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**Communities of Practice in eXtension: *What, Why, How?***

A Community of Practice (CoP) is defined as a virtual network of content experts—faculty, specialists, educators, industry experts, clientele, government agency representatives—who share knowledge or competence in a specific content area and are willing to work and learn together over a period of time to develop research and educational products and programs. CoPs are the heart of eXtension – people of similar interests working virtually together to foster research and education.

**Specific Functions of CoPs**

* Create or assemble a data base of educational products and resources such as articles, fact sheets, answers to FAQs, online courses, webinars, and websites.
* Peer review educational products.
* Contribute answers to questions from Ask an Expert.
* Maintain ongoing engagement with their corresponding Community of Interest.

**Benefits**

* Sustainability of educational products and programs produced
* Production of higher quality, interactive, online educational materials
* Increased reach and impact of products produced
* Opportunities for collaborative research with colleagues from multiple institutes and disciplines
* Enhanced access to national programming resources and professional development opportunities
* National recognition for research & leadership in specific content areas
* Recognition for all content providers
* More efficient use of faculty and staff time
* More efficient use of resources and technology
* Less duplication & redundancy of effort
* Increased skill sets for faculty and staff & access to the latest technological & collaborative tools
* Better customer services & more efficient delivery of educational services
* Opportunity to link from Community of Practice content to your MSUE News articles.
* Opportunity to submit content to a CoP as a resource with national reach.

**Scholarship**

The work of faculty, educators and other professionals in eXtension is based on unbiased research and is subject to a peer review process prior to publication in eXtension. Metrics on individual contributions to a CoP include FAQs authored, edited, peer reviewed, and published; number of AaE questions answered; number of Web conferences or on-line chats conducted; number of participants per session; and how many times each recorded session was accessed.

**How to Join a CoP**

1. Review the 46 existing CoPs: <http://about.extension.org/communities-of-practice-descriptions/>. See a longer list including those under development at: <http://www.extension.org/people/communities>.
2. Go to <https://www.extension.org/people/>and log in with your eXtension I.D.\*
3. Click on ‘Browse, join, and create communities’
4. Click on the CoP you would like to join.
5. Under ‘Membership Options’ click “I want to join this community.”
6. Click on ‘Leaders’ and make a personal contact with the leaders listed. Ask how the CoP functions and how you can begin contributing. Some CoPs are very active with numerous members adding and updating content on a regular basis. Some need a shot in the arm, which you may be able to provide.

**How to Create a New CoP**

1. If none of the CoPs fit your area of expertise, identify colleagues who share the same interest and are willing to collaborate. One way to find collaborators—go to <https://www.extension.org/people/> and click on ‘Find Colleagues.’ Then click on ‘by Interest’. Use the “Interest Query Builder” to narrow your search with key words.
2. Contact eXtension; they are prepared to help clarify and guide you in the development of your CoP application. Please contact: Dan Cotton at dan.cotton@extension.org, 402.472.8841; Craig Wood at craig.wood@extension.org, 859.323.8472; or Ashley Griffin at ashley.griffin@extension.org, 859.323.8473.
3. For more info, see the **Community of Practice Handbook**: <http://create.extension.org/node/2119>; and **Application Steps for Establishing a New eXtension CoP:** <http://create.extension.org/node/3081>.

**Questions?**

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**\* Forgot your ID or password, OR don’t have an eXtension ID?**

1. Go to the login page at <http://people.extension.org/> , click “Forgot your password?” You’ll be asked to enter your eXtension ID OR the email you used to register with when you first signed up. You’ll be emailed directions for resetting your password.
2. If you haven’t signed up, or you don’t know what email address you used to sign up with, go to the sign up page at <https://www.extension.org/people/signup> and proceed as if you are signing up for the first time (and maybe you are). If you use the same email you used before, you’ll be alerted that you are already a member. Then you can go back to step one and enter in your email in order to reset your password.