Developing a Community of Practice: A Checklist of Considerations

Forming the CoP

Ensure favorable group characteristics and clear reasons for forming CoP

- Work within a closed group in which all members have something in common
- Be explicit about the type of group being formed
- Recruit volunteer members/participants
- Work to obtain buy-in of participating agencies and organizations
- Convene the CoP promptly in funded projects to avoid missing window of opportunity
- Be clear about the purpose or objective and the expected outcomes of the group
- Understand the community and its members as well as its topic area and niche

Ensure that the CoP has needed resources to get started

- Plan platform for interacting in advance based on members’ needs and comfort level
- Select a platform (i.e., electronic, face-to-face) that is compatible with how members share
- Have multiple ways to share: conference line, meetings, discussion board, website, email
- Ensure needed technology support for electronic platforms
- Identify and support a CoP facilitator/coordinator to lead, guide, and gather input
- Identify funding to leverage time for people to attend training and engage in CoP activities
- Share physical activity standards, effective “how to” strategies for promoting physical activity, and other resources for promoting physical activity in practice

Engage in early strategies to build trust and cohesion

- Get and honor CoP member input about meeting logistics, topics, desired outcomes
- Have positive rules of participation and maintain etiquette
- Facilitate discussions that are relevant to participants’ experiences and expectations
- Identify and create linkages to existing groups that are already working in the area
- Strive to maintain a focus for the group to help maintain the sense of community

www.physicalactivityplan.org/projects/communitysofpractice
Structure the CoP to be self-governed with shared leadership and transparent operations
Convene an initial face-to-face meeting to provide member access to experts, networking, and to develop group trust and cohesion
Create a safe and noncompetitive space to share so that members are comfortable sharing needs as well as information and expertise

Maintaining an Effective CoP Over Time

Ensure CoP members participate and are engaged over time

Cultivate CoP champions beyond the sponsors or funded staff
Facilitator prompts responses, post resources, serves as caretaker, keeps members active
Develop some but not too much group infrastructure (committees, formalized roles, etc.)
Tap into local resources
Ensure the group has common goals/vision over time
Allow CoPs to grow and evolve over time with new ideas and opportunities
Expect active contribution (i.e., posting to discussions) to vary among members
Allow for participation on demand (e.g., to solve a periodic problem) rather than daily
Involve new people over time to replace those who drop out
Create space where members feel comfortable asking questions and ensure they get responses and feedback
Create resource for archiving and accessing resources, products, and other documents as appropriate to CoP purpose

Strive to maintain CoP effectiveness

Plan for regular meetings of group, committees, and subcommittees as appropriate
Foster interactions that result in inspiration and benefit at the individual level
Foster interactions that result in benefits at the CoP member organization level
Create space for stakeholders to connect, ask questions, and access resources
Expect CoP change over time; may need to examine identity, governance, and communication
Support development of group products consistent with CoP purpose such as an action plan, compendium of resources, reports, step-by-step approach to addressing physical activity issues, clearinghouses of physical activity resources or information
Ensure benefits for Individuals

- Ensure that participation is not burdensome time-wise
- Provide opportunities for members to understand the work and perspectives of others
- Provide opportunities for members to get new ideas, information and inspiration
- Provide opportunities for reflection
- Structure the CoP so individuals feel a sense of solidarity and commonality with others
- Provide technical assistance, training for skill development, as appropriate for CoP purpose
- Foster the development of professional identity for CoP members

Ensure benefits for the CoP Group (in addition to the individual benefits)

- Provide opportunities to share successes
- Provide opportunities to share scarce resources to achieve common goals
- Strive to establish a reputation for the CoP
- Structure the CoP to create a sense of community, cohesion, and belongingness
- Encourage relationships and linkages between members outside formal group
- Encourage development and implementation of joint projects within CoP
- Foster use of evidence-based practices, models, guidelines, policies and practices
- Promote the development of products that promote physical activity, as appropriate for CoP

Getting Feedback from Your CoP

Two-way communication and feedback are essential

- Conduct a needs assessment up front to understand group and individual needs
- Conduct a satisfaction survey (Does the CoP meet needs of group?)
- Enumerate product(s) produced on topic(s) of interest (when applicable)
- Assess peer-to-peer contacts/engagement outside of planned CoP meetings/events
- Conduct surveys periodically to get feedback and refine how CoP is run (What would make this CoP better or more useful?)
- Consider conducting a CoP evaluation