

What is a Community of Practice?

A community of practice is a group of practitioners who share a domain of interest, interact regularly, and use each other's experience as a resource to learn and improve practice. Members exchange both practical know-how and knowledge to solve problems, spread good practice, and build collective capacity.

Why Communities of Practice Matter

CoPs help make knowledge accessible across organizations and geographies, speed problem-solving, surface and standardize better practices, and support learning and innovation. They are especially useful where expertise is distributed, fast adaptation is needed, or practice must be coordinated across units.

Key elements of Successful Communities of Practice

1. **Domain:** A focused, shared domain that justifies investment of time.
2. **Community:** Active members, visible facilitators or leaders, and simple governance.
3. **Practice:** Routines, tools, templates and problems that members engage in together.
4. **Governance:** Simple rules for decisions, participation, convening formats and a low-friction user experience for participation.
5. **Measurement & adaptation:** Agreed success metrics and regular reflection to adapt activities and roles.

The Life Cycle of a Community of Practice

Communities of Practice are cyclical: **Define** → **Design/Launch** → **Grow/Sustain** → **Perform** → **Transform/Close**. Early work focuses on a concise charter that clarifies the community's purpose, membership, and expected benefits), as well as planning a small set of repeatable activities that create value.

Signals of success and risks to monitor

Regular member-to-member problem solving, re-use of shared tools, contribution recognition, measurable improvements in practice, and durable member engagement.

Sources

European Commission (JRC), *The Communities of Practice Playbook*. [Publications Office of the EU](#)

University of Wisconsin – *Communities of Practice Guide*. [Human Resources](#)

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), *Community of Practice Toolkit 2.0*. [ics.crs.org](https://www.crs.org)