

Centering Equity, Digital Learning, and Continuous Improvement through Communities of Practice

Actionable strategies for structuring and facilitating communities of practice in higher education

Boulder, CO (March 7, 2023) – Communities of practice offer higher education faculty, students, and leaders a range of benefits, such as facilitating resource sharing, individual and collective goal achievement, group problem solving, evaluation of practices, and emergent learning. A new playbook, [Communities of Practice in Higher Education](#), developed by Every Learner Everywhere in partnership with Achieving the Dream (ATD), the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), provides the higher education community with guidance on how to envision, design, facilitate, evaluate, and sustain communities of practice.

Of particular emphasis, the playbook highlights three under-explored elements of the communities of practice experience: equity, digital technologies, and continuous improvement. Approaching these elements with intentionality can ensure a reflexive, accessible process that supports all community members. This playbook provides actionable strategies for all who want to learn more about structuring and facilitating communities of practice. It also explicates ways to engage this three-pronged approach through the lifecycle of a community experience.

The playbook outlines five stages of communities of practice work and dedicates a section to each: envisioning, designing, facilitating, evaluating, and sustaining. Each section highlights actionable strategies for managing each stage of the process and embeds considerations related to equity, digital learning, and a focus on continuous improvement. Far from being additive, these aspects of communities of practice work are foundational to the entire lifecycle and warrant consideration at all stages. Finally, the playbook includes an appendix that references examples of communities of practice that might serve as models for others interested in this work. Published in conjunction with the Communities of Practice Playbook is [Communities of Practice in the Higher Education Landscape: A Literature Review](#).

An effective community of practice functions as a mutual learning environment where practitioners are committed to improving their practice and building new knowledge and resources. The community structure and platform should be designed to enable thoughtful and strong facilitation that creates an environment that supports emergent learning.



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Our intent is to inspire individuals to develop and facilitate thriving communities of practice that identify relevant issues facing educators today, offer solutions to shared challenges, generate new knowledge, and support all members in forwarding their goals. “One thing I have learned about myself is that I think best in groups,” says co-author, Susan Adams, Associate Director, Teaching and Learning at ATD. “One of my favorite experiences is to facilitate and be a participant in a community of practice to explore everyday problems, emerging trends, new practices and complex challenges that will enhance my teaching and learning practice.” We hope this playbook will serve as a guide for those undertaking this work and provide a roadmap for opportunities and challenges to consider along the way.

To download the free resource, [Communities of Practice in Higher Education](#), or learn more about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org. To contact Every Learner Everywhere, email everylearner@wiche.edu, or call (303) 541-0208. Follow Every Learner on Twitter [@EveryLearnerNet](https://twitter.com/EveryLearnerNet).

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Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a partner and champion of more than 300 community colleges across the country. Drawing on our expert coaches, groundbreaking programs, and national peer network, we provide institutions with integrated, tailored support for every aspect of their work — from foundational capacities such as leadership, data, and equity to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, building K–12 partnerships, and more. We call this Whole College Transformation. Our vision is for every college to be a catalyst for equitable, antiracist, and economically vibrant communities. We know that with the right partner and the right approach, colleges can drive access, completion rates, and employment outcomes — so that all students can access life-changing learning that propels them into community-changing careers. Visit us at achievingthedream.org.

The **Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)** is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association’s membership consists of 244 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations. APLU works with members to expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally. The association’s work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the



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administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) is a collaborative community of education leaders and innovators dedicated to advancing quality digital teaching and learning experiences designed to reach and engage the modern learner—anyone, anywhere, anytime. OLC inspires innovation and quality through an extensive set of resources, including best-practice publications, quality benchmarking, leading-edge instruction, community-driven conferences, practitioner-based and empirical research, and expert guidance. The growing OLC community includes faculty members, administrators, trainers, instructional designers, and other learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies, and corporate enterprises. Learn more at onlinelearningconsortium.org.

Every Learner Everywhere is a network of partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work aims to advance equity in higher education centers on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institution practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org.