

Communities of Practice Guide



PHASE #1: Define

Whether just starting a CoP or reenergizing an existing CoP, it helps to start with a definition. The definition of your CoP will steer every major decision you make for and regarding your community. In some ways it is like a vision or mission statement. The action steps below will help you define your CoP. Remember – it may be best to reflect and plan as a group.

Define your purpose

Without clear purpose, people will have other, better defined priorities for their time and energy. People need to clarify what they are passionate about, where they need assistance, and where they have things to share. Consider researching how to write an organizational charter or mission statement as a guide for this process.

- What is your group's primary purpose?
- What specific needs will the community be organized to meet?
- What are the benefits to group members and stakeholders?

Notes:

Define your shared interest

Trekkies, Preschool teachers, small business owners, unicyclists – these can all be CoPs with the right level of action and engagement. CoPs are not just a network of people or a group of friends, but a group that shares both an interest and a commitment to that interest

- What is your group's shared interest?

Notes:

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Define your community

Without people and relationships, there is no community. Community members engage with one another, help each other and learn from one another. While CoPs typically begin organically, key stakeholders may emerge to lead or fund CoP activities. For example, a person may notice the need for a CoP, invite others to participate and find that 5 years later the CoP hosts an annual conference. That original person may label themselves “founder & CEO” of the CoP. CoPs might also benefit from paid administrators, especially if website management or meeting spaces are needed.

- Who are members of your group?
- Does your group have important stakeholders (i.e. funding or leadership roles)?
- How will community roles be defined (individuals, groups, group leaders, community administrators, etc.) and who will take them on?

Notes:

Define your practice

Community members are practitioners engaged in practice. Practice can range from practicing an instrument to teaching a certain topic or age group, to research to advising to management. Within a CoP, members swap stories, resources, and expertise. Members often use a common language surrounding the shared practice.

- What is your shared practice?

Notes:

