Communities of Practice Details

What is a Community of Practice?

With support from The California Endowment [1], the Your Voice initiative of DiversityRx sponsored Communities of Practice (CoPs) for health care professionals, policymakers, advocates, researchers, and others who work in the field of cultural and linguistically competent health care. The first five Communities of Practice (CoPs) each had 10-15 members and met for 6-12 months on the following topics:

- Cultural competence training
- Policy for state-level policy-makers and advocates
- Collecting and using demographic data to improve care and reduce health disparities
- CLAS management issues for those implementing and managing CLAS and diversity programs
- Cultural patient support

A Your Voice Community of Practice ‘meets’ monthly on a specific topic through teleconference or virtual learning platforms to discuss common practice challenges and share information about strategies and resources. The group is supported by a listserv for ongoing dialogue between meetings and a wiki where the collective knowledge of the group is documented over the course of the project for use by others. After the formal Your Voice sponsorship ends the groups may continue to meet after that, as interest and funding permit.

We created Communities of Practice because people are the best sources of useful, actionable information. People have experiential knowledge that is not often found in a book. One person can share how they handled a situation, which may enable another avoid mistakes and shorten the learning curve. In a Community of Practice, members can openly discuss and brainstorm about a project which can lead to new achievements.

Ten Reasons to Join a Community of Practice

- Reduce professional isolation by connecting with people like you across the nation
- Learn from the real-life experiences of professionals doing the same kind of work
- Find out about resources, tools, and strategies that can help your organization
- Make new connections between ideas and generate innovative approaches to common challenges
- Have a safe space to discuss issues that arise in your work and get the perspectives of others
- Engage in collaborative problem-solving
- Get some morale-boosting encouragement and support from colleagues facing similar challenges
- Help others move forward – and not recreate the wheel – by sharing the approaches that work for you
- Get recognition for your organization’s efforts by sharing your successes through blogs, websites, and wikis
- Build a knowledge base that can benefit others outside the group
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How a Community of Practice Works

Individuals apply to participate in a Community according to their interest and experience. The group of participants is then selected by the moderator and the Your Voice team. Working from the general theme and the issues raised by participants in their applications, a list of potential discussion topics is presented to the group. With the moderator, the group decides on a working agenda of topics to address for each monthly meeting and a mutually agreeable monthly meeting time. Before the first meeting, participants receive background information about the group members, guidance about how to use the virtual meeting and communication tools, and an agenda for the year.

The first session is devoted to introductions and a discussion of hopes and concerns for the group. A brief technical session takes place before the first full session so that everyone understands how to use the technology involved.

Subsequent sessions start with a brief presentation by a designated member, followed by discussion on that topic, and discussion of related topics, as time allows.

Between monthly meetings, community participants continue to interact with each other through an email discussion list. During the course of the project, community members make brief contributions to public blogs and help Your Voice staff develop an online resource where the information gathered and lessons learned from the community can be shared with others.

Working with the moderator and Your Voice staff, participants in a Community of Practice may agree to adapt this model, the discussion topics, or the interaction options to suit the needs and the interests of the group.

Selection Criteria

- Current professional involvement in the specified topic
- Quality of responses to questions about current work interests, contributions, and challenges related to the topic
- The complementarity of those responses with those of other potential members
- Overall geographic diversity
- Mix of newcomers and old-hands
- Willingness to abide by the Conditions of Participation

Conditions of Participation

Individuals selected to participate in a Community of Practice agree to

- Provide written approval of participant’s immediate supervisor within one week of tentative acceptance into the group
- Commit to participate for the full course of the group
- Actively participate in monthly teleconferences and online meetings (60-90 minutes per month)  
  Contribute one 15-minute discussion launch on a theme or topic relevant to my institution during the project period —or—
- Contribute at least one short blog posting to DiversityRx website on a topic discussed by the community of practice
- Participate in the listserv and blog discussions between meetings at least twice a month

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Share information, case examples, tools, resources, institutional documents, commentaries for the collective knowledge database

- Agree that information that is of personal, proprietary, or a confidential nature may not be communicated to anyone outside the community without the explicit permission of the individuals or organizations involved.

Keep informed about future Communities of Practice by joining our email list [2]. Learn about our other peer networks, the Your Voice Peer Learning Networks > > [3]

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