Organizations are concerned about making progress, as progress shows an organization is moving forward. Progress is usually a result of good strategic planning and efficient staff. But, a measurement of progress can be hard to show. To show progress an organization must document what they are doing on a day to day basis, which can be complex and time consuming. According to an article recently written by the Federal Government's Business Development Agency "poor planning and lack of planning are repeatedly cited among the top reasons for business failure…to plan effectively you will need to collect, screen, and analyze information about the company's environment". Collecting and tracking information should be simple, quick, and require no duplication of effort by staff. Organizations should be able to quickly enter data and just as quickly be able to turn that information into useful reports, charts, and maps to document progress. These features, and more, are the driving force behind The University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health's tracking system; TruServe.

TruServe is a web-based activity tracking system operated from a secure site that allows users to add, update, and report activities and their impacts using a series of easy to use forms. The system was created in 2007 by the Center for Rural Health (CRH) at The University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The CRH, established in 1980, serves as North Dakota's state office of rural health. It is one of the nation's most experienced rural health organizations having developed a full range of programs include policy, research, community development, organizational development, evaluation, native American issues and information dissemination. Staff has extensive industry knowledge to successfully serve the CRH's customers and communities. The Mission of the CRH is to connect resources and knowledge to strengthen the health of people in rural communities.

<u>Activity Tracking System (TruServe)</u>

Purpose. The main purpose of TruServe is to capture the activities of staff; information later used to provide detailed and accurate reports for staff, the organization, funders, decision makers, legislators and others. The system serves as a data repository that is available at all times with the ability to generate reports, maps, charts, and more with a few clicks.

Functionality. TruServe has very few required fields, allowing for significant flexibility within an organization. Required fields include: 1) activity type (drop down box of options created by the user organization), 2) date of activity (selected from a date-picker), and 3) activity title (typed in by individual user). A list of optional entries follow (users are encouraged to enter as many as applicable to enrich reporting options):

- budget associated with activity (e.g. $500)
- length of time associated with activity (15 minutes, 2 days)
- assistance level (in depth, brief)
- reach (internal, state, national, other)
- number of people (150, 2)
- committee involvement (Flex advisory)
- focus of activity (grant-writing, caregiving)
- description/summary of activity
- mode (in person, telephone)
- location (where the activity took place)
- staff (list of internal staff involved)
- programs involved with the activity (e.g. Flex, SORH)
- program goals (by specific programs)
- people/organizations that the activity involved (local hospital, John Doe)
- files (attach any number of files to an activity)
- others

Communication. TruServe is accessed by individuals, identified by an organization as "users", and for the most part includes all staff, no matter their position within the organization. Users may also include others such as program partners. Exchange of information between users is facilitated through TruServe; each user is provided with a unique login and password and users have the ability to share entries with one another via e-mail. The system provides a drop down box listing all user names which are linked to their e-mail addresses; users may also "assign review" of activities which facilitates information sharing, accurate entries associated with a variety of people and programs, and overall coordination between users and programs.

Reporting. TruServe effectively tracks activities and associates them with other variables such as time, budget, specific program goals, level of assistance, location of customers, staff and much more. Reports can be saved and shared with others and include impressive maps. Graphs can be generated, for example showing activity over time or types of partner organizations. Accurate reporting is essential in today's economy, with funders and stakeholders expecting quantifiable results demonstrating the impact of their investment. Organizations save time by using TruServe and are able to confidently present their work and impact to others as requested within minutes. TruServe eliminates the need for specialized staff trained in created maps and graphs; professional reports are built into the system and are easily exported to others programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

Document Repository. Documents can be uploaded and attached to an entry. There is no limit to the size or amount of files that can be attached. This feature provides an easy way to reference documents at a later time by the user or others, ultimately saving time and facilitating information sharing within an organization. For example, during a monthly meeting a user can log into TruServe and within minutes enter who was in attendance, what was discussed, and upload the minutes from the meeting where it will be saved to the server. Staff members anywhere in the world can then log into the system and download the minutes to view what was discussed at the meeting.

Security. Data is backed up twice a day on three separate servers located at three different locations on the University of North Dakota campus. A SSL Web Security Certification is used for the program which encrypts and secures data transactions. Access to the portal is password protected with only authenticated users given access. In case of termination of an agreement, UND will provide the contraction organization with a copy of the data inputted by users and will destroy all other copies of such data on all active server storage devices. The contraction organization owns its data at all times.

TruServe Support. At the launching point of TruServe, CRH staff may travel to the startup organization and provide up to one full business day of assistance. Training is also available via webinar. Assistance related to set up is facilitated via phone, webinar and e-mail prior to implementation.

The UND Center for Rural Health staff offers support for TruServe Monday through Friday during normal business hours (8am to 4:30pm CT). Support includes general product support, usage guidance, technical issues, trouble shooting, and organizational support related to implementation and sustainability. The system includes contact information on the home page including an on-site "super user" of the organization who is trained to handle day-to-day type of questions. A product manual and tutorial videos are also located on the homepage.