APLIC as a Community of Practice: How are we doing? What's next?

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Summary: Communities of Practice (COPs) are groups of people who share an interest (technical or professional) and share knowledge, information and experience in their group. After this session, participants will have a stronger sense of community with their APLIC colleagues, understanding:
- how APLIC can be an important professional community;
- how to engage outside of conferences and
- what tools are available to support community engagement

What is a COP?
- "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."[1]
  - *Domain:* The area of shared inquiry and of key issues.
  - *Community:* The relationships among members and the sense of belonging.
  - *Practice:* The body of knowledge, methods, stories, cases, tools, and documents.

Why COPs?[2]

Facilitated introductions	"Are you doing what I am doing? Who else is interested in this?"
Facilitated resource sharing	"Have you seen this? Do you have what I need?"
Problem solving	"Can we work on this design and brainstorm some ideas; I'm stuck."
Requests for information	"Where can I find the code to connect to the server?"
Seeking experience	"Has anyone dealt with a customer in this situation?"
Reusing assets	"I have a proposal for a local area network I wrote for a client last year. I can send it to you and you can easily tweak it for this new client."
Coordination and synergy	"Can we combine our purchases of solvent to achieve bulk discount?"
Discussing developments	"What do you think of the new CAD system? Does it really help?"
Documentation projects	"We have faced this problem five times now. Let us write it down once and for all."
Visits	"Can we come and see your after-school program? We need to establish one."
Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	"Who knows what, and what are we missing? Who else should we connect with?"

COP Roles and Levels of Participation
In a community of practice, not all members are expected to play the same role or even have the same level of engagement. Over time, the same individuals may shift between these levels of participation.
-Core Group: The highly engaged small group that champions the community, provides energy, and nurtures the community.
-Participants (active and occasional): These are members who are practitioners, help to define the community, and participate to varying degrees depending on the specific topic.
-Lurkers: These members of the community are those who observe but may not participate for any number of reasons. They may be listening on a call, reading emails or documents, but not actively contributing. However, in most online communities, lurkers are the vast majority of members.

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[1] Etienne Wenger, "Communities of practice a brief introduction."
[2] Etienne Wenger, "Communities of practice a brief introduction."

APLIC Connects on the IBP Knowledge Gateway
APLIC Connects serves as a resource for APLIC members to share information, learn from each other, and continue to build APLIC into a community. The IBP Knowledge Gateway is an "electronic communication platform that connects people working in health and development through virtual networks and online discussions to facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange." Using the Knowledge Gateway as a platform, APLIC Connects allows file sharing, email discussions and a shared calendar. To join, visit http: https://knowledge-gateway.org/aplic-connects.

2015 Conference Notes on COPs
During the 2015 APLIC Conference in San Diego, a session on communities of practice identified the following action items for APLIC. The top items that emerged are in the first list and the second list below are the other ideas that we could do in the future or even possibly do at our next APLIC conference.

1. Host informal phone/adobe connect meetings on topics of interest such as Altmetrics, Citation Software or New guidelines on open access publishing requirements by funders.
2. Use the listserv to call out for discussion or input on any issue - make more use of the list as a community we can draw on to solve problems we all will be dealing with.
3. Facilitated Introductions of new APLIC members and periodic reintroductions of current members on the listserv.
4. Annually updated Google document with member bios and info about what topics we can help others with.
5. Share resources on the list such as links, observations or tools we learn about, and invites to get together informally in our regions/cities
6. Explore other solutions to sharing this information on either an additional listserv, platform or gateway. Some members currently divert APLIC listserv emails to folders due to high volume of ILL requests, so it might be helpful to have a parallel info sharing solution for resource sharing, conversations, posting documents, etc.

List of all suggestions in order of most valued by members - all members can feel free to offer to facilitate these ideas! We really encourage everyone to share and make suggestions for how to do these:

- Facilitated introductions of all new and current members on listserv
- A list of our members and their expertise - could be a database or a google doc/ could also be ordered by topic areas such as citation software, CoPs, etc. and / or languages, skills, etc.
- Informal call in meetings/webinars on any topic- anyone can join with few or many calling in over a lunch time phone call or Adobe connect or GoToMeeting could be quarterly or informally scheduled
- Use the listserv to share more resources, tools, templates, lists, guidelines we are making - have all conference attendees share something they learned with the whole list
- Conferences that give more space for knowledge sharing among APLIC members and survey all APLIC membership for conference ideas and include more virtual participation options
- Case Study or Lessons Learned shared on listserv
- Make what APLIC does more visible and discoverable on web and by larger communities
- Buddy system for new members and first time conference goers!
- Share professional development activities and see APLIC sharing activities as part of our own professional development and value added that can be communicated to our organizations
- Communications strategy for APLIC - how do we describe ourselves and does that need updating on website and our materials?

Additional Resources
- Wenger-Trayner: http://wenger-trayner.com/
- DGroups webinar on "Developing and Facilitating Your Community" Presentation: http://ow.ly/M09K6
- DGroups webinar on "Developing and Facilitating Your Community" Recording: http://ow.ly/M09N5
- IMARK: Knowledge Sharing for Development: http://www.imarkgroup.org/#/imark/en/course/K
- IMARK: Building Electronic Communities and Networks: http://www.imarkgroup.org/#/imark/en/course/C
- FAO Design Aid: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/knowledge/docs/FAO-NC-DesignAid.docx