Developing a Community of Practice:
A Checklist of Considerations

Forming the CoP

Ensure favorable group characteristics and clear reasons for forming CoP

Work within a closed group in which all members have something in common
Be explicit about the type of group being formed
Recruit volunteer members/participants
Work to obtain buy-in of participating agencies and organizations
Convene the CoP promptly in funded projects to avoid missing window of opportunity
Be clear about the purpose or objective and the expected outcomes of the group
Understand the community and its members as well as its topic area and niche

Ensure that the CoP has needed resources to get started

Plan platform for interacting in advance based on members' needs and comfort level
Select a platform (i.e., electronic, face-to-face) that is compatible with how members share
Have multiple ways to share: conference line, meetings, discussion board, website, email
Ensure needed technology support for electronic platforms
Identify and support a CoP facilitator/coordinator to lead, guide, and gather input
Identify funding to leverage time for people to attend training and engage in CoP activities
Share physical activity standards, effective "how to" strategies for promoting physical activity, and other resources for promoting physical activity in practice

Engage in early strategies to build trust and cohesion

Get and honor CoP member input about meeting logistics, topics, desired outcomes
Have positive rules of participation and maintain etiquette
Facilitate discussions that are relevant to participants' experiences and expectations
Identify and create linkages to existing groups that are already working in the area
Strive to maintain a focus for the group to help maintain the sense of community

Structure the CoP to be self-governed with shared leadership and transparent operations

Convene an initial face-to-face meeting to provide member access to experts, networking, and to develop group trust and cohesion

Create a safe and noncompetitive space to share so that members are comfortable sharing needs as well as information and expertise

Maintaining an Effective CoP Over Time

Ensure CoP members participate and are engaged over time

Cultivate CoP champions beyond the sponsors or funded staff

Facilitator prompts responses, post resources, serves as caretaker, keeps members active

Develop some but not too much group infrastructure (committees, formalized roles, etc.)

Tap into local resources

Ensure the group has common goals/vision over time

Allow CoPs to grow and evolve over time with new ideas and opportunities

Expect active contribution (i.e., posting to discussions) to vary among members

Allow for participation on demand (e.g., to solve a periodic problem) rather than daily

Involve new people over time to replace those who drop out

Create space where members feel comfortable asking questions and ensure they get responses and feedback

Create resource for archiving and accessing resources, products, and other documents as appropriate to CoP purpose

Strive to maintain CoP effectiveness

Plan for regular meetings of group, committees, and subcommittees as appropriate

Foster interactions that result in inspiration and benefit at the individual level

Foster interactions that result in benefits at the CoP member organization level

Create space for stakeholders to connect, ask questions, and access resources

Expect CoP change over time; may need to examine identity, governance, and communication

Support development of group products consistent with CoP purpose such as an action plan, compendium of resources, reports, step-by-step approach to addressing physical activity issues, clearinghouses of physical activity resources or information

Ensure benefits for Individuals

Ensure that participation is not be burdensome time-wise
Provide opportunities for members to understand the work and perspectives of others
Provide opportunities for members to get new ideas, information and inspiration
Provide opportunities for reflection
Structure the CoP so individuals feel a sense of solidarity and commonality with others
Provide technical assistance, training for skill development, as appropriate for CoP purpose
Foster the development of professional identity for CoP members

Ensure benefits for the CoP Group (in addition to the individual benefits)

Provide opportunities to share successes
Provide opportunities to share scarce resources to achieve common goals
Strive to establish a reputation for the CoP
Structure the CoP to create a sense of community, cohesion, and belongingness
Encourage relationships and linkages between members outside formal group
Encourage development and implementation of joint projects within CoP
Foster use of evidence-based practices, models, guidelines, policies and practices
Promote the development of products that promote physical activity, as appropriate for CoP

Getting Feedback from Your CoP

Two-way communication and feedback are essential

Conduct a needs assessment up front to understand group and individual needs
Conduct a satisfaction survey (Does the CoP meet needs of group?)
Enumerate product(s) produced on topic(s) of interest (when applicable)
Assess peer-to-peer contacts/engagement outside of planned CoP meetings/events
Conduct surveys periodically to get feedback and refine how CoP is run (What would make this CoP better or more useful?)
Consider conducting a CoP evaluation