6 CoP Facilitator Tasks That Can Create a Sense of Community and an Environment that is Welcoming

Nancy Dixon, Common Knowledge Associates

I have been implementing Communities of Practice (CoP) since around 2000. As I have helped organizations design their own CoPs, I have learned a great deal about how to make them a real force for change and collaboration. One of the most important things I have learned is that **it is the community facilitators who set the tone and spirit for a community** – that make it a place where members feel a part of something larger than self.

This is list of what I ask facilitators to do to create that environment:

1. Facilitating On-line Conversation

- Facilitate the answering of questions in a timely manner – if no one responds to a question, reach out to members of your own personal network to get the question answered
- When a member asks a question that is not clear, contact him or her to see if you can be helpful in clarifying what is wanted
- Welcome new members (make a personal call to get acquainted with them and show that you are interested in them)
- Go back to the question asker to find out "what happened next" after he or she got a lot of responses. Ask him or her to post the results to let members know their effort was worthwhile.
- Have a quiet conversation with people who write inappropriate posts

2. Providing Recognition

- Express appreciation to members (by email or phone) who write a great response or really useful question
- Develop awards for members (e.g. best success story, top contributor, generosity award, etc.)

3. Connecting Members

- Fill out your own profile in a way that models openness and friendliness (a smiling picture helps)
- Encourage members to put up their own profiles to help members get acquainted with each other

- Feature members on the home page (interview them, write up the interview and post with their picture)
- Arrange monthly on-line events (speakers, interviews with experts, problem solving sessions). It helps members get to know each other better and to feel a part of the whole.
- Schedule and hold in-person events for community members (story telling sessions, speed consulting, knowledge cafes, etc.) either in a periodic community meeting or as part of another meeting or training session
- Create an on-boarding package for new members

4. Promoting Content

- Write blog posts about interesting ideas you've had or articles you've read and/or encourage other members to write when they tell you about an interesting perspective they have
- Advance content from the discussion to vetted content
- Review content for needed updates or to remove content that is out-of-date.
- Consolidate responses to a question when that would be useful to the community or ask the question asker to do so
- Highlight new content on the home page (a brief summary of a document, # of likes a piece of content has, etc.)

5. Market the Community

- Market the community to potential members (speak at meetings, brown bags, orientation meetings, etc.)
- Collect success stories and feature them on the home page to market the community and to attract new members
- Provide success stories to the executive management committee. When they have good stories to tell they are great marketers for the community.
- Maintain a calendar of events for the community, both internal events and outside events.

6. Continuous Improvement

- Continually seek member feedback about what the network should be doing (polls, interviews, chats, etc.)
- Periodically interview members of the community to learn what the issues of the community are and what the community can do to help them deal with those issues.
- Periodically review community metrics to see how the community is doing and where you need to focus your attention and energy. (have the # of downloads gone down? fewer new members?)
- Obtain support (funds for a meeting, a conference room, a new on-line feature for your community, a new core team member) for community activities.