



Peer Learning Communities

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Peer Learning Community Guide

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Why a PLC?

- Provide a model for connecting people in the spirit of learning, sharing knowledge, and collaborating
- Connect people within and across state agencies, online, across states; those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact
- Build understanding and insight about barriers to success and promising practices; solve challenging problems, and create new opportunities
- Vehicle for ongoing communication and self-reflection
- Platform for those with more experience to share with those beginning to learn. More experienced members of the PLC will learn from those with less experience about the challenges, issues, and questions that could inform their policies and practices
- Provide a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices

Principles of PLC Functioning

- Members will engage in *collaborative processes* and the free flow of ideas and exchange of information is encouraged.
- Participants will be encouraged to *actively participate* in conversation.
- Structure of the PLC must be consistent with what the research shows about best practices, and include a vision that the PLC will *ultimately be sustained by participants*.

Five principles for success

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Collective creativity
- Shared values and vision
- Supportive conditions
- Shared personal practice

Stages of a PLC: Start-up

- Identify opportunities, problems, and resources that will be beneficial to participants.
- Encourage facilitators and members to challenge one another on how the learning is being applied.
- Ask members to develop action plans for applying the learning, and commit to the group to move forward.

Stages of a PLC: Implementation

- Continue to engage members through regular calls or meetings.
- Meet in person at conferences or meetings that members regularly attend such as annual meetings and professional conferences.
- Begin calls or meetings with a short review of key objectives met to date, questions that the PLC is addressing, and objectives that were developed based on the last time the PLC convened.
- Establish a secure site that includes resources and links, to enable regular, easy sharing of documents, questions and materials among members.
- Members should share action plans that have been developed and reflect on progress and lessons learned to date.

Stages of a PLC: Sustaining

- Leadership and facilitation shift mainly to the membership of the PLC, with logistical and resource support from the sponsoring organization.
- Promote regular reflection of progress and lessons learned, in a range of venues (in person, online etc.)
- Encourage and mentor new/other members.

Key Steps, Activities, and Considerations

Consider:

- the range of stakeholders who will be involved and schedule to suit needs of majority.
- interests/issues of concern of stakeholders and focus on most relevant.
- technology and space needs for meetings (resources, materials, skilled facilitators) and ensure they are in place.

Resources - Articles

- Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., & Wallace, M., with Greenwood, A., Hawkey, K., Ingram, M., Atkinson, A., & Smith, M. (2005). Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities. Research Report No 637. Annesley, Nottingham: University of Bristol. Retrieved from http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/images/Creating%20and%20Sustaining%20PLCs_tcm4-631034.pdf
- Cambridge, D., Kaplan, S., & Suter, V., (2006). Step-by-step guide for designing and cultivating communities of practice. Educause. Retrieved from: <https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/NLI0531.pdf>
- Wenger, E. & Synder, W.M. (2000). Communities of practice—The organizational frontier. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from http://itu.dk/people/petermeldgaard/B12/lektion%207/Communities%20of%20Practice_The%20Organizational%20Frontier.pdf
- Wirth, R., A. (2006). Employee development within a framework of communities of practice. Entarga.com Retrieved from <http://www.entarga.com/km/PeerLearningCoP.pdf>

Resources: Websites

- Etienne Wenger is considered the “father” of the community of practice. This is the resource site for [Wenger-Trayner](#), an organization that specializes in organizational and social learning strategies.
- [Brief Introduction to Communities of Practice](#). This page has easily accessible information on the definition of communities, what they look like in practice, and how and where they are being used. There are links to many other resources, including additional articles by Wenger.
- [SEDL's](#) page on professional learning communities provides a number of links about learning communities, as well as very thorough information on the five main characteristics of a learning community: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.

Resources: FastFact

[CEELO Peer Learning Community Guide](#)

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