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Building a Community of Practice to Improve Dissemination of Disability Research

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Building a Community of Practice to Improve Dissemination of Disability Research



In 2022, the Center on Knowledge Translation for Employment Research launched a Community of Practice (CoP) for NIDILRR disability employment grantees. The focus of the CoP was “Using Social Media Effectively for Research Dissemination.”

What is a Community of Practice?

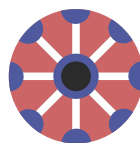
A Community of Practice (CoP) brings together “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.”¹

CoPs are flexible, informal groups that encourage the sharing of knowledge among members to advance practice. When done well, CoPs provide a unique opportunity for peers to learn from each other and solve mutual problems in a collegial, supportive atmosphere. The focus may be on a professional discipline, a specific skill, or a topic.

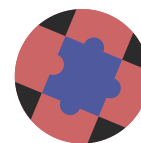
Three important characteristics distinguish a Community of Practice from other groups:



1. The domain is the shared focus or topic of interest. This is what the group will address in its work and should be something that motivates the members to participate.



2. The community is built by the relationship and interaction of the members. Coming together to share similar and different experiences and problems helps create the community.



3. The practice is the new skills and knowledge shared and applied by the members as they seek to learn, solve problems or create new ideas together.²

How Did We Do It? A Case Study

A Community Built Across the Silos — “S.M.A.R.T. Social Media for Employment Research Dissemination”

Under the theme “S.M.A.R.T. Social Media for Employment Research Dissemination,” CeKTER conducted a survey among NIDILRR disability research grantees, revealing a collective desire to enhance their social media effectiveness.

Following the 4E Model of training intensity, we began with a 2-part webinar series on this topic. Participants gained **Exposure** to the topic in the first session and the opportunity in the second session to **Experience** some practical application of new skills. The extension of this webinar series was our Community of Practice where members focus on developing **Expertise** in this area and **Embedding** of newly acquired skills into their organizations’ daily practices.^{3&4}



Launching Our Community

We invited knowledge translation personnel who had attended the webinar via email marketing and social media posts. Meetings were coordinated by a CeKTER employee, with another team member handling administrative tasks.

- Initial gatherings included introductions, knowledge level assessments, and establishing a baseline for discussion.
- Subsequent sessions involved sharing current practices, exchanging platform-specific tips, and reviewing strategies.
- CoP members applied new knowledge to their social media dissemination and over time members saw tangible, positive results.

How We Conduct Our CoP

- The content of a CoP should be driven by its members so they derive the most benefit from it. Topics may evolve as members ask, “what about xyz?” It is an opportunity to continue to learn as a group in a changing environment. Future meetings can be set up to talk about the new topics.
- Monthly Meetings are a blend of meeting types to maintain interest.
 - Guest speakers on a specific topic (chosen by the members).
 - Pre-planned topics of learning from each other.
 - “Ask me anything”/open meetings which are community-building-and-connecting meetings (many topics brought up here become organized guest speaker meetings in the future).
- Engagement is high because our topics are driven by attendees. Everyone is polled regularly for new topics to discuss and cover.
- There is much interaction among attendees, and everyone is given a turn to share.
- When topics are pre-planned and/or include a guest speaker, we will invite the larger audience of all NIDILRR employment grantees. This encourages them to join us for specific topics that interest them and oftentimes these attendees become members as they find value in the meetings.
- Our CoP on social media dissemination broadened, based on member input, to include topics such as video creation, podcast integration, email platform comparisons, AI utilization in KT, LinkedIn usage, and short-form video strategies.

What Creates a Successful CoP?

Key factors include:

- A strong sense of community fostered by consistent attendance and active participation.
- Designated facilitator and administrative roles to manage meetings effectively.
- A supportive environment for questions and feedback, promoting confidence and trust among members.
- Defined meeting types tailored to the group's preferences and needs.
- Member-driven topic selection and ongoing input through informal solicitation of feedback to ensure relevance and engagement.

Key Takeaways

- Designate roles for facilitation and administration within the CoP.
- Define topics based on member input and share them in advance.
- Ensure everyone's voice is heard and questions are addressed.
- Customize meeting formats to suit the group's dynamics and goals.

Resources

Creating a “Community of Practice” on Transition Age Youth & Young Adults with Serious Mental Health Conditions in Northeast Massachusetts

<https://repository.escholarship.umassmed.edu/handle/20.500.14038/45467>

Building a Community of Practice to Support Young Adults with Serious Mental Health Conditions

https://repository.escholarship.umassmed.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.14038/44214/Building_A_Community_of_Practice.pdf

Community of Practice Development Manual: A Step-By-Step Guide for Designing and Developing a Community of Practice

https://ktdrr.org/resources/rush/copmanual/CoP_Manual.pdf

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