



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE'S TOOLKIT 2005 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Building and Sustaining Professional Learning Communities

A learning community is “a purposeful gathering of individuals who share common interests and goals for learning improvement, or professional development. The learning community is committed to supporting one another's and their group's development” (NSDC & NICI, 2001, p. 25). The *context, process* and *content* of eLearning standards guide schools and states in building and sustaining professional, collaborative learning communities in an online professional development environment.¹

	Learning Communities
Context Standard	The program provides opportunities for educators to build online learning communities and to work together in pairs or teams with access to follow-up discussions to share information. Opportunities for participants to collaborate online during and following courses and workshops are provided. Online professional development goals are aligned with the states' and schools' academic standards, as well as goals for student academic achievement. Acceptable participation requires adherence to communication standards and legal and ethical use of the Internet.

¹ This model is based upon the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) *Standards for Staff Development* and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) *Standards for Online Professional Development, Guidelines for Planning and Evaluating Online Professional Development Courses and Programs*.

	Collaboration
Process Standard	Interactive communication tools—such as forums, chats and discussion boards—are used to develop and maintain a collegial online learning community. Strategies are used that promote sharing and working together to achieve common goals. Course design provides opportunities for collaboration. Online instructors have specific understanding of the challenges and strategies for building an online learning community.
	Quality Teaching
Content Standard	The program models effective teaching in the online environment by meeting the learning needs of each participant, using collaborative learning activities and ensuring timely responsiveness to learners.

HPR*TEC online resources were created to support the definition and model of the professional learning community. They are:

- TrackStar #239340, Online Learning Communities, providing research, definitions, components and strategies for building online learning communities, available at <http://trackstar.4teachers.org/trackstar/ts/viewTrack.do?number=239340> ;
- TrackStar #239347, Readiness Surveys for Online Professional Development, available at <http://trackstar.4teachers.org/trackstar/ts/viewTrack.do?number=239347> ; and
- “Top Ten Tenets of Effective Online Facilitation,” a rubric for online professional development models designed to use as a benchmark along a Professional Learning Communities continuum, from startup to sustained collaborative communities, available at http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=ShowRubric&rubric_id=1104132& .

Essential components the Professional Development Work Group determined as essential for building and sustaining collaborative communities in eLearning environments are:

	Building Communities	Sustaining Communities
Administration	Effective Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess learner needs; • Bring multiple stakeholders to the table during design; and • Define goals, strategies and measures of success. 	Effective Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess learner needs and revise as necessary; • Communicate results and impact with stakeholders; and • Review benchmarks and indicators of success and modify as needed.
	Efficient Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish technical support team; and • Simplify registration process. 	Efficient Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain technical support team; and • Review and reduce user difficulties.
	Train Facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define standards and expectations; and • Provide necessary training, skills and resources. 	Re-Train Facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review, revise and retrain facilitators based upon lessons learned; and • Continue to supply necessary resources and support.
Methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit cohort size; • Base cohorts on shared interest; • Utilize interactive help (Jump Starts for novice participants); • Vary discussion processes (prompts, surveys, etc...); and • Establish consistent communication expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create subgroups to further reduce cohort size; • Continue to review and ensure that content is relative and applicable; • Establish checkpoints to ensure all participants actively involved in the community; • Continue discussion strategies to maintain connections with participants; and • Monitor communication and establish follow up to avoid losing participants.
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress accessibility; • Provide equity; and • Ensure reliable infrastructure (tools that work). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vary delivery and communication methods to reach different learners; and • Monitor and maintain reliability of infrastructure (keep the tools working).

A wide variety of online resources exist for building eLearning Communities. The following matrix lists tools and resources recommended for building and sustaining collaborative learning communities²:

Vehicle	Tools	Online Resources
<p>Synchronous (At a particular time, you must be present.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audioconferencing • Internet Telephony • Webconferencing • Videoconferencing • Chat • Instant Messaging • Whiteboards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting Tools for Online Communities: Suggestions for Learning Technologists http://ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&id=994 • Audio Conferencing: Tips and Techniques http://www.b-print.com.au/audio.pdf • Audioconferencing in Support of Distance Education http://www.col.org/knowledge/ks_audioconferencing.htm • Skype Internet Telephony www.skype.com • Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication Tools http://www.centeronline.org/knowledge/article.cfm?ID=2587 • Free Web Technology Tools http://www.indiana.edu/~tickit/resourcecenter/resource1.htm • How to Use Internet Communication Tools http://core.ecu.edu/vel/itc/tutorials/internet_communications.pdf

² This matrix is based upon an idea and a table found in “Building Communities: Strategies for Collaborative Learning,” by Soren Kaplan, in ASTD’s *Learning Circuits*, available at <http://www.learningcircuits.org/2002/aug2002/kaplan.html>.

Vehicle	Tools	Online Resources
<p>Asynchronous (At anytime, when you are ready)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Boards • Calendar Links • Group Tools • Announcements • Email • Surveys and Polls • Blogs (Web Logs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Interaction Tools http://150.135.84.221/rapid/SessionDiscussion.htm • Creative Use of Online Discussion Areas http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/discuss/ • Discuss it with discussion boards and forums http://www.learnnc.org/index.nsf/doc/timesaver0509?OpenDocument <p>Online Survey Makers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiler Survey http://profilerpro.com • Zoomerang http://info.zoomerang.com/ <p>Blog Software:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manila http://manila.userland.com/ • Diaryland http://www.diaryland.com/ • Journalscape http://www.journalscape.com/ • eBlogger http://www.blogger.com/start • NiceNet http://www.nicenet.org/

Vehicle	Tools	Online Resources
Support for Learning Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Facilitators • Guides/Coaches • Readiness Surveys • Incentives for Completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SREB Multi-State Online Professional Development Toolkit http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/toolkit/onlineindex.asp • Facilitating Online Collaboration and Interaction http://www.ucet.ufl.edu/tools/teachingwithtech/bpfacilitatingcollaboration.shtml • Facilitation skills for e-trainers http://www1.astd.org/astdInterim0304/pdf/handouts/TU408.pdf • E-Mentoring Literature Review http://www.my-ecoach.com/online/webresourcelist.php?rlid=2872 • Facilitating and Hosting a Virtual Community http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communityfacilitation.htm • What Makes A Successful Online Facilitator http://www.ion.illinois.edu/IONresources/onlineLearning/instructorProfile.asp • Professional Development: 21st Century Models: 20 Tips for Effective Professional Development http://www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=13000492&pgno=3 • The Importance of Learning Communities in Virtual Learning Environment http://www.ipfw.edu/as/tohe/2001/Papers/mccracken.htm <p>Online Readiness Surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web CT http://webct.frontrange.edu/wctfiles/readinessquiz/ • Lesley University http://www.lesley.edu/online_learning/readiness/home.html • Texas Tech

Vehicle	Tools	Online Resources
Content Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courseware • Streaming Media • Narrated Slideshows • E-books 	<p>Professional Development Courseware:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The George Lucas Educational Foundation's Professional Development Modules Home Page http://www.edutopia.org/foundation/courseware.php • ENC Launches Online Professional Development Resource for Teachers http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/whats_new/math/jan02.shtml • By Your Own Design This project from ENC and NSDC is designed to help you create and implement an individual professional learning plan. http://www.enc.org/professional/ • Tools and Tips for Creating Narrated Slide Shows http://streaming.wisconsin.edu/slideshow.html <p>Software to Create Courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackboard http://www.blackboard.com/ • WebCT http://www.webct.com/ • Desire 2 Learn http://www.desire2learn.com/welcome.html • SharePoint http://www.sharepointsite.com/default.aspx • Streaming video – Video on Demand http://education.discovery.com/ (AIMS & United Learning) • Online E-books http://www.free-ebooks.net/