

# Communities of Practice Guide



## PHASE #2: Design

Once you have a clear sense of identity, it's time for your CoP to get busy. It is important that members of your CoP engage with one another in some meaningful way to swap stories, resources, and expertise. Your CoP design will determine member commitment and overall culture of your community. The action steps below will help you design your CoP. Remember – it may be best to reflect and plan as a group.

### Design Activities

CoPs are alive and active. CoP activities help establish a shared community identity. Activities may include weekly coffee talks, producing a newsletter, biannual online seminar, etc. Some CoPs are productive and content with fewer meetings and adding more meetings might hurt member retention. Some CoPs find that monthly meetings keep the energy flowing. If applicable, member recognition or awards might help boost energy and excitement.

- What kinds of activities will generate energy and support the emergence of community presence?
- What kinds of interactions (with each other and with the content of the community) will generate energy and engagement?
- Can you award members for outstanding contributions to your shared domain? Or award them for service to the CoP?

Notes:



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### Design CoP

#### Communication & Shared Resources

Your group is full of knowledge. That's why you are a CoP (or an aspiring CoP) – your members all specialize in the same domain through practice. Some CoPs benefit from online knowledge bases. Other CoPs generate journals or newsletters. Collaboration might be a key part of your CoP design. Perhaps CoP members share the same research interests and regularly team up on new, innovative studies

- How will members communicate on an ongoing basis to accomplish the community's primary purpose?
- How will community members collaborate with each other to achieve shared goals?
- What are the external resources (people, publications, reports, etc.) that will support the community during its initial development?
- How will members share these resources and gain access to them?

Notes:

### CoP Stories (Design)

This story is adapted from *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge* (Wenger, 2002). A CoP of librarians held an annual conference and introduced a shared website with an online discussion forum. During and shortly after the conference, members contributed questions and generated responses for one another. It was an active, vibrant online space for sharing. A few months later there was very little activity on in the online forum. Meanwhile, a community of engineers saw their online forum maintain small bursts of activity year-round. The engineers host weekly online sessions instead of an annual conference, so each week their members would read and post on the forum.