

# Communities of Practice

- the why?
- the what?
- the how?
- the who?

## Why

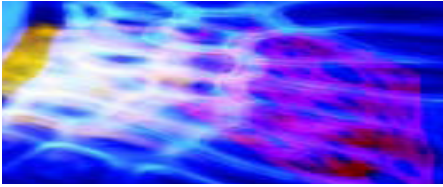
The on-going drive for better performance and improved services while keeping a strict control on costs and resources, coupled with cross-cutting issues such as the environmental and equalities agendas mean that the challenges for local government in Scotland are significant. Active and committed communities of practice can contribute to the improvement agenda through supporting the capture and sharing of know-how. For people working in and with local government in Scotland communities of practice can provide a collaborative framework in which to share experience and innovations and find solutions for areas of common and shared interest. They can enable faster problem-solving, cut down on duplication of effort and provide a potentially endless source of expertise.

## What

Communities of Practice are essentially networks of individuals with common problems or interests who “get together” - physically and/ or virtually - to discuss current challenges, explore new ways of working, share good practice tools and ideas. They are self-defined and self-managed, focussed on particular key issues or within a specific context. Each community will agree how it wants the community to work, how members will relate to each other and what methods they will use to share and develop their body of knowledge.

A Community of Practice (CoP) can:

- Help members make new contacts, keep up-to-date, generate new knowledge and share experience.
- Help people to do something differently and save some time
- Make connections between experts/specialists and people just starting out
- Enable sharing of learning and good practice with other authorities
- Enable people to work together and influence from the grass roots
- Provide a forum for sharing documents, building a repository of lessons learned, resources and best practice case studies
- Provide a non-threatening forum for discussing issues, testing ideas, acting as a sounding board, developing joint projects
- Provide mutual support for members - provide “comradeship” and opportunity to learn from others
- Bring together a mix of different organisations sharing a common interest - this promotes a better understanding of different perspectives and constraints



- Be empowering - the CoP members have identified a need for change and are now acting together to do something about it, fostering a greater sense of professional commitment
- Benefit organisations by enabling re-use of resources and ideas, speeding up development and change cycles, creating a knowledge sharing culture and by supporting early take-up of innovation/best practice

### How

Many communities may already exist and working in this way may be a familiar experience - for example through membership of professional or specialist groups. Other communities may just be starting to recognise the benefit of collaborative working and sharing experience.

Communities may operate through regular face-to-face meetings or events. They may also use a range of techniques - storytelling, case studies, peer reviews. Using technology to develop a “virtual” community might be a useful addition or solution for those communities where it is a challenge to attend “physical” meetings. Technology cannot drive communities but it has great value as an underpinning tool and can help people to work in creative and innovative ways. It can enable communities to:

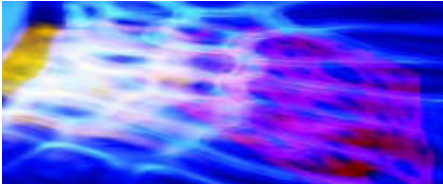
- Access networking tools - event diary, discussion forum, people-finder
- Share documents through up-load to an on-line library
- Make it easy to email updates and newsletters to your community
- Share information within a community, across communities or publicly
- Share skills and tools - the body of knowledge, methods, cases, stories, tools
- Develop a map of key knowledge resources

### Who

#### *You/your community*

To work effectively a CoP needs:

- An underpinning need to learn and improve - for example a shared policy driver or strategic or operational focus
- Committed members with a shared understanding of the purpose and philosophy of the community e.g. they know how to do something and want to interact and participate regularly to learn how to do it better
- A co-ordinator/facilitator/administrator to “animate” the community and help to set up face-to-face events and develop the virtual collaboration site



- “Champions” who encourage others to contribute
- Members who will contribute to discussions, provide content
- A willingness to exploit enabling technology

You will need to think about:

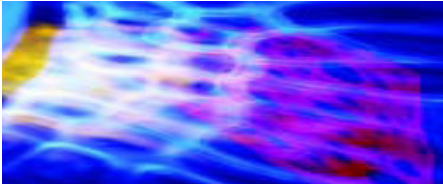
- What key benefits/objectives do you want to achieve from establishing a Community of Practice?
- Is there a genuine, identified need for a Community of Practice in this area?
- What is the rationale for developing the community?
- What are the core issues which need to be addressed
- What work has been done to date on this theme?
- What is the community setting out to achieve?
- What benefits can the community offer - to members, to local government as a whole
- How long do you want to keep the community going?
- Are there identified members or will it be open for others to join?
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the community?
- How will the community members be supported in their use of knowledge sharing process and tools?
- How will users be trained to use the collaboration site and other knowledge sharing tools?
- How will you ensure that content on a collaboration site is refreshed and reviewed on a regular basis?

### ***The Improvement Service***

We believe that communities of practice can be a good and effective means of creating links and cutting across organisational and departmental boundaries, encouraging innovative solutions to problems, and promulgation of best practice.

We can assist you in thinking through the fundamental issues that need to be considered if you are working in or in partnership with Scottish local authorities, focussing on new ways of working, change and service improvement issues and want to address issues of common interest in the ways outlined above. We are happy to talk through specific requirements - all communities will differ in terms of their make-up and preferred ways of working. We can work with community facilitators, providing an understanding of what is involved in setting up, cultivating and managing a community.

We can provide support for hosting a collaboration space for your CoP, providing training and technical support and working with you to ensure its effective use. Encouraging and developing communities of practice is currently a key priority for the Improvement Service. Our discussions with you will enable us to develop an agreement with



you which addresses the purpose of your CoP, operational issues, timescales and any related resource issues.

Services we offer to support CoPs include:

- Integrated hosted online collaboration space with access to professional networking tools, e.g. discussion forums, events diary, people finder, wiki, blog, document library (through our partnership with the IDeA)
- Public and/or private communities
- Secure hosting, monitoring and management of the space
- Ability to access the documents, events and discussions of other communities you belong to which use the same platform
- Branded community pages or sub-sites for major topic areas linked to the main IS website

What we ask in return is that you make a commitment to sharing your knowledge and experience with colleagues in local government and partner organisations so that we can improve together.

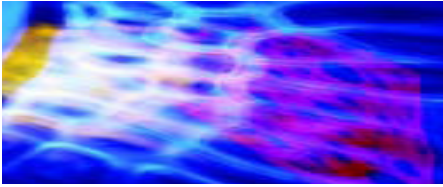
### **What Next?**

If you are thinking of setting up a Community of Practice, there are a number of questions to ask yourself before going ahead, for example:

- How will setting up a CoP help your network/colleagues achieve their objectives?
- What key benefits do you want to achieve?
- Who are the intended users?
- How will they be identified?
- How does your network or community currently interact?
- What challenges do you currently face in knowledge sharing?
- Who will manage/facilitate the Community of Practice?
- What sort of knowledge might you want to share, and what sort of things might you want to have on the CoP area?
- What will success look like for your community of practice?

Please get in touch with us if you would like our assistance with considering these questions and with setting up a Community.

Contact: [communities@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:communities@improvementservice.org.uk)  
Knowledge Management Team  
Tel: 01506 775579  
Website: [www.improvementservice.org.uk](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk)



### Connecting people to learn and share.

This website supports professional networking across local government and the public sector. It is a freely accessible resource that enables knowledge development and sharing through online communities of practice.

Registered members can join communities, or create their own, connect with their peers and domain experts, arrange meetings, participate in forums, up-load documents and subscribe to conversations.

To join a community you need to register with the website first and then apply to the relevant community. Community facilitators will respond to each membership request.

If you are based in England and Wales and want to set up a community space please email [communities@idea.gov.uk](mailto:communities@idea.gov.uk)


If you are based in Scotland please email [listen@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:listen@improvementservice.org.uk)

This service is provided by the Improvement and Development Agency for local government and a partnership is in place with the Improvement Service for local government in Scotland.

Register to access the following features

Register and become a Communities of Practice member today.

[Register](#)



<b>Forums</b> Generate your own content and exchange your ideas. <a href="#">Learn about forums</a>	<b>Event calendar</b> Listing of events in any community. <a href="#">Learn about events</a>
<b>Document library</b> Store, share and track files in your community. <a href="#">Learn about documents</a>	<b>Wiki</b> Generate your own content and exchange your ideas. <a href="#">Learn about wiki</a>
<b>Blog</b> Publish and document your ideas in your online journal. <a href="#">Learn about blogs</a>	<b>RSS Feeds</b> Browse RSS feeds relevant to your community of practice <a href="#">Learn about RSS</a>

**Find a community**

Community name  [Go](#)

**Most active communities**

- Facilitators' Community
- Pan Cornwall GIS Group
- IDeA CoP Training Community
- Mapping Services Agreement CoP
- PRIVATE - LGIH Facilitators CoP
- National Graduate Development Programme
- Local Land and Property Gazetteer Custodians CoP
- Geographical Information CoP



[View all communities](#)

**People finder**

Use People Finder to search for people with similar areas of expertise, in regions across the country.

[Access the people finder](#)

[Feedback](#) | [Help](#) | [Demo](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#)

An example of a screen from the online collaboration space we provide through a partnership with the IDeA