Many life sciences organizations have deployed Microsoft Office SharePoint Server-based collaborative portals for communication and data sharing. A collaborative portal can streamline the management of distributed scientific research. However, getting beyond the basics and using out-of-the-box features of this powerful software can be overwhelming. Following a planning and development process grounded in information services competencies can help information professionals build and support portals that are sustainable and usable collaborative research spaces.

**Planning for a Portal**

Start with a set of simple questions about collaborative work, communication, artifact organization and recall, and tracking activities to ascertain your user's needs:

- **Collaborative Work**
  - What are the structure and culture of your collaboration?
    - Relationships
    - Participant roles
    - Contacts
    - Locations
    - Meetings
    - Cultural preferences

- **Communication**
  - What requirements or goals exist for dissemination of information?
    - Announcements
    - Revision notes
    - Discussion board
    - Decision recording
    - E-mail
    - Wikis

- **Artifact Organization and Recall**
  - What are the products of your work?
    - Presentations
    - Publications
    - Documents
    - Images
    - Wikis
    - Posters

- **Tracking Activities**
  - What needs to be tracked and recorded in what format?
    - Calendar events
    - Approval records
    - Shipping records
    - Project management
    - MTAs
    - Reports
    - Milestones
    - Tasks

**Note:**
The overhead of collaboration is reduced by spreading the burden over an entire set of participants.

- Information resides in a centralized repository.
- A shared workspace builds community and trust.
- Contributing gives participants a sense of ownership of the collaboration output and fosters greater dedication.
- Tracking and recording of assets and artifacts is simpler and becomes a group responsibility.

**Wiki Pages and List Features**

- Create a wiki using basic wiki markup and HTML.
- All wiki pages are stored in a list items; manage items in bulk.
- Topic selection supports presentation of similar items.

**Collaborative Databases**

- Use for sharing complex sets of data and previewing relevant sets.
- Metadata provides category filters to drive views for users.
- Versioning captures changes for each record.

**Portal Development Process**

An Information Specialist leads the development of an effective information space by combining knowledge of the organization and project with expertise in information services, tools and technologies. Which technologies match the project and participants?

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