**Strengthening Knowledge, Skills and Partnerships Among Service Coordinators Through Communities of Practice** - Susan Connor, Maria Kastanis, Sarah Nichols

A **community of practice (CoP)** is a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic that come together to deepen their knowledge and expertise through interactions with one another on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Success (as identified by Illinois Service Coordination Community members)</th>
<th>Strategies Applied within two (2) Illinois Service Coordination (SC) Communities of Practice (CoP) (Members include service coordinators and those who prepare SCs at the local level who share an interest in high quality services)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **A Strong Facilitator** | • Two consistent lead facilitators  
• Knowledgeable about the shared interest  

**Multiple Ways to Participate** | • Quarterly virtual meetings via zoom by phone or computer with option to use chat, voice and/or video camera  
• Access resources on an online workspace  
• Members choose to sit and listen, share resources, and/or seek resources  
• Leadership group members plan meetings and co-facilitate discussion topics  
• Subgroups/Workgroups for specific interests  

**Effective Communication** | • New members receive welcome email to orient them  
• Record of past, present and future meeting information is accessible to members  
• Agendas and notes are distributed and posted  
• Online workspace with email alerts  

**Opportunities to Network** | • Resource sharing, time to problem-solve and support one another is built into every meeting  
• Subgroups/Workgroups  
• Leadership Groups  

**Participation is Valued by Members** | • Voluntary participation  
• Periodic needs assessments and post meeting evaluations help determine how time is spent  
• Discussion topics and guest speakers  
• Share/Develop tools and resources that can be used/applied  

**Shared Interests** | • Members shared roles and experiences (all active service coordinators or those who prepare them locally)  
• Topics driven by interests and areas seeking support  
• Ongoing assessments to gauge interests and needs  

**Opportunities to Earn Credit** | • Continuing education hours for ongoing professional development  
• Additional continuation education hours for leadership group members  

*Developed by the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP) at the University of Illinois*  
suec@illinois.edu, mkastani@illinois.edu and sln4eitp@illinois.edu
| 1. **Design for evolution**       | • Use initial & ongoing needs assessments to identify interests & priorities  
|                                  | • Be flexible & ready to adapt with changing needs  
|                                  | • Recruit, welcome & orient new members  
|                                  | • Support co-creation of resources, tools & CoP subgroups  
|                                  | • Utilize online workspaces/website that can evolve with resources & shared interests  
| 2. **Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives** | • Encourage questions, ideas & shared expertise among members in every meeting  
|                                  | • Invite guest speakers & subject matter experts with outside expertise on topics of interest  
|                                  | • Embrace diversity of backgrounds, experiences & perspectives of group members  
| 3. **Invite different levels of participation** | • Create numerous ways for people to engage within meetings (ask questions, share resources, chat with one another, discussion questions, polls, etc.)  
|                                  | • Establish a method for members to connect in between meetings (emails, online workspace, listserv, etc.)  
|                                  | • Develop a leadership group to assist with various tasks (plan meetings, facilitate meetings, welcome new members, etc.)  
|                                  | • Identify tasks that members can help with (record meeting notes, host a spotlight session on something they have been working on, etc.)  
|                                  | • Recognize “core” and “peripheral” members add/receive value according to their needs, interests & capacity  
| 4. **Develop both public and private community spaces** | • Utilize a private listserv or platform for privileged information (for members only)  
|                                  | • Establish times, places and spaces where information can be shared publically (e.g. a conference session, newsletter article or flyer used to invite or recruit new members)  
|                                  | • Create time and space for formal and informal connections among large groups, small groups and individuals (e.g. share/chat in large group within a meeting & encourage small group or individual discussions between meetings)  
| 5. **Focus on value** | • Stay true to shared interests/visions of the CoP  
|                                  | • Discuss value, information gained, applied, or realized with members  
|                                  | • Assess value within meetings & through a post meeting evaluation  
|                                  | • Share resources & connecting with individuals in between meetings  
|                                  | • Link members with shared needs or pair a member with a need to another member with the knowledge/skills to support that need  
|                                  | • Evaluate quality, relevance, value & impact (for individuals and/or organizations)  
| 6. **Combine familiarity and excitement** | • Set expectations for participants & use an agenda for meetings  
|                                  | • Create a safe place to share knowledge, practices, ideas & questions (e.g. establish a climate of care, community guidelines, etc.)  
|                                  | • Identify “hot” discussion topics which may address high level needs  
|                                  | • Invite guest speakers with differing, diverse and cutting-edge perspectives  
|                                  | • Create opportunities for needs to be met spontaneously (“just in time” support)  
| 7. **Create a rhythm for the community** | • Establish methods, frequency and intensity for meeting & communicating  
|                                  | • Ensure members know who, how, where, when to connect & how to get caught up if they miss a meeting (e.g. post meeting information, send out meeting reminders, take good meeting notes, etc.)  
|                                  | • Include a mix of idea sharing, support seeking, & knowledge/skill building in agenda  
|                                  | • Connect & share resources in between meetings to keep the rhythm alive  
|                                  | • Develop leaders who recognize the 7 design principles & delegate tasks to them in order to promote sustainability |