce the cost of Internet access for member schools and libraries.
- ❖ Increase the overall knowledge and skill of Region 1 staff members and others that use Region 1 as a resource for application and technology support purposes.
- ❖ Provide a secure and redundant technology infrastructure, in a cost effective manner, which school districts and other education services entities may rely on to transact administrative functions.
- ❖ Maintain an environment for on-going application and technology training through e-communications and user group meetings and training sessions.

### **Specific Objectives**

- a. Performance monitoring of current hosted application environment: through a variety of techniques, including server farm performance monitoring, bandwidth utilization graphing for member sites, service provider network performance monitoring, etc., Region 1 will continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of the entire technology infrastructure of the hosted environment. Region 1 will work closely with NW-Links and the telecommunications providers to assess and identify any performance issues within the telecommunications network that negatively impact access to the hosted software applications. In addition, Region 1 will continue to monitor the performance of the server farm and make necessary adjustments to ensure a high level of performance. Necessary adjustments will take the form of bandwidth expansion or upgrades to the various software and hardware components of the server farm.
- b. Provide Additional Application Services (ASP Model): in addition to the current hosted software applications – finance, HR/payroll, student management and library management - there continues to be a growing need for the Region’s school districts to utilize an ASP model to realize the economies of scale by sharing the common costs of involvement in administrative software applications. Other examples of software applications that may be deployed in a hosted model are lunch room management and automated timekeeping. Region 1 will continue to review and assess additional software applications and the viability of providing them in the hosted environment.
- c. Refine security processes and redundancy in the hosted environment: review and develop additional security processes and measure for both network security and physical security measures. Region 1 will continue to work jointly with NW-Links and the telecommunications providers for the purpose of identifying and refining best practices for the security of the network. Within the last two years, Region 1 constructed a new office facility with improved physical security features in the facility. We will continue to evaluate and obtain feedback from our technology services provider regarding the redundancy protection built within our server farm. In addition, additional redundancy measures, such as a back up power supply source, was designed into the new Region 1 facility.

- d. Business Recovery Plan: Region 1 will refine and test a business recovery plan. In the event of a disaster, Region 1 must attempt to minimize the amount of time that services in the hosted environment are unavailable. Development of a comprehensive documented plan is the first step and testing will follow. A significant piece of the process will be the identification of an off-site location with which to restore communication links and processing capabilities for the end users.

## II. Professional Development Opportunities Provided

### Region 1 Staff Members

- ❖ Annual Region 1 Business Conference – a two day event that provides attendees a wide range of professional development training sessions classes in nearly all areas of district administration software applications, such as finance, HR/payroll, student information management and reporting (MARSS), employee benefits, etc. Attendees are provided the opportunity to attend up to seven different training sessions during the event. Although this event is geared towards our members, we provide a number of professional development sessions from outside presenters that Region 1 staff members can attend.
- ❖ Monthly SMART Management Team Meetings – a collaboration of finance and HR/payroll coordinators from all RMICs that discuss, research and review various issues and potential enhancements in the finance and HR/payroll areas.
- ❖ SQL Administration Training – training will involve the network administrator and technical specialists at Region 1 and encompass new SQL version and the associated enhancements to the application.
- ❖ Student Information Management. Staff supporting the Synergy Student Information System hosted by Region 1 attend training sessions and webinars relating to version updates and Synergy system functionality.
- ❖ Other workshops – throughout each year, the staff at Region 1 is exposed to a variety of workshop opportunities dealing with specific support areas. Each workshop is evaluated and staff members are sent if the content is applicable.

### Member District Staff

- ❖ Annual Region 1 Business Conference – a two day event that provides attendees a wide range of professional development training sessions classes in nearly all areas of district administration software applications, such as finance, HR/payroll, student information management and reporting (MARSS), employee benefits, etc. Attendees are provided the opportunity to attend up to seven different training sessions during the event.
- ❖ Annual Finance User Meeting – review of changes to UFARS guidelines and update of enhancements to SMART Finance software application.
- ❖ Semi-Annual HR/Payroll User Meetings - review of changes to payroll and tax reporting requirements, update of enhancements to SMART HR/payroll software application, and procedures for both fiscal year-end and calendar year-end processing activities.
- ❖ SERVS webinars and trainings. Region 1 and district staff working with the Minnesota Department of Education SERVs system for data reporting attend webinars and trainings offered by MDE on reporting requirements and procedures.

- ❖ Annual MARSS User Meetings - review of changes to MARSS reporting guidelines and the processes to upload student accounting data to the Minnesota Department of Education.
- ❖ Annual Food Service User Meetings - update of enhancements to hot lunch software application and review of new school year set up issues and free and reduced meal application processes.
- ❖ Annual Student Information Management training. District staff may attend variety of training sessions and webinars relating to version updates and software functionality of Synergy, the student information system supported by Region 1.

### **III. Needs Assessment 2013-2015 to Support Technology Objectives**

#### Districts

- ❖ Continue to monitor the performance of current hosted software applications and acquire sufficient computer hardware and software to meet those needs. In addition, work with NW Links to assure that proper telecommunications bandwidth is available to provide the desired level of performance in accessing the hosted software applications.
- ❖ Review additional centralized application services and monitor the performance of the current Application Services Provider (ASP) model.
- ❖ Continue to monitor and develop redundancies and security measures for the server farm at Region 1.
- ❖ Review and refine a comprehensive business recovery plan to ensure minimal hardware and software downtime in a disaster event.

#### Internal Staff

- ❖ Continue to provide ongoing training opportunities for Region 1 staff in areas of need.
- ❖ Continue to monitor and assess support requirements in specific support services areas and modify job functions or incorporate cross training of multiple tasks for specific employees.
- ❖ Review software/hardware requirements for Region 1 employees with which to conduct their job function and change/upgrade as necessary.
- ❖ Review and modify acceptable use policy and practices regarding employee e-mail and internet use.
- ❖ Monitor and make staffing changes as deemed appropriate for the fiscal years covered under this technology plan.

### **IV. Evaluation Process**

Region 1 does not have a defined single method of evaluation of services, such as a written customer satisfaction survey. The evaluation process is a conglomeration of feedback results from a variety of ongoing resources.

- ❖ Support services coordinators are continually requesting and receiving feedback during all of the annual and semi-annual user group meetings and annual business conference regarding the performance and features of the software applications and the satisfaction with the support services provided by the Region 1 staff.
- ❖ Third party software vendors with which we have a software support arrangement for their proprietary software applications provide feedback regarding the support services pertaining to their applications.
- ❖ Throughout the year, the Executive Director of Region 1 regularly attends administrator meetings at two different service cooperative venues in NW Minnesota to interact and obtain feedback from the superintendents of the member school districts regarding the Region 1 services and potential future technology and software application needs.
- ❖ The Executive Director of Region 1, representing NW-Links, frequently participates in technology coordinators groups meetings from the member school districts to obtain feedback regarding wide area network performance.

Obtaining feedback results from multiple sources at various times throughout the fiscal year is a more effective means of assessing the performance of the application hosting function and wide area network, and satisfaction with the services provided by the Region 1 support staff.

## Appendix A

### Region 1 Member Districts

School District #	School District Name	School District #	School District Name
25	PINE POINT	593	CROOKSTON
32	BLACKDUCK	595	EAST GRAND FORKS
36	KELLIHER	599	FERTILE-BELTRAMI
38	RED LAKE	600	FISHER
146	BARNESVILLE	601	FOSSTON
150	HAWLEY	611	CYRUS
152	MOORHEAD	627	RED LAKE COUNTY CENTRAL – OKLEE
162	BAGLEY	628	RED LAKE COUNTY CENTRAL – PLUMMER
206	ALEXANDRIA	630	RED LAKE FALLS
207	BRANDON	676	BADGER
208	EVANSVILLE	690	WARROAD
213	OSAKIS	768	HANCOCK
261	ASHBY	769	MORRIS
264	HERMAN-NORCROSS	771	CHOKIO-ALBERTA
306	LAPORTE	801	BROWNS VALLEY
308	NEVIS	803	WHEATON
309	PARK RAPIDS	846	BRECKENRIDGE
356	LANCASTER	850	ROTHSAY
363	SOUTH KOOCHICHING	852	CAMPBELL-TINTAH
390	LAKE OF THE WOODS	914	ULEN-HITTERDAL
432	MAHNOMEN	2149	MINNEWASKA
435	WAUBUN	2164	DILWORTH-GLYNDON-FELTON
441	MARSHALL COUNTY CENTRAL	2171	KITTSOON CENTRAL
447	GRYGLA	2176	WARREN-ALVARADO-OSLO
542	BATTLE LAKE	2215	NORMAN COUNTY EAST
544	FERGUS FALLS	2311	CLEARBROOK-GONVICK
545	HENNING	2342	WEST CENTRAL AREA
547	PARKERS PRAIRIE	2358	TRI-COUNTY
548	PELICAN RAPIDS	2527	NORMAN COUNTY WEST
549	PERHAM	2609	WIN-E-MAC
550	UNDERWOOD	2683	GREENBUSH-MIDDLE RIVER
553	NEW YORK MILLS	2854	ADA-BORUP
561	GOODRIDGE	2856	STEPHEN-ARGYLE
564	THIEF RIVER FALLS	2888	CLINTON-GRACEVILLE-BEARDSLEY
592	CLIMAX	2889	LAKE PARK-AUDUBON

## Appendix B

### NW-LINKS MEMBERS

School Districts and Cooperatives	
Ada-Borup I.S.D. 2854	Lakes Country Service Cooperative 0926
Area Special Education Cooperative 0997	Lancaster Public I.S.D. 0356
Ashby Public Schools 0261	Mahnomen Independent SD 0432
Badger Public Schools 0676	Marshall County I.S.D. 0441
Bagley I.S.D. 0162	Moorhead Schools District 0152
Barnesville Schools District 0146	Morris I.S.D. 0769 / Midwest Spec Ed Coop 0398
Battle Lake I.S.D. 0542	Nevis I.S.D. 0308
Bemidji Regional Interdistrict Council 0998	New York Mills I.S.D. 0553
Blackduck I.S.D. 0032	Norman County East District 2215
Breckenridge I.S.D. 0846	Norman County West School ISD 2527
Browns Valley I.S.D. 0801	Northwest Regional Interdistrict Council (NWRIC) 0382
Campbell-Tintah Schools District 0852	Northwest Service Cooperative 0928
Chokio-Alberta I.S.D. 0771	Oklee I.S.D. 627
Clearbrook-Gonvick Public School ISD 2311	Pelican Rapids I.S.D. 0548
Climax I.S.D. 0592	Perham I.S.D. 0549
Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley I.S.D. 2888	Pine Point I.S.D. 0025
Cyrus 0611	Plummer I.S.D. 0628
Crookston I.S.D. 0593	Red Lake I.S.D. 0038
Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton SD 2164	Red Lake Falls I.S.D. 0630
East Grand Forks I.S.D. 0595	Regional Management Info Center (R1) 0869
Fergus Falls Schools 0544/FF Spec Ed Coop 0935	Roseau I.S.D. 0682
Fertile-Beltrami I.S.D. 0599	Rothsay Public I.S.D. 0850
Fisher Independent I.S.D. 0600	South Koochiching - Rainy River I.S.D. 0363
Fosston I.S.D. 0601	Stephen-Argyle I.S.D. 2856
Frazee - Vergas Public Schools 0023	Thief River Falls I.S.D. 0564
Goodridge I.S.D. 0561	Tri County Independent School ISD 2358
Greenbush-Middle River SD 2683	Ulen-Hitterdal I.S.D. 0914
Grygla District 0447	Underwood I.S.D. 0550
Hancock I.S.D. 0768	Walker-Hackensack-Akeley School 0113
Hawley I.S.D. 0150	Warren-Alvarado-Oslo School ISD 2176
Herman-Norcross I.S.D. 0264	Warroad I.S.D. 0690
Kelliher I.S.D. 0036	Waubun I.S.D. 0435
Kittson Central District 2171	Wheaton I.S.D. 0803
Lake of the Woods I.S.D. 0390	Win-E-Mac I.S.D. 2609
Lake Park-Audubon District 2889	

**Public Library Systems**

<b>KITCHIGAMI LIBRARY SYSTEM</b>	<b>NORTHWEST LIBRARY SYSTEM</b>
Bemidji Public Library	Greenbush Public Library*
Blackduck Community Library	Hallock Public Library
Brainerd Public Library	Northwest Regional Library HQ
Cass Lake Community Library	Red Lake Falls Public Library
Kitchigami Regional Library HQ	Roseau Public Library
Margaret Welch Memorial Library	Thief River Falls Public Library
Park Rapids Area Library	Warren / Godel Memorial Library
Pine River Public Library	Warroad Public Library
Wadena City Library	
Walker Public Library	<b>VIKING LIBRARY SYSTEM</b>
	Alexandria / Douglas County Library
<b>LAKE AGASSIZ LIBRARY SYSTEM</b>	Carnegie / Browns Valley Public Library
Ada Public Library	Elbow Lake / Thorson Memorial Library
Bagley Public Library	Fergus Falls Public Library
Barnesville Public Library	Glenwood Public Library
Breckenridge Public Library	Hancock Community Library
Climax Public Library	Morris Public Library
Crookston Public Library	New York Mills Public Library
Detroit Lakes Public Library	Pelican Rapids Public Library
Fertile Public Library	Perham Public Library
Fosston Public Library	Viking Library System
Hawley Public Library	Wheaton Community Library
Lake Agassiz Regional Library HQ/Moorhead Public Library*	
Mahnomen Public Library	
McIntosh Public Library	