

RAND California - Vendor's Response

August 30, 1999

Response to California Community Colleges EAR Committee Review of RAND California
(ca.rand.org)

Prepared by Joe Nation, Director, RAND California.

I thank the members of the California Community Colleges EAR Committee for the time they spent reviewing RAND California. Please send additional comments to nation@rand.org or call 415/453/5086.

INFORMATION DATABASE

Comments in this area focused clarity and background information on the available databases. Specific comments included:

1 "The RAND online library however is not fulltext enough. Less than half the database is fulltext."
Response: As the site matures, more of this will be full text.

2. "I see no indication of how often data is updated and new data added."
Response: Each statistics form shows the date updated and the next scheduled update.

3. "What's included here is excellent information, assuming that one does not need national or international statistics, of course."
Response: We are adding national and other state data to the site and hope to move towards a "RAND USA" concept.

4. "There was no explanation of what certain abbreviated terms meant."
Response: Most databases now have explanatory pages or links to category definitions.

5. "The capability of ordering publications online will make any college librarian very nervous. I did not try but I certainly hope that it can be "passworded" in some way for student access."
Response: Users may order publications only if they provide a personal credit card.

SEARCH INTERFACE

Comments in this area focused on layout and search capabilities.

1. "This website is graphically challenged in a pretty big way."
Response: This is the first complaint about the graphics. Most appreciate the simple design, lack of frames, and consistent look across pages.

2. "My first (and continuing) response to the RAND California interface is that there is WAY too much text to read."

Response: We have tried to strike a reasonable balance between too much text and the need to explain the data.

3. "The design of the site should be intuitive enough that people don't have to read and read and read to find out what to do next."

Response: We have about 100,000 hits monthly now, and we receive only about 3 inquiries each month about the interface from users.

4. "Each database must then be searched separately."

Response: There is no efficient way to structure the "back end" to create one database given the size of each database. For example, our detailed trade database is about 4GB for only 2.5 years of data.

5. "The keyword searching available for California Policy Bulletins is case sensitive."

Response: This has been fixed.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES

Comments in this area focused on online help and contact procedures.

1. "The absence of any kind of online help would pose a significant problem for many if not most community college level students, particularly since they are not likely to read through all the text on the top level pages. Other than the "Sign our Guestbook" link on the top level page, I didn't see any indication of how one would contact Tech support or Customer support if help were needed."

Response: Online (i.e., email) help is available on the home page (ca.rand.org).

2. "I don't know if the vendor supplies training nor whether a telephone helpline is available."

Response: We will demonstrate this to sufficiently large groups. There also is a telephone contact on the home page.

COST

Comments focused on the additional cost for obtaining full-text RAND publications.

1. Some of the reports and documents indexed in RAND must be purchased. If there is to be a charge for access to the site, I believe that there should not be additional charges for the documents."

Response: Providing free reports is cost prohibitive.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

1. "It may have been a glitch at my end but for every search I did it took one minute or more (yes, I timed each one) to get the results. I hope mine was an isolated case, otherwise this is a problem!"

Response: Even the largest database can be searched in less than one second, so this must have been a

bandwidth issue on the user's end.

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