User Survey Summary

EMSL is committed to continually improving the users' experience. Although change cannot always be implemented overnight, we rely strongly on the input received from our user community and encourage you to continue providing feedback to our technical staff, our User Support Office, and through the bi-annual survey. Users can also provide comments and feedback to the User Executive Committee and should feel free to contact anyone on the committee at any time.

Currently, user surveys are administered biannually for experimental users and are sent only to those individuals who have accessed our resources during the prior six months or annually for computational-only users and are sent only to those individuals who have accessed computing resources during the prior year. The results of the most recent survey are posted here with management responses to concerns or issues identified by our user community.

October 2012 Survey

Surveys Submitted Between October 11, 2012, and October 31, 2012.

Survey Satisfaction: 91.1 %

Survey Responses: 157

Surveys Sent: 632

Survey Response Rate: 24.8%

1. How satisfied were you with the availability of facilities and equipment?

- 78 Very Satisfied
- 72 Satisfied
- 2 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- 3 Dissatisfied
- 2 Very Dissatisfied
- 0 Not Applicable

2. How satisfied were you with performance of facilities and equipment (e.g., were they maintained to specifications for your intended use, ready when scheduled, etc.)?

- 89 Very Satisfied
- 56 Satisfied
- 5 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- 3 Dissatisfied
- 1 Very Dissatisfied

- 3 Not Applicable

3. List additional capabilities that you think EMSL should have.

User comments to this and other survey questions are below.

4. With the new knowledge gained at EMSL, I expect to (check all that apply):

- 137 Disseminate new knowledge via publication in peer-reviewed open literature
- 124 Disseminate new knowledge via presentations at professional society meetings
- 10 Acquire a patent
- 71 Further Department of Energy mission(s)
- 93 Facilitate collaborative interactions (e.g., stimulated new ideas for future experiment; increased work; etc.)
- 61 Train students (undergraduate, graduate or postdoctoral associate)
- 91 Use data for a future proposal
- 72 Establish or grow network and/or further collaboration
- 2 Other

5. How satisfied were you with the assistance provided by the EMSL technical staff?

- 99 Very Satisfied
- 44 Satisfied
- 10 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- 1 Dissatisfied
- 0 Very Dissatisfied
- 3 Not Applicable

6. How satisfied were you with the assistance provided by the EMSL administrative staff?

- 86 Very Satisfied
- 58 Satisfied
- 4 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- 0 Dissatisfied
- 1 Very Dissatisfied
- 6 Not Applicable

7. How appropriate and user friendly were the training and safety procedures?

- 55 Very Satisfied
- 65 Satisfied
- 18 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- 1 Dissatisfied
- 0 Very Dissatisfied

- 17 Not Applicable

8. How satisfied were you with the proposal process (e.g. submission & review)?

- 52 Very Satisfied
- 48 Satisfied
- 13 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- 7 Dissatisfied
- 7 Very Dissatisfied
- 29 Not Applicable

9. How did you learn about EMSL?

- 29 Scientific meeting/conference
- 11 Internet search
- 12 Journal publication
- 44 Previous EMSL use
- 61 Colleague
- 92 PNNL staff member
- 7 Other

USER ENDORSEMENTS AND COMMENTS

Although not all comments are shown, below is a representative sampling of the positive user comments received.

- EMSL provides state-of-the-art equipment.
- I realize that there are many users needing access to the facilities at PNNL; but I found the researchers to genuinely show interest in trying to address our biological questions.
- Easy to login (I use ssh), easy to use, short time in queues (I use Chinook).
- Advanced equipment and experienced experts.
- As we all know, a useful result does not come from just putting samples through a machine but from pursuing the proper experiment, in terms of experimental design and sample preparation, as well as interpreting and annotating the data. The research team we worked with worked with us on this project from beginning to end.

EMSL's Response

As always, we rely on our staff to provide expertise and operational support to create a positive user experience. We especially want to call out Dehong Hu, Alex Laskin, Mark Engelhard, Danny Perea, and the User Support Office team, for user recognition of their exceptional knowledge, commitment, and outstanding help.

User Concerns and Suggestions

While user satisfaction rates very highly, we carefully review any comments in which users expressed concerns or suggestions for improvement. These have been compiled into several topical areas and representative comments are provided below, along with EMSL's response.

USER COMMENTS

OVERSUBSCRIBED INSTRUMENTATION OR STAFFING

- Need more expert staff availability, they seem stretched pretty thin.
- Resources are great but are somewhat difficult to use because they require extensive PNNL backup but there are few resources available for them. Projecting and insuring adequate resourcing before a project begins would reduce frustration later.
- The mass spectrometry queue (sample preparation, data acquisition, and analysis) seemed slow. But in general, instruments are well maintained. Sometimes, unplanned outages seem to take a long time to resolve due to a lack of staff.

EMSL'S RESPONSE

We try to provide a high level of technical support to our user community to the extent possible within limited budgets. As part of our evaluation process for selecting proposals, EMSL management conducts a detailed assessment of the time commitments on both instruments and staff to ensure optimal support. This is not an exact science, however, and we are at times stretched too thin. However, our goal is to allow science to progress as needed while users are onsite, and we encourage users to contact the Capability Leads during the scheduled visit to see what adjustments can be made. Alternately, we invite your feedback after scheduled experiments to provide details about your experience so we can improve our staff and instrument estimates for scheduled use.

USER COMMENTS

TRAINING

- The training procedures are tedious, but necessary.
- Seemed like a lot of training unrelated to what I would be doing there…Kind of pointless.
- Given that I'm not going to EMSL, the security training seemed a little more intense than necessary.

EMSL'S RESPONSE

As reported in the prior survey response, PNNL is in the process of redesigning training courses and focusing the training for our users into role-specific modules. The first course redesign, PNNL Orientation, is expected to reduce user training by approximately 3 hours. Refresher courses have also been revised to eliminate staff-specific information, and Cyber Security training is included in future course redesigns—to eliminate onsite-specific information that does not apply to our remote user community.

USER COMMENTS

TRANSPARENT PROCESSES AND COMMUNICATION

- It is still a rough process. For example, there should be a mechanism for proposers to update their applications before the deadline.
- It took a really long time to hear the results on an open call proposal.
- The proposal process took way too long and updates to the proposal status were rare and difficult to obtain.
- Our most recent proposal received what seemed to us a very unreasonable review, from a reviewer who seemed not to have really paid attention to what was in the proposal. Previous applications were treated appropriately, however.

EMSL'S RESPONSE

EMSL's goal for General proposals is a 6-8 week turnaround, unless the user has been notified of expected delays, and a 2-week turnaround for Rapid Access proposals. Peer reviewer availability can still create unavoidable delays, but we are working to minimize these as much as possible. In addition, the User Support Office has modified internal processes to prompt earlier management decisions, and we hope to see improved turnaround this coming year. We're working with our developers to revise the submittal process to allow authors to edit the proposals up until the deadline or, for proposals with special requests, until the proposal is screened and assigned to peer review. Due to the number of modifications in our queue, we expect this to roll out in FY2013.

Our proposals undergo a full discussion by members of a proposal review panel, and no one reviewer is responsible for the outcome of the proposal's score or rank. However, users who can demonstrate how the proposal was inaccurately evaluated can appeal the proposal decision following the process outlined on the website: Appealing a Decision.

USER COMMENTS

OPERATIONAL DELAYS OR DOWNTIME

- One component of our research was excellent, however the other component was not addressed (PNL had the material for over a year) and by the time we received poor results, it was too late to resubmit material.
- The NMR probe that I was supposed to use was broken at the time of my visit. I was able to use a different probe, but I had to search for its pieces (which were scattered around the facility and put in the boxes of another probe).

- I was assigned one user support individual who passed me on to another individual, who also passed me on. These individuals were also inflexible about work hours. As a user, we are only allotted a certain period of time. Therefore, we may have to work earlier than 9 or later than 5.

EMSL'S RESPONSE

Your feedback regarding instruments operation—both readiness and capability development—is crucial for our continued improvement. We are developing new probes to respond to project needs and have made organization changes to ensure instruments are ready when scheduled and staff are available during the access times granted by the Capability Lead.

USER COMMENTS

ADDITIONAL CAPABILITIES REQUESTED BY THE USERS

- Additional SEMs
- More microbial growth facilities
- CyTOF flow cytometry mass spectrometer, Accuri flow cytometer and simple fluorescent microscopes.
- Bioinformatics tools and training
- AFM/NMR/DNP

EMSL'S RESPONSE

Bioinformatics tools and training are under development, and a CyTOF is planned for FY13. Additional SEMs, NMRs and AFMs are limited by funding constraints but are planned. If you do not see something on the website that you are interested in, or want to pursue specifics related to the experiments you have in mind, we encourage you to ask the Capability Lead (http://www.emsl.pnl.gov/contacts/) or your host.