

DRAFT
Process toward Unidata Users Survey-2010
February 18, 2010

Below are some considerations for development of a community survey. The draft schedule and review:

- UMT (Jan 27 meeting)
- Staff (Jan 29)
- Tom Whittaker, UserComm Chair (Feb 8)
- UserComm (Feb 22)

Reasons for doing a survey:

- To gather the needs of the community regarding data, tools and services in the following areas:
 - Data
 - Tools
 - Services (including support and E-letter)
- Community characterization and evolution (NSF panel recommendation)
 - Need a good sample of the diverse community
- Metrics
 - Requesting information on number of undergrads using Unidata tools, data and services graduating each year; number of PhD candidates using Unidata
- Impact/outcome
 - How did the data, tools, and services from Unidata impact the students' learning experience
- Identify and measure trends over time
- Provide direction for the program

Considerations:

- We don't want to conduct a survey just for the sake of doing one. An important aspect to consider is the KISS principle (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KISS_principle). Preference: second definition "Keep It Short and Simple." A Users Committee survey has not been conducted since 2001.
- Below are some of the factors and questions for consideration:
 - What is the driving force for doing a survey (see some of the Reasons above)? Things change, not only in the community, but technology changes, along with data availability, which leads to changes in the way we do business. For example, we now have the motherlode server and RAMADDA; THREDDDS has come a long way; the IDV has a huge following; there are changes with GEMPAK and the eventual migration to AWIPS-II; diversity is becoming more important than ever; netCDF development and its widespread adoption domestically and internationally. The world has definitely not stood still over the past nine years since the last UserComm survey was conducted. Unidata needs to stay ahead, or

at least neck and neck with technology and community needs, so we can continue to provide a range of tools, data services, and support that we're known for.

- Has the community changed?
 - The community is evolving and broadening; we need fact based community feedback on specific areas to help us identify possible areas of improvement or changes.
- Should we be measuring the impact/outcome of tools, services, data that are being developed and provided by Unidata?
 - Absolutely. Times and needs change in our community, and we need to change with them. We need to track those changes, not just in support emails, but through multiple methods including surveys.
- Should we build on the 2001 survey or is it too old?
 - The 2001 survey is short and succinct. We could use that survey, along with other surveys, e.g., 2006 Nelson Consulting metrics assessment, the UCAR surveys, and other information collected, to model our questions accordingly. Reinventing the wheel is not the goal! Previous surveys provide the building blocks, so it's a matter of modifying some of that data to glean current information. This should not be a huge burden on resources.
- How can the survey information be used?
 - Surveys provide valuable input that can be used to change course, if we find that we are not fulfilling the needs of our constituents. Updated information can be used for proposal preparations, metrics needed by our funding agencies, and overall reporting via presentations, governance, etc. Findings of a survey can point out shortcomings, and provide expectations of the community.
- Do surveys just waste time for the community participants?
 - No. Surveys are a communication mechanism for us to use to inform the constituents (based on the questions) on what our trajectory is, and to provide the survey participants a chance to comment and provide useful information for consideration.

Developing the Survey:

- Create a sub-committee to work on the survey and deadlines to have a draft and final version.

One approach might be a theme-driven survey by using the six proposed focus areas from the 2008-2013 NSF proposals. They are:

- Broadening participation and expanding community services
- Advancing data services
- Developing and deploying useful tools
- Enhancing user support services
- Providing leadership in cyberinfrastructure
- Promoting diversity by expanding opportunities

The idea would be to create questions that provide feedback related to these areas.

Another approach might be to use the 2001 survey and make the necessary changes/updates to build a 2010 version of the survey. This might lead to a good longitudinal design that lends itself well to metrics measurements, thus killing two birds with one stone, voila' the KISS principle.

The UCAR surveys taken in 2005 and 2009 had a similar technique to allow tracking changes and making comparisons over the four year period.

An important issue is the middleware. Cyberinfrastructure plays an important role in Unidata, and determining how that is represented in the survey needs some input from technical staff.

Creation and Distribution of the Survey Options:

- UCAR uses “Opinion” surveys. It provides a web-based survey; answers are anonymous. The survey collects cumulative statistics, but that feature can be turned off if it is too distracting.
- Question of distribution of survey
 - Use of Unidata’s community email list
- Individual projects (IDV, GEMPAK, McIDAS, THREDDS, RAMADDA, LDM, etc) could send the survey with a short note of introduction requesting the user to forward the survey to others who may not have received it.

For additional information check the URL below.

References: <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/committees/usercom/2010survey/index.html>

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