

## LEARNING HANDBOOK

Guidance and tools to support systematic learning before, during and after project activity in health and care

LEARNING

### Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (CoPs) are networks of professionals that share common goals or interests. CoPs can be sources of knowledge, learning and support.

#### When?

You should consider joining a CoP before the start of a project utilising it throughout the life of the project or programme. CoPs can be accessed on a regular and ad-hoc basis.

#### Who?

Anyone who has a level of expertise or experience surrounding a topic and can contribute or gain from a relevant CoP.

#### How?

Firstly, you need to join or create a CoP.

Once created CoPs will often develop organically. Initially a key group of experts is often a solid starting point.

You should decide if you want the CoP you are involved in to be a 'face-to-face' or virtual. This will impact which CoP you decide to join / or how you create your own.

Once involved, opportunities for open dialogue and networking become available. Conversation is often the best way to extract the CoP members tacit knowledge (the knowledge in your head!) and use this to inform your own work.

If there is more than one member of a team who is a member of the same CoP, it may be beneficial for them to analyse and further discuss the knowledge they have acquired through their membership. Discussing what you have learned with a member of your own team can help you to convert it into actionable knowledge that can really impact on a project.

In the spirit of building long-standing relationships within CoPs that you can draw upon again in future, remember to share your learning with members in return and keep them updated on your project and experiences.

#### Further reading:

- Etienne Wenger-Trayner - [Introduction to communities of practice](#)
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement - [Communities of practice](#)
- NHS eLearning - <http://www.ksslibraries.nhs.uk/elearning/km/cp>

