

SEPTEMBER, 2021

FOR 20 YEARS, SETDA

has provided focused, professional learning experiences which expand members' content knowledge, as well as developing their potential for leadership. Our events have provided opportunities for networking and collaboration that are valued by our partners as well as state leaders. Building consensus among national experts and sharing resources across state boundaries have been hallmarks of SETDA's unique capacity to convene for learning. These gatherings also strengthen our advocacy presence, extend our influence, and provide opportunities for strategic outreach and partnership.



As it did across all facets of education, 2020 proved to be a year that would drastically reshape the way we sustained our professional learning as an organization, and 2021 provides a moment to reflect on those changes and consider how the best pieces can continue to be integrated into our plan going forward. Most notably, SETDA has nurtured a number of avenues to connect that have allowed us more opportunities for real-time conversation than ever before, and more effective ways to engage our community.

During the pandemic, the advent of a weekly support group proved invaluable to leaders dealing with drastic, and fast-moving change. That gathering has evolved into our Wednesday Water Cooler, which continues to be well-attended by leaders and partners alike, providing a safe space to bring questions and share ideas on timely subjects chosen by participants. And when physical gatherings were not possible, SETDA also



demonstrated the potential of a virtual conference event to inspire members, to convene conversations, and to connect learners. In recent months, we've also seen exponential growth in discussions that have moved to Slack for real-time connections, with threaded conversations to focus on pertinent topics.

In reflection, we can say that we have lived up to our reputation as leaders in EdTech, by using the tools we know so well to model the ways people can overcome the constraints of space and time. Connecting across platforms like Zoom, Hopin, Sophya and InSpace have expanded member familiarity with new virtual possibilities, and increased our competency to lead in these environments. By pioneering with technologies like [Kajabi](#), we were able to offer our E-Rate training sessions and Twitter conversations in a way that not only expands our reach to a larger audience, but also provides them the flexibility to engage at a time that is convenient, and to continue at a pace that meets their needs.

This Professional Learning and Community Engagement Plan is the result of the thoughtful consideration of our traditions, a careful analysis of these emerging possibilities, and our best thinking about how we can achieve the goals of our association. It was begun in conversation with the SETDA board, and influenced by membership surveys, conference feedback, and discussions of SETDA's Professional Learning committee. The sections below will outline our proposed efforts in each of the professional learning and community engagement initiatives.



TRENDS SURVEY

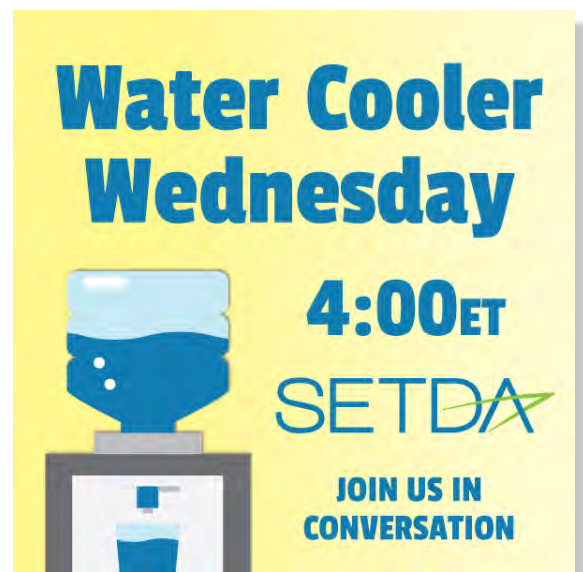
One of the critical pieces that will help tie together the various components of our approach, is an annual trends survey sent to our membership. Our most recent version, sent as a broader interest survey in the early days of 2020 provided a pre-COVID [snapshot of](#)

[SETDA member priorities](#), and focus areas. A shorter, more focused survey, collected annually, would identify areas that would serve as the menu for targeted professional learning opportunities at the Leadership Summit, and throughout the year. Questions geared toward horizon topics would also help us identify themes to focus on each summer in our Emerging Trends Forum, and could be publishable in a way that would build anticipation for the results each year in the broader EdTech community.



WEDNESDAY WATER COOLER

Another piece with the potential to be foundational to this plan is our informal gathering at the Water Cooler. As noted before, this weekly touchpoint has already evolved from its original intent. And while its core is now more about building and strengthening relationships with other SETDA family members, it can also serve the purpose of identifying micro-trends in our daily work. Discussions frequently surface commonalities across states with regard to job focus, new hurdles, and emerging policies. These discussions are often the identifier of topics for a more focused professional learning initiative or conference session. As the Water Cooler continues to evolve, we should consider being more intentional about using these conversations to tease out new ideas worthy of pursuing.



LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

SETDA's Leadership Summit will continue to be our flagship event. Perhaps the most unchanged, the Summit would continue to be an in-person event in Washington, D.C. during the fall of each year. This event, which has always been the most attended of our gatherings, will continue to be a sort of SETDA roll-call. If you only attend one SETDA event each year, it should be the Leadership

Summit. Because our work intersects to a large extent with federal offices and agencies, this location provides an unparalleled opportunity for in-person advocacy, and face-to-face collaboration with those who work in our nation's capital.



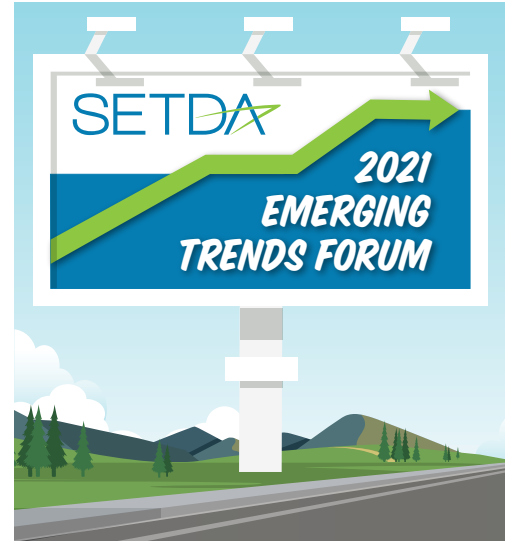
It is critical that we maintain this avenue to connect face-to-face, as it is necessary for developing deeper relationships among members of the SETDA family. Attending an in-person event brings the benefit of more focused time, and a momentary reprieve from the distractions of the office. Members value this time, and the small conversations that happen over meals and in the halls during 'recess.'

This physical gathering is also necessary for fostering relationships between members and private sector partners. This venue will allow us to continue to offer a showcase that is difficult to replicate well in a virtual setting. It will also allow us to offer coveted in-person R&D sessions. And while the focus for this event will still be on building the leadership capacity of our members, our goal for the conference sessions is that they resemble more facilitated conversations, rather than sit-and-get presentations or workshops.



EMERGING TRENDS FORUM

Previously known as the Emerging Technologies Leadership Forum (ETLF), SETDA has already begun to reshape our other signature event. In 2020, we were forced to take this collaboration to a virtual medium for the first time. In 2021, again virtual, we made a more intentional effort for the forum to be a true model for online collaboration, pushing the capabilities of our platforms and leaning on best practices for professional learning, with an extra emphasis on balancing new learning with time for reflection. Last year also saw a rebrand that moved the event from ETLF to [Emerging Trends Forum \(ETF\)](#), recognizing that our interest in emerging trends goes beyond the technologies and into the ways that they are being used to improve education.



Being a virtual conference, the forum was also separated for two years from the ISTE annual conference where we are traditionally co-located as an in-person event. There had already been many discussions at the board level across the last five years evaluating the effectiveness of this event whose location and related costs were outside of SETDA's control. Surveys showed that most of our members were not choosing to stay and attend ISTE, and those who did participate were beginning to have to choose between the two events, as ISTE's schedule continued to expand, and overlap our dates.

In this way, the requirements of the past two years may have shown us an option that we wish to continue in the future. While there are clear benefits to hosting an in-person Leadership Summit, there are also benefits to balancing this with a virtual ET Forum going forward. The virtual gatherings through the pandemic have shown an increased participation from more members of each SEA team, and our SETDA family who were previously unable to travel, either due to state restrictions, cost, or personal issues. Having one major event in a virtual format not only allows us an opportunity to model great technology use, it levels the playing field for participation and allows ALL states and partners to join the larger conversation.



SETDA@

The SETDA@ concept is centered on broadening our engagement in the larger EdTech community, as well as capitalizing on opportunities to connect with the SETDA family at in-person events which they already attend throughout the year. SETDA staff members variously attend conferences such as ISTE, CoSN, and FETC to connect with differing facets of EdTech, as well as prospective partners. We know that some among the membership and current partners are able to travel to these conferences as part of their work. Depending on the opportunity at any given event, SETDA would create a touchpoint for our family to connect. For some this might just include hosting a beverage or a meal to share the learning and build relationships. At others, this could include adding a state-level session or co-branded meeting facilitated by our membership.



These connections would benefit our association, not only by giving us more of those 'hallway' opportunities to build our own relationships, but also by helping us have a more visible presence outside of our organization. Attending these events as something more than individuals will result in a more connectable SETDA, and more opportunities to share our influence and leadership. There is great potential to expand and explore these possibilities, but we will begin by hosting just a few of these connections in 2022 and continuing to explore the events that are most popular among the SETDA family.

These gatherings would also provide our partners increased face time to build relationships with members, as well as additional sponsorship opportunities for the association. With these costs potentially underwritten, and members already funding their own travel to these events, our primary investment for SETDA@ would be in the form of staff efforts to organize and facilitate these community engagements.



BRIDGING THE GAP

In a more typical year, we believe that these three components would complement one another very well. We would host one main in-person event (Leadership Summit) where we would strive to bring everyone together, one focused virtual event (Emerging Trends Forum) that lives up to our reputation as EdTech leaders, and invest in community building (SETDA@) at many of the spaces in between.



But this is no typical year. While we have gotten positive feedback about the overall concept of these changes to hosted SETDA events, we also know that there is a strong desire to meet in person as soon as it is safely possible. For this reason, we have been considering opportunities for how we could bridge the gap over the next 15 months, until we can establish this new rhythm. Our recent travel survey indicates that spring 2022 travel might be reasonably possible for most within the SETDA family, and that March might have less conflicts for state members than any other month.

In March 2022, SETDA is planning to co-host an in-person EdTech Advocacy and Policy Summit in Washington, D.C. in partnership with CoSN, ISTE, and SIIA. SETDA Board members are considering the possibility of hosting an additional day for SETDA members to gather with a focus on developing our policy leadership skills, shaping and refining our advocacy positions, and allowing us to engage in conversations about the current legislative landscape.



However, given the changing conditions around COVID-19 and its variants, SETDA will wait to make the final decision regarding this gathering until mid-December, 2021.

TRAVEL SUPPORT

One important note about changes set out in this plan is how they will affect the travel support that SETDA provides each state education agency. It has always been SETDA's intention to ensure that each state is represented at our signature events. Now that we are focused on one in-person gathering, we are able to offer every state travel support for one member to attend the Leadership Summit each year, which is more likely to completely cover airfare, hotel, and other travel expenses. We would not provide a travel benefit for members to attend SETDA@ events, with the possible exception of those traveling on behalf of SETDA in an official capacity.

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY LEARNING INITIATIVES

Beyond our conference-level events, the Professional Learning Committee will continue to be instrumental in choosing and delivering learning opportunities on priorities that we identify via survey, water cooler, and conference feedback. To accomplish this we will lean on the following modes:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We will continue to spin up spontaneous training events for members and partners that help them grow their leadership, or come up to speed with new developments. This might just be a one-time webinar, or a recurring series similar to our Twitter Thursdays or E-Rate trainings when we want to explore a topic more deeply.

LUNCH-N-LEARN

Too often, excellent state initiatives don't get enough exposure in passing comments. We want to create more opportunities for state sharing in a brown-bag setting, where the SETDA family can gather and hear what your state is doing in a way that sparks good conversations and shares best practices or innovative strategies.

SLACK COMMUNITY

As mentioned before, Slack has become our go-to for sharing news and asking questions. It will eventually replace SETDA Connects altogether. Please [join our Slack community](#) and participate in any of the topic channels relevant to your work. This is a great way to find your tribe within the SETDA family.



For questions, to share ideas about professional learning topics, or to join the Professional Learning Committee, please contact [Jason Bailey](#).