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Site Coordinator Community of Practice Guide Book

“ I am so happy that this ‘movement’ was started. I have taken away so many ideas and resources that I know will greatly improve our program.

Community of Practice Participant

A project of the California AfterSchool Network
With support of the California Department of Education
Expanded Learning Division



CONTENTS

What is a Community of Practice?	3
Why Create a Site Coordinator Community of Practice?	4
How to Implement a Site Coordinator Community of Practice	6
Results of the Site Coordinator Community of Practice	10
Impact of the Site Coordinator Community of Practice	11
Strengthening the Model	13
Acknowledgements	15

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<http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/site-coordinator-community-practice>

What is a Community of Practice?

The term, “Communities of Practice” was first used in 1991 by social theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger.¹ A Community of Practice (CoP) can be defined as, “a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas strategies, determine solutions, and build innovations.” A more simplified definition is that a CoP is, “A group of people who share a concern or passion for what they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

The three components of a CoP are:

1. **Shared domain or interest.** The Site Coordinator CoP Pilot domain is a group of After School Education and Safety (ASES) and/or 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program Site Coordinators who share a concern

of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) in their program.

2. **Community.** ASES and 21st CCLC Site Coordinators will come together to “interact and engage in shared activities, help each other, and share information with each other.” Relationships are foundational to an effective CoP, and participation can result in supportive connections that can sustain beyond the CoP. Therefore, the participants in the Site Coordinator CoP must commit to attending all scheduled meetings.
3. **Practice.** The Site Coordinator CoP Pilot will be made up of Site Coordinator practitioners that share and/or develop resources including promising practices and strategies, helpful tools, and ways of addressing common challenges. This interaction and exchange develops over time.

Why Create a Site Coordinator Community of Practice?

Have you ever attended a workshop or conference and, even though the training was valuable, the biggest takeaway came from a quick hallway conversation where a colleague shared a resource or innovation with you? This is the essence of a CoP. CoPs combine the best of both worlds. Participants

will receive professional development, but they won't have to rush or duck out of the room to have those invaluable hallway conversations. Learning from others, and sharing knowledge and innovative ideas is an essential part of the experience.



1 Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Traynor (2015). Introduction to Communities of Practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses. Retrieved June 2016 from <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

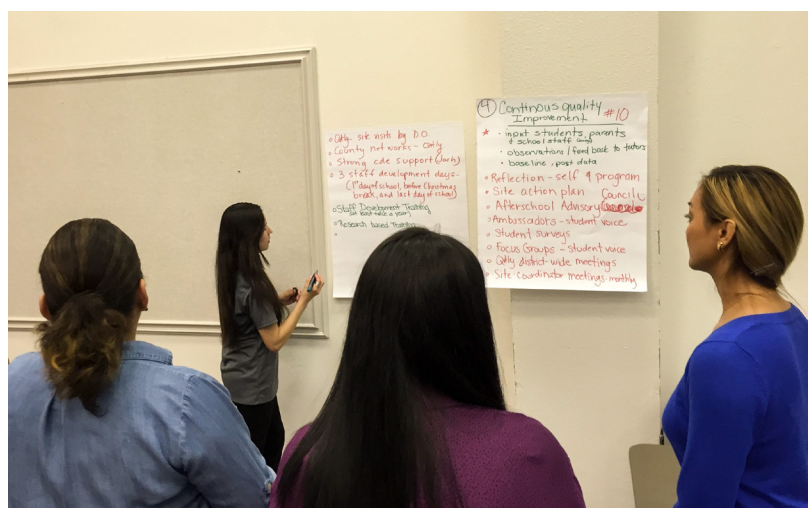
Share Promising Practices Across Program Contexts

CoPs offer participants the opportunity to learn innovative practices by facilitating collaborative interaction across school district, agency, and program contexts. Many participants indicated this was one of the most useful components of the CoP. After one year of participation, one participant highlighted that “the opportunity to network with other sites, sharing promising practices, and getting new ideas” was a particularly useful aspect of participation. Many participants indicated that peer collaboration offered them new strategies, information, and “ideas to help me enhance my program as well as become a better site lead.” Many indicated that their site-level practice would be positively impacted by their participation.

CoPs allow participants to have organic conversations about their practice, and create opportunities to learn new innovations. In one CoP meeting, participants were discussing promising practices related to youth voice and leadership. During the conversation, a participant shared that one challenge for youth voice and leadership was that middle school participants were leaving the program early due to hunger. Another participant offered a suggestion and a resource to address that issue, the Child and Adult Care Food Program At Risk After School Meal Program. CoP facilitators were able to quickly provide access to information about the meal program and by the next CoP meeting the site was participating in the program. This example illustrates the immediate impact on site-level practice when Site Coordinators are offered opportunities for peer learning and knowledge transfer.

Surface and Address Common Challenges and Needs

CoPs provide a forum for participants to surface common challenges and share strategies to address them. Many participants indicated this was a valuable aspect of their participation in the CoP. CoP evaluations indicated that “Being able to share site specific challenges with the CQI and collaborating to come up with solutions to tackle issues” was a particularly useful aspect of the experience. Another participant highlighted, “I really enjoyed being able to see the roadblocks, solutions and needs we created as a group.” CoPs create the conditions for participants to surface common needs and share resources and information to address them. One participant found it particularly useful to find “agreement with fellow staff on building better programs and sharing the tools we need.”



Facilitators of CoPs have the unique opportunity to learn challenges and needs directly from a cross section of regional Site Coordinators. The information learned through facilitation of CoPs is invaluable data to support future Technical Assistance efforts targeting Site Coordinators.

Participants found value and relevance in the opportunity to express their needs as indicated by one evaluation response stating, “We may not be here years from now but we hope our concerns make others jobs easier in the future.”

Increase Participant Knowledge & Understanding of Continuous Quality Improvement

The Domain for the Site Coordinator CoP Pilot was the Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California and CQI. The CoP allowed participants to learn and explore these concepts together. Evaluations of the CoP illustrate that participation in the CoP increased knowledge and understanding of the Quality Standards, and that participants learned promising practices related to the elements of the standards. CoP evaluations also indicated that participation in the CoP increased participant knowledge and confidence related to the CQI process and provided them with resources to support site-level planning. One participant evaluation indicated that it was particularly useful to receive “clarification of what CQI is all about and no longer feeling overwhelmed and lost.” The CoP allowed participants the time to explore and dialogue about the Quality Standards and the CQI process. Many cited what they learned about the CQI process as a particularly useful aspect of participation.

CoP participants walked away with more than knowledge of the concept of CQI, but a clearer understanding of how to implement CQI in practice. One evaluation noted, “I learned what an action

plan based on the CQI should really look like.” Other evaluations illustrate that participation in the CoP increased efficacy around CQI, including one participant that proclaimed, “(the) CQI process is actually easier than I thought!” Additionally, participants of the CoP gained understanding of the low-stakes for high impact intent of the CQI requirement, and how unanticipated outcomes surfaced through the implementation of their plan can drive program improvements. One participant noted that, “Failure is only an opportunity to succeed and grow!”

Create a Collaborative and Supportive Community of Site Coordinators

Through the facilitation of the CoP it became clear that many participating Site Coordinators came into the experience with a feeling of isolation, and participants benefited greatly by interacting with individuals with similar experiences. Participants enjoyed learning from and sharing information with one another. One participant noted that they particularly enjoyed “Getting to talk with other Site Coordinators! (I) Loved hearing new ideas and realizing that a lot of our struggles are similar.”

“The extra support around the (Continuous Quality Improvement) CQI process was very helpful. I love that we were walked through the process”

“[This] made me feel like my job is important, thank you!”

This notion of simply, “knowing we aren’t alone” was repeatedly surfaced in evaluations of the CoP. One participant stated, “The collaboration involved at these meetings was of great benefit to me. The sharing of others’ experiences and ideas really helped me understand I am not the only one facing these issues.” Chances to share promising practices, challenges, and needs allowed participants the opportunity for “having support from other colleagues.” Participation in the CoP helped participants feel their positions were valued and supported. Participants felt reassured that the challenges they were experiencing were shared, and enriched by hearing how others had addressed similar issues across program contexts.



How to Implement a Site Coordinator Community of Practice

Goals, Objectives and Activities

The goal of the CoP was to increase Site Coordinator knowledge and capacity to implement a CQI process. Participating Site Coordinators committed to participating in five (4.5 hour) meetings in 2016 and 2017. Over the course of five meetings Site Coordinators learned current information related to Quality Standards, CQI, and available Technical Assistance. Perhaps more importantly Site Coordinators had the opportunity to learn and share promising practices with their peers. Through the implementation of this pilot CAN surfaced site-level promising practices, successes, challenges, and needs to successfully implement a CQI process. These activities that target Site Coordinators will complement existing efforts to provide information to the field regarding the most recent rollout of the (CQI)².

Below are the goals, objectives and activities designed for the implementation of the pilot Site Coordinator CoP.

Goals: Increase Site Coordinator knowledge and capacity to implement a CQI process.

Objectives:

- Inform Site Coordinators on current information related to Quality Standards, CQI, and available technical assistance resources.
- Provide participatory peer learning opportunities allowing participants to learn and share strategies related to the Quality Standards and CQI.
- Surface promising practices, successes, challenges, and needs of Site Coordinators to effectively implement a CQI process.

Activities: In order to accomplish the project objectives, CAN implemented five Site Coordinator CoP meetings over 2 years in four regions. Each meeting contained new content and provided participatory peer learning opportunities. Local System of Support for Expanded Learning teams selected to participate had the opportunity to provide input to how the meetings can be designed to meet local needs and compliment existing work plan items. In order to ensure engaged participation CAN provided coffee, light morning refreshments, as well as lunch (using non-CDE funds). Timing for each CoP meeting was 4.5 hours (e.g.,

8:30am – 1pm; 9am – 1:30pm; 9:30am – 2pm). As needed, CoP meetings were scheduled on Saturdays.

Site Coordinator Community of Practice Meeting Planning Considerations

Planning a successful CoP includes thinking about logistics for each meeting, the participants perspective and creating a timeline for implementation. Logistics for a meeting can make or break it for participants. Choose a location that has ample space for the participants to sit comfortably and engage with the meeting in a meaningful way. When choosing a location, make sure to choose a place that has additional space for the teambuilding activities. During the Site Coordinator CoP the team building activities were often facilitated outdoors, in an empty space, parking lot, or grass area. If using the outdoors for teambuilding make sure to consider all safety hazards and designating someone as the safety monitor for the activity. The indoor meeting space needs to include plenty of empty walls for flipcharts and group discussions. Lastly, make sure the meeting room has space for a materials table, presenter table, and refreshments table.

Implementing a Community of Practice

RECRUITING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PARTICIPANTS

The first step in implementing a CoP is recruitment of participants. It is important to be clear in the expectations and purpose of a CoP for both the participants and their supervisors. CAN developed recruitment materials to explain the purpose, expectations, details and desired outcomes for the meetings for Site Coordinators and for Program Directors. CAN also created an application for participants, which was used to create the rosters for each region. An introductory phone call with Program Directors can be a helpful tool to gain buy-in from supervisors to support their Site Coordinator's participation in the CoP. CAN worked with the System of Support in each local region to recruit a diverse group of participants from multiple counties and programs. The purpose behind a CoP is allowing for participants to work together and learn from each other, so recruitment is key to the successful implementation of a CoP.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETING DETAILS

Following is an overview of the content of each meeting. Meetings were facilitated by CAN staff with a strong background in expanded learning and experience with site/program coordination and program monitoring.

Year One, Meeting One

- Teambuilding and creating a cohort
- Overview: Expanded Learning in CA, Quality Standards and CQI
- Focused discussion: promising practices related to the Quality Standards

Year One, Meeting Two

- Teambuilding continued
- Focused discussion: Strategies and challenges in the implementation of a CQI process
- Overview: Resources and Technical Assistance available to support a CQI process

Year One, Meeting Three

- Teambuilding continued
- Overview: The future of CQI
- Focused discussion: Successes, challenges, and future needs of Site Coordinators to implement a site-level CQI process

Year Two, Meeting One

- Teambuilding and creating a cohort (building on the work done in year one meetings)
- Review: Context, Background and History of the Quality Standards and overview of CQI: Assess, Plan and Improve
- Focused discussion around CQI Challenges and Successes

Year Two, Meeting Two

- Teambuilding continued
- Regional success stories around CQI implementation
- Gathering data through consensus workshop: Site Coordinator challenges, solutions and needs

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETING PURPOSE WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

CoP meetings were designed with significant time for participants to get to know each other and work together. During the first meeting it is important to create a safe space to share and discuss topics that are often stressful and can be uncomfortable. This first meeting really sets the stage for the CoP.

Meetings began with a general overview of the CoP and icebreaker activities intended to help participants get to know each other and establish relationships. This was followed by a proposal and discussion of CoP Community Agreements. These agreements are essential for any group and help to create a foundation to build from. The group agreements for this CoP are as follows and were used in all five meetings:

Play Safe

- Physical and emotional safety
- Respectful of self and others

Play Fair

- Be fair to yourself, true to your experience, real about your limitations
- Play by the rules, meet the expectations

Play Hard

- Be here; commit
- Playing hard means different things to different people. Sometimes its hard for some to step up, sometimes its hard for others to step back. Sometimes it's hard to share a fantastic practice that you have because you are not great at self-promotion. Sometimes it's hard to be vulnerable and authentic about challenges you are facing. Challenge yourself to play hard through the process.

At the start of each year we wanted to create depth and meaning for participants. Following relationship building, agreements and logistics, the CoP began with reflection and gratitude for the important work of Site Coordinators. CoP facilitators utilized videos that brought the voice of practitioners and students into the room. The "Ode to the Site Coordinator"² was shared in the first meeting of the first year, and

2 Access the Ode to the Site Coordinator at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGQISLmdV5I>

“Student Voices: the future of school”³ in the first meeting of the second year.

The “Ode” expresses gratitude to Site Coordinators and an understanding of the challenges they face, while illuminating the passion they have in service to children, schools, families, and communities. “Student Voices” features high school youth describing their current experience of school and what they would dream the future of schools to be. The video allows facilitators to highlight how Site Coordinators emulate



Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California while they create the kinds of learning opportunities students yearn for.

TEAMBUILDING

Structured time for teambuilding was incorporated into every meeting to foster a sense of camaraderie, levity, and fun among participants. Activities were chosen that required setting a goal, working as a team, and team communication to accomplish the objective of the activity. This provided an additional opportunity for facilitators to utilize the teambuilding activities to make connections to implementing effective CQI processes.

“I like all the teambuilding activities, interactions and collaborating.”

All these activities serve multiple purposes:

- Build a sense of team and community
- Create an environment of levity and fun
- Make linkages to the CQI process
- Provide a replicable activity participants can integrate into their programs

“Thank you for the team building activities especially! Definitely bringing today’s back to my site.”

Because one of the major goals of the first meeting is to build community or “create the cohort” more time was spent in the first meeting on teambuilding than any other meeting. An activity titled “Have you Ever” was utilized for participants to learn about one another in a risk-free way. Additionally, an activity titled “PLM” was chosen because it is an activity that requires communication, a team focus on a goal, and builds trust among participants. In subsequent meetings activities were chosen such as “Islands in the Stream” and “raccoon circles” among others that focus on a specific goal, require effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving among all team members. Another activity, “the Marshmallow Challenge” was also accompanied by a Ted Talk that outlines the relationship with low stakes challenges and high impact implementation. This activity and video reinforce that the CQI process was designed with the intention to be low-stakes for high-impact. Teambuilding activities support multiple objectives of the CoP because they foster relationships and community among participants while making specific linkages to the conditions necessary to implement an effective CQI process.

“I always love participating in the teambuilding activities.”

Any time teambuilding activities are implemented it is important to remind the group of the Community Agreements (Play Safe, Play Fair, Play Hard). Specifically, it is important to remind participants about the agreement to play safe with others and one’s self. It is important for facilitators to remind participants of the agreement to be fair with themselves about what

3 Access Student Voices: the Future of School at <https://vimeo.com/155339834>



they feel comfortable participating in. For example, one activity that was utilized involves two individuals attempting to accomplish a challenge while one of the participants is blindfolded. It is important for facilitators of teambuilding activities to create a safe place for individuals uncomfortable with the activity as designed to opt out of the activity, or participate consistent with their comfort level and physical ability.



INCORPORATION OF EXTERNAL EXPERTISE

No facilitator comes equipped with all the knowledge and content expertise that participants may need. In order to ensure participants understand the content of the Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California and the CQI process, CoP facilitators utilized videos featuring content experts at the California Department of Education's Expanded Learning Division and Ted Talks highlighting

additional expertise including promising practices on Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and the relationship between low stakes and high impact implementation.

PEER INTERACTION

The heart of a Community of Practice is the interaction of the community of practitioners. As part of the CoP, Site Coordinators reviewed the Quality Standards for Expanded Learning and made meaning of them through discussion of how the Standards come alive on their sites. Participants learned about the process of creating a CQI plan for their site and discussed the elements they might include in their Site-level plans. Participants worked through a facilitated process to surface their current successes, challenges, and needs. In doing so, participants learned practices they can integrate into their program from one another. Potentially of even greater impact, they gained a hopeful perspective when they learned their challenges were shared, and they were not alone.

"The team building was fun and not the same old team building activities I see at trainings."

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Successes, Challenges, and Needs Surfaced Through the CoP

Through the process of this CoP the facilitators collected information regarding the challenges Site Coordinators face, potential solutions to those challenges and what needs they have to be successful. Below are some of the themes that developed through this process of the meetings.

A majority of Site Coordinator participants highlight a desire to effectively partner with their K-12 partners and through the CQI process they are seeing some successes.

"This process has created buy-in and even more opportunities for collaboration with our school day stakeholders as well as an understanding of what our program truly strives to accomplish!"

"We use feedback from teachers, admin, students and parents to create quality programming that fits the needs of the community."

Site Coordinators are seeking ways to orient, train and motivate their staff.

"We need adequate training, materials and staff that are willing to learn about and implement improvement plans around the standards. Support from administrators, coordinators, teachers, parents, etc."

"I feel that the challenges we face are training staff and making sure that our staff has an understanding of what is expected to be a quality program."

"My staff is not familiar with the standards or CQI Process. Professional Development and additional training regarding the standards, program quality should be enforced everywhere."

Site Coordinators struggle with time and capacity to meet the needs of their site and communities.

"Site Coordinators are not given enough time to write, implement, and ensure plans are done properly."

"The greatest challenge would be having the time needed to properly train staff to implement the standards at a quality level."

"Having the time, training, and manpower in order to effectively implement a CQI process."

Top Five Site Coordinator Needs Around CQI Implementation

1. Information on new requirements to create site-level CQI plans
2. A resource (e.g. guidebook) on how to implement a CQI process
3. Training on how to create site-level CQI plans
4. Training on how to implement a CQI process
5. Promising practice/information on how others have successfully implemented a CQI process

Impact of the Site Coordinator Community of Practice

The California Afterschool Network conducted the Site Coordinator CoP Pilot Meetings in Regions 2, 8, 9, and 10. The following results are based on the evaluations, which were conducted at the end of each of the five meetings in each region. Based on these submissions, the results were as follows.

Year 1, Meeting 1

115 Participants.

97% indicated increased knowledge of Quality Standards.

Knowledge of quality standards before and after meeting 1 of the CoP:

	Low	Medium	High
Before	21%	69%	10%
After	0%	50%	50%

"It was great and empowering to know that we all have similar struggles and challenges."

97% indicated increased knowledge of promising practices.

99% agreed teambuilding activities were an effective vehicle for positive interactions with colleagues.

99% agreed the meeting provided them with applicable information or practices

Year 1, Meeting 2

112 Participants.

96% indicated increased confidence in implementing a CQI process.

Understanding of the CQI process before and after meeting 2 of the CoP:

	Low	Medium	High
Before	18%	75%	7%
After	0%	50%	50%

"This meeting really clarified the proper way to fill out the improvement plan."

97% agreed they were provided with resources to support a site-level CQI plan.

97% agree they had the opportunity to learn about CQI from others in their region.

96% agreed the meeting provided them with applicable information or practices

Year 1, Meeting 3

95 Participants.

99% indicated increased knowledge of quality standards.

99% indicated increased confidence in implementing a data-driven CQI process.

99% agreed they were provided with resources to support a site-level CQI plan.

99% agreed the meeting allowed them to share the challenges and needs of Site Coordinators

"My level of familiarity with the Quality Standards increased significantly after having attended the trainings in the last few months. I know what the standards are and I know how to go about setting a goal for my school site to better those standards — now I just have to put everything into action!"

Year 2 Meeting 1

94 Participants.

99% indicated increased understanding of the CQI process

Knowledge of Quality Standards before and after meeting 1 of the CoP:

	Low	Medium	High
Before	19%	69%	17%
After	0%	38%	62%

"It was a more in depth look into the CQI process."

98% indicated increased knowledge of promising practices.

98% agreed teambuilding activities were an effective vehicle for positive interactions with colleagues.

97% agreed the meeting provided them with applicable information or practices

Year 2 Meeting 2

73 Participants.

100% indicated increased knowledge of quality standards.

100% indicated increased confidence in implementing a data-driven CQI process.

100% agreed they were provided with resources to support a site-level CQI plan.

100% agreed the meeting allowed them to share the challenges and needs of Site Coordinators

"The collaboration involved at these meetings was of great benefit to me. The sharing of others experiences and ideas really helped me understand that I am not the only one facing issues."

Additional feedback received from our respondents throughout their participation in this project:

"Before the workshop I was not thrilled about attending; however after, I am very pleased that I came and look forward to the next two meetings."

"I appreciate the facilitator using a variety of engagement strategies with the ice breakers/conversations/learning opps."

"Team building activities are Amazing! CQI process is actually easier than I thought. Thank you!"

"I found the explanation of the quality standards very useful. I also found the solutions to dealing with our roadblocks to be useful."

"Being able to discuss with other districts about different things they do that I can bring back to my school site."

"Meeting other coordinators and realizing they also have the same issues and concerns."

"Impactful solutions to my struggle with the CQI process."

"Good to renew what I learned and to add ideas from other sites. Thank you."

"The collaborative answers to questions that were posed to us about our individual sites. It helps us to garner new ideas and ways to improve our sites."

Strengthening the Model

Create Ongoing Opportunities for Interaction and Learning Between Meetings

PROVIDE ON-DEMAND COACHING BETWEEN MEETINGS

Facilitators of the CoP can make themselves, another local leader or “graduates” available for on-demand coaching throughout the process. As participants begin to implement what they are learning in their sites, new questions are likely to emerge. Holding “office hours” where participants can make appointments or know they can contact a coach can be an effective capacity building strategy. These office hours can be marketed to participants during the sessions and through follow-up emails and social media outreach. Implementing on-demand coaching address participants’ real-time issues or challenges and can deepen the impact of participation in the CoP.

MATCH PEERS FOR PEER LEARNING, MENTORING OR COACHING BETWEEN SESSIONS

Facilitators of CoPs have the opportunity to match peers for interaction in-between meetings. Such interactions might include reflections on the most recent CoP meeting, the objectives outlined in their CQI plans, and successes, challenges, and needs specific to individual sites. This strategy provides increased opportunities for individualized learning and relationship building within the community. Pairing experienced Site Coordinators with newer Site Coordinators in a mentoring relationship is another approach to matching peers.

Matching peers as “growth coaches” is another strategy to strengthen the community. In this type of relationship, each matched peer becomes the “growth coach” for the other. Each partner would set a personal and/or professional goal for the year, work with each other to create a road map to their goal(s), and connect regularly (e.g., at least once between meetings) to discuss their progress. Such a discussion should always be low-stakes and rooted in support rather than accountability. It is important to reassure

growth coaches that they do not have to be content experts. Rather, they are a listening and supportive ear that can help ask questions and offer suggestions to support their peers in developing their own solutions. Each participant and growth coach should connect at least once in between sessions to check-in with each other and their growth progress.

MATCH PEERS AND FACILITATE SITE VISITS

During the CoP meetings Site Coordinators share resources and solutions to challenges outside of the program environment. Offering the opportunity for Site Coordinators to visit and learn from the practices implemented at another site and reflect on site-level challenges creating another level of depth to the process. Such an arrangement is mutually beneficial. Site Coordinators hosting visits benefit from an outside perspective on their site’s operations. Visiting Site Coordinators receive the benefit of learning new program models, resources, etc.

NETWORK THE COMMUNITY THROUGH A WEB-BASED PLATFORM

Creating a web-based social-media-style platform (a group Facebook page, Edmodo page) that allows participants to ask on-demand questions related to a new challenge, seek advice on available resources to meet a particular need, or share successes. This strategy offers an unstructured way to strengthen participation within the community and engage participants in ways that are personally relevant outside of the facilitated structure of the CoP meetings. This ongoing network will help graduates to stay connected with graduates from their cohort as well as other cohorts.

GROUP WEBINARS OR CONFERENCE CALLS BETWEEN MEETINGS

Group webinars or conference calls in between meetings provide the opportunity to delve deeper into a successful practice or challenge. They also have the opportunity to incorporate subject matter experts and graduates around a particular need expressed in the CoP (see below).

Create Space for Individual Development Plans

Before or towards the beginning of the CoP participants should have an opportunity to create individual CQI plans for their professional development. This allows individuals to set intentions around their own development in the context of strengthening their program and site. Individual goals can serve as a guide throughout the process so each participant can benefit from the experience while meeting their own needs. Sharing goals with other CoP participants and identifying similar goals can then contribute to the idea of coordinated strategies and learning. This will allow for two levels of measurement for the CoP, individual and collective. Goals will often shift throughout the CoP process and can be adapted as needed. This serves as another way to reinforce the CQI process for participants.

Coordinate Participant Efforts to Pilot New Innovations

During the CoP meetings participants surface challenges and issues and explore potential solutions. The CoP can be a platform to go beyond sharing potential solutions in a meeting setting. Because a CoP includes interaction over time they provide an opportunity for the group to experiment with an agreed upon strategy to address a common challenge. There is a strong potential to strengthen collective practice by allowing participants to select a specific shared practice and measurement or data collection strategy to implement between meetings. Offer opportunities in subsequent meetings to share and analyze the impact of the new practice and assess what was learned. By selecting a specific practice and data collection strategy and reflecting with the larger group participants collectively practice and model the CQI process.

Integrate Subject Matter Experts based on participant need

As participants surface new needs for information or resources related to a specific content area, CoP facilitators have the opportunity to meet those needs directly by connecting participants to content experts and graduates who can share what they have implemented and how they continue to build off their experience beyond the CoP. For example an expert

researcher/evaluator could offer content knowledge on data collection, or participants could learn from content experts about emerging topics such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Such topics should be driven by the needs of the Community. Such opportunities can take place within the context of existing meetings or through opportunities to connect between meetings. Integration of subject matter experts and graduates should support the learning of the group while not detracting from opportunities for peer learning.

Create a cohort model of Site Coordinator Community of Practice Participants

As Site Coordinator CoP efforts progress locally there will be a community of “graduates” that can continue to be engaged. This process can build strong connections between cohorts of CoP participants and graduates as they experience the CoP together. If you have created an online community, the entire local community can be engaged and contribute to the shared knowledge pool. Local TA providers with the help of graduates can organize annual events for all new and prior attendees of CoPs. Such a strategy builds a continuum of support among Site Coordinators throughout the region and a strong bench of next level leaders in the field prepared to take on additional leadership opportunities.

Engage All Levels of Leadership in the Process

It is important for Site Coordinators to be able to participate authentically in the CoP. Individuals may not be as open to honestly share challenges if their supervisor is in the room. Therefore, it is important to reserve space for peer learning that is reserved only for Site Coordinators.

On the other hand it can be challenging when a Site Coordinator has received specific information, tools, and resources to support a CQI process in a vacuum. Without communication or connection with their decision-makers for the program, Site Coordinators might be challenged to implement or apply what they are learning. Decision-makers for the larger program must be engaged if larger organizational change is going to take place. Therefore, a parallel meeting before or after each CoP for program leaders may be a useful strategy.

CoP facilitators have the opportunity to build in touch points between Site Coordinator participants and their supervisors to reflect on progress and development. In turn, Supervisors are in a position to collaborate with Site Coordinators as they create or enhance their site-level CQI plans. Such engagement supports cohesion between site-level goals and organizational goals, and can enhance the effective implementation

of organizational and site-level CQI plans. Supervisor engagement can also strengthen the support structure for Site Coordinators because Supervisors are in a position to connect Site Coordinators to resources and professional development that can support progress toward their goals. Supervisor engagement in the CoP process has the potential to not only strengthen site-level practice but organizational practice as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide would not be possible without the nearly 150 participants of the Site Coordinator Community of Practice pilot. Their dedication and hard work is greatly appreciated.

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

Gloria Halley, Butte County Office of Education

Amy Cranston, Ventura County Office of Education

Ernesto Duran, Ventura County Office of Education

Brenda San Roman, Imperial County Office of Education

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