



Community of Practice

An Opportunity to Collaborate Beyond the Intersect Council

About Communities of Practice

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a craft and/or a profession, a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly, a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor.

The concept was first proposed by [cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave](#) and educational theorist [Etienne Wenger](#) in their 1991 book *Situated Learning* ([Lave & Wenger, 1991](#)). Wenger then significantly expanded on the concept in his 1998 book *Communities of Practice* ([Wenger, 1998](#)).

What makes a community of practice succeed depends on the purpose and objective of the community as well as the interests and resources of its members. Wenger identified seven actions that could be taken to cultivate communities of practice:

- Design the community to evolve naturally – Because the nature of a community of practice is dynamic, in that the interests, goals, and members are subject to change, CoP forums should be designed to support shifts in focus.
- Create opportunities for open dialogue within and with outside perspectives – While the members and their knowledge are the CoP's most valuable resource, it is also beneficial to look outside the CoP to understand the different possibilities for achieving their learning goals.
- Welcome and allow different levels of participation – Wenger identifies three main levels of participation. 1) The core group participates intensely in the community through discussions and projects. This group typically takes on leadership roles to guide the group. 2) The active group that attends and participates regularly, but not at the level of the leaders. 3) The peripheral group, while they are passive participants in the community, still learns from their level of involvement. Wenger notes that the third group typically represents the majority of the community.
- Develop both public and private community spaces – While CoPs typically operate in public spaces where all members share, discuss, and explore ideas, they should also offer private exchanges. Different members of the CoP could coordinate relationships among members and resources in an individualized approach based on specific needs.
- Focus on the value of the community – CoPs should create opportunities for participants to explicitly discuss the value and productivity of their participation in the group.
- Combine familiarity and excitement. CoPs should offer the expected learning opportunities as part of their structure and allow members to shape their learning experience together by brainstorming and examining the conventional and radical wisdom related to their topic.
- Find and nurture a regular rhythm for the community. CoPs should coordinate a thriving cycle of activities and events that allow members to meet regularly, reflect, and evolve. The rhythm, or pace, should maintain an anticipated level of engagement to sustain the community's vibrancy, yet not so fast-paced that it becomes unwieldy and overwhelming in intensity ([Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002](#)).

Intersect CoP Guidelines

1. Leadership

- a. All CoPs should have a Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary identified at the beginning of every calendar year. The Co-Chair will assume the Chair position at the start of the following calendar year.
- b. The CoP Chair and Co-Chair will commit to building the culture of the CoP.
- c. When determining candidates for the next Co-Chair or Secretary, the Chair and the Co-Chair will speak privately to members of the CoP to gauge interest and encourage candidates.
- d. The Chair is responsible for providing status updates on CoP activity to the Council as requested.
- e. One Intersect Council member will serve as a liaison to each CoP. The Council Liaison will provide guidance and leadership support to the Chair and Co-Chair as needed to ensure the continued progress of the CoP. The Liaison may also, from time to time, be asked to provide CoP updates to the Council.

2. Membership

- a. All Intersect Network Members, including Affiliates, are welcome to join any CoP by contacting the CoP Chair or the Intersect Scribe at intersectability@gmail.com.
- b. All Intersect Community Members can become a Chair, Co-Chair, or Secretary in a CoP.
- c. There is no limit to the number of members on each CoP.
- d. There is no limit to the number of members each organization may have on a CoP.

3. Meetings

- a. CoPs are expected to meet at least once a quarter, more if needed or desired.
- b. CoP meetings can be held virtually or in person at each CoP's discretion. Consider offering a teleconference option for in-person meetings.
- c. CoP meeting locations should rotate, and tours of the sites should be offered.
- d. The CoP Leadership is responsible for sending meeting invitations and ensuring all members receive invitations.
- e. Minutes are to be taken at each meeting and uploaded to the Collaboration Site database within two weeks of each meeting.
- f. CoP meeting attendance will be included in the meeting minutes, identifying each member's first and last name, organization, and presence or absence. Enter meeting attendance on the CoP Attendance Spreadsheet.
- g. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Intersect CoP meetings is limited to the CoP Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary, and solely to assist with meeting minutes. AI summaries may be pasted into the minutes; AI-generated summaries or recordings will not be shared directly with CoP members. All recordings should be deleted after the corresponding meeting minutes are completed.

4. Purpose and Goals of Intersect CoPs

- a. The CoPs are wonderful opportunities for staff to learn and grow from peers and mentors in their field. In that sense, we expect participation from the group's individuals and members to step up to leadership roles when needed.
- b. Each CoP can determine how they structure their meetings and yearly goals within a set of prescribed activities, including
 - i. Learning and Development,
 - ii. Projects, and
 - iii. Networking.
- c. The CoP's activities should focus on
 - i. The Intersect for Ability [Focus Areas & Areas of Interest](#), which represent the priorities of the Intersect Council for the year, or
 - ii. The top challenges within that CoP's domain of practice.

5. Intersect Collaboration Site

- a. All CoPs are expected to store their minutes and documents on the Collaboration Site, which will make them available to the entire Intersect Community.
- b. All CoP members are offered access to the Collaboration Site.
- c. All new members should be added to the CoP Rosters by contacting the Intersect Scribe at intersectability@gmail.com.

6. Organization Expectations

- a. Once a CoP is identified, organization participation is recommended.
- b. Agency management should be aware of the individual selected to attend the CoPs. As a leadership opportunity, organizations should send individuals willing to step up and take on new challenges when needed.
- c. Agency management should also check in with the individual to determine how the CoPs are progressing and if the individual is still a good fit for that CoP. If not, it might be time for a change.

7. Member Expectations

- a. Each member is expected to consistently attend the CoP and be an active participant in each meeting.
- b. CoPs are an excellent opportunity to gain leadership skills and learn to coordinate large groups in a welcoming and safe environment. All members are encouraged to take on leadership roles as Secretary, Co-Chair, or Chair of the CoP, lead discussions, or present new topics. We want all participants to benefit from the collaborative process offered by the CoPs. To create shared responsibility and success, rotating the Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary positions each year as designed is essential.
- c. If a CoP Member attends less than 50% of meetings in 12 months, the CoP Chair will forward the information to the Intersect Council Chair. The Intersect Council Chair will discuss with agency management whether a new member should be assigned to the CoPs.