KENISSA
COMMUNITIES OF MEANING NETWORK

Communities of Practice Leader's Guide

About this Guide*

Welcome! If you are reading this guide, most likely you have agreed to co-lead a *Kenissa* Community of Practice (CoP). Terrific! Your peers will appreciate your initiative and effort to make their CoP productive and valuable. *Kol Hakavod*! This guide addresses questions that you, as a volunteer co-leader, are likely to ask as you embark on the journey of leading a CoP. You should be able to scan the questions quickly and find the information you are looking for. If you don't find what you need, please email Rob Weinberg, *Kenissa* Communities of Practice Coordinator, with your questions at: RobWeinbergPhDLLC@gmail.com.

What is a CoP?

Simply put, a Community of Practice (CoP) is a network that's about something. It's been called "a container that sparks wise sharing among peers" on an ongoing basis. CoPs are designed to bring members of the *Kenissa* Network together for sharing, thought partnership, and mutual support regarding topics of common interest and concern. People who sign up for *Kenissa* CoPs agree to meet at least five times with the group, participate in defining group mission and ways of operating, contribute actively to the conversation, and share cases and resources from their experience and learnings.

Participating in a Community of Practice can help you to:

- Elevate your practice to the next level;
- Reduce feelings of isolation;
- Increase your knowledge and understanding in certain areas;
- Provide a forum to develop ideas or work through dilemmas with colleagues; or
- Gain a fresh perspective on your work and organization.

We hope that the CoPs will continue to meet well beyond five sessions, but that is totally up to the members. One of the hallmarks of a true CoP is that it is self-directed by the members. The group chooses when to meet; what to learn, talk about and share; what norms and expectations to establish; how long to keep meeting; and when/if to call it quits.

Another hallmark of a CoP is that its members share a "practice." Although the initial set of *Kenissa* CoPs are not organized around either sectors or themes, members of these CoPs share common interest and concern about some aspect of their work or leadership about which they want to learn together and from one another. The initial CoPs beginning in 2017 are:

1. Funding and Fundraising: strategies and models, identifying potential funders, the challenge of asking, getting your house in order, how funding scales, the place of fundraising in your leadership.
2. Leadership: matching people with needs and gifts, making tough choices, wearing multiple hats, managing transitions, leading change, loss and uncertainty, values-based leadership, power and humility.
3. Scale and growth: Balancing depth and breadth, growing infrastructure and program together, letting go, "business" models, growing without over-extending or losing the essence, choosing partners
4. Covenanting: Balancing accountability and hospitality/inclusiveness, belonging and engagement, mutual obligation and structures of reciprocity, defining, revisiting/renewing the *b'rit*, balancing individual and collective, addressing breach.
5. Sustainability: Personal well-being of self, staff, partners.
6. Organizational Culture: forming culture, defining the community, marketing/recruiting messages, lay leadership empowerment, ownership- vs. consumerist-mindset, values and assumptions about money, matching internal culture to external mission.

Why Co-Lead a CoP?

Becoming a *Kenissa* CoP Leader is an opportunity to contribute not only to your own professional growth but also to step up as a leader and provide a valuable service to your peers. Volunteering to co-lead a CoP gives you the chance to create a rich and meaningful conversation from which both you and the group can benefit. It allows you to build a meaningful learning community in which everyone is focused on improving their practice in areas that the group cares about. And it enables you to be proactive—along with a partner—to prevent the isolation you may feel by tapping into the wisdom of others who are walking similar paths—in some cases a few steps ahead of you.

What are the roles and responsibilities of a CoP Co-Leader?

Here are the responsibilities you take on when you agree to be a CoP Leader:

Handle Group Logistics

Schedule meetings with those who signed up for your CoP:

- Use Doodle polls or Meeting Wizard to schedule an initial organizing meeting. After the first meeting we encourage you to establish a regular meeting time e.g. first Tuesday of each month at 1:00 pm ET;

- Work with the *Kenissa* Program Assistant, who will set up a Zoom link through the *Kenissa* account on the dates you choose.

- Notify and remind CoP members of the meeting times;

Establish Mission and Ways of Working

Lead the group to define its mission and establish how it will operate including:

- How often the group will meet;
- Norms and expectations (e.g., showing up, participating, volunteering, contributing)
- Topics and questions to focus on;
- How (and if) the group will interact between CoP sessions and how/where it will share and store resources; and
- How the group will make decisions.

Plan CoP Sessions

Work with your co-leader to plan the content and process of each session including:

- A content centerpiece such as an article, case study, panel, guest expert, specific practice, or question/dilemma for discussion;
- A volunteer (or two) from the group to take the lead in the session, e.g. present a case, outline a question/dilemma, arrange and introduce a guest, facilitate the conversation; and
- A protocol or process for conducting the conversation and processing the centerpiece content with the group (using or adapting protocols and processes provided by *Kenissa*).

Note: as leader, you don't have to facilitate every session; you just need to make sure someone does.

Keep the Group Energized

- Set up and maintain a CoP Facebook Group, Google Group or similar to share resources and materials with CoP members and *Kenissa* staff; and
- Work with your co-leader to monitor the progress and energy of the CoP:
- Check in with the CoP members at the fifth session (and again at similar intervals after that) to gauge what's working and what's not (using check-in protocol provided by *Kenissa*); and
- Co-determine with group members the focus, content, and direction of the CoP going forward. The CoP will continue as long as its members find it useful.

Who are CoP members? What are their roles and responsibilities?

Anyone who attended the March 2016 Consultation, the December 2016 *Kenissa* National Training, or the March 2017 Consultation is eligible to participate. Each CoP will set its own norms and expectations. By signing up (below) to take part in one or more CoPs, Network members agree to: meet at least five times with the group; participate in defining group mission and ways of operating; contribute actively to the conversation; and share cases and resources from their own experience and learnings.

How do we define success? What are the goals?

The purpose of *Kenissa* CoPs is to continually build *Kenissa* Network members' leadership capacity as well as that of the respective organizations that you lead. CoPs achieve this by bringing members together for sharing, thought partnership, and mutual support regarding topics of common interest and concern. We define success in three arenas:

- **Learning**: CoP members learn something new. On the whole, they find the pace and content of learning in the group worthwhile.

- **Relationships**: CoP members forge relationships with other members and experience mutual support, colleagueship, and trust.

- **Practice** (action and growth): CoP members apply their learning to elevate their practice as leaders of their respective communities of meaning and deepen their leadership capability in ways that benefit their organization, their employees and partners, their sector, and others in the Network.

Ways of Working in a CoP

Defining a CoP mission

A classic leadership text—*Alice in Wonderland*—reminds us that "if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." Defining your CoP's mission early on will help you stay focused. One CoP cannot address every issue; you have to define some boundaries. A brief mission statement will articulate the group's *raison d'etre*. When you want to check-in with the group on its progress, you will be able to refer back to the mission and assess whether you are achieving it. An example of a simple CoP mission statement comes from the *Kenissa* Organizational Culture CoP:

> The Organizational Culture Community of Practice is a peer network of professionals working across a range of fields that make up *Kenissa*. We meet regularly to share best practices and support one another in our attempts to build organizational cultures that reflect our wider vibrant, inclusive, and covenantal communities.

One of the CoP's co-leaders drafted this statement after initial conversations and revised it after gathering feedback from members of the group.

How big should a CoP be?

We imagined a *minyan* of people is a good number to allow for a full exchange of ideas. As your CoP gets going, if the group feels too large or too small to spark productive learning and conversation and allow full participation, contact Rob Weinberg, *Kenissa* CoP Coordinator, to discuss options.

How often should a CoP meet?

Each CoP will determine how often it wants to meet. To succeed, a CoP needs to meet often enough to build relationships and trust among the members and a sense of continuity in the conversation. Nevertheless, trying to meet too often can overtax people's schedules and lead to drop off in participation. Taking those factors into account, at the outset monthly meetings seem like a good place to start. After a few meetings, you'll get a sense of whether that rhythm is too often or too seldom to meet. Again, it's up to each group to choose how often (and for how long each time) it wants to meet.

How long should each CoP session last?

As with frequency of meetings, each CoP will choose its own meeting duration. Success lies in allowing enough time to get everyone focused, create a trusting environment, hold a meaningful conversation with diverse and active participation, and allow for reflection to consolidate learning and transition back to work. See the discussion of Meeting Process below for more on how to do that. And yet, if sessions go too long, people will leave early or decide not to show up at all. Based on experience, 75 minutes seems like a good duration to start with and then take the pulse of the group; it's their group and their choice.

Choosing CoP Topics

Each of the CoPs is forming around a conversation that began at a *Kenissa* gathering—either a Consultation or National Training session. The topics outlined in those contexts provided a good springboard for the CoP to begin its conversations. One group took their list of topics and asked members of the group to flesh out questions within each topic area. Those questions provided a rich set of options for orienting future sessions.

Chances are that anyone who chose to join the CoP will find any of the topics within its mission to be worthwhile. A simple way to choose the focus for a given session is to ask for a volunteer from the group to take the lead in the next session and ask them what they would like to focus on. They may have a case study that's on their mind or a dilemma they are facing on which they'd like the group's input; these can form the basis for the next conversation. Proceeding in this fashion you are unlikely to run out of session topics.

Group norms and expectations

In the first "organizing" session of the CoP, it's important to work with the group to discuss and establish norms and expectations to which they agree to hold one another accountable. These might include agreements about matters such as:

- Commitments to show up regularly and advance notification if something comes up;
- Participating actively in the conversation;
- Volunteering to present or lead the discussion;
- Confidentiality and creating safe space;
- Completing pre-work or *hevruta* conversations between sessions;
- Being present; avoiding interruptions and distractions.

It's also helpful—especially in an online format—to agree on ways to signal one another if someone goes outside those norms. Any signal is okay as long as everyone agrees to use it and to hold each other accountable; it should not fall to the co-leaders or facilitator alone to uphold the group's norms; it's everyone's responsibility.

Conducting conversations online

Technology: you will need a computer with a working camera and microphone (although you also can call in by phone) and a strong enough Internet connection to carry the video and audio. We are currently using Zoom as our platform; you should download and test the Zoom application before your first call.

It's a good idea to find a quiet place without interruptions to join your CoP conversations; coffee shops and moving automobiles are generally bad places to do this (for obvious reasons of both noise and safety).

Recording conversations: Zoom has the capability to record your meetings and there may be occasions when you choose to do that. For example, if a member of the group who is keenly interested in the topic of a particular session is nevertheless unable to join, you may want to record it for later viewing/listening. However, if you do record a session be sure to secure the consent of everyone on the call before hitting "record" and be sure to provide access to the recording in a manner that is in keeping with the group's confidentiality agreements.

Using the online space to advantage—tips and techniques: First, make sure everyone can be seen and heard. Some participants may need help getting to know the platform—how to log in, how to turn on their camera, how to mute when not speaking.

You may want to make—or ask the meeting's presenter to make—slides (e.g. through PowerPoint or Keynote) to help focus the conversation. They also can serve as a resource after the session. If someone is presenting a case, showing it in written form can provide a helpful touchpoint for the group throughout the discussion. If you are studying a text, it helps to show the text on the screen for reference. If you are following a protocol, listing the steps and timing also can be helpful in managing time and expectations.

Zoom provides a chat box and it may be helpful at times to provide "parallel processing" by posing a question and asking people to respond in the chat. It's a quick way to get a sense of the group. If following the conversation, the slides, and the chat feels like a little much to handle, you can eliminate one or ask someone else in the group to monitor the chat and lift up topics to the full group or the presenter/facilitator as appropriate.

And sometimes simply using the platform as a way to see and hear one another is a great gift in and of itself.

Keeping the conversation active and alive between CoP meetings

Oftentimes you may want CoP members to prepare for a conversation—perhaps reading an article, viewing a video, listening to a podcast, or thinking about a text or a question. You can send these out via email or post them in a group space (see below) and send out a link.

Depending on how your group's habits evolve, you may decide that group members should take turns taking notes on the conversations and circulating them—or at least highlights of the conversation—to the group following the session.

Keeping the community active and alive between sessions can be a challenge (everyone is busy) but it will advance the goals of learning, relationships, and practice. You might consider:

- Recommending pairs of people to hold virtual coffees;
- Using a Facebook group to continue sharing resources (see below);
- Posting reflections or blogging with questions;
- Asking CoP members to share additional relevant resources; or
- Setting up and seeding online discussion.

When a CoP really gets going as a community, supported by a technology platform (see below), the interaction between CoP meetings can take on a slightly different character than that of the meeting conversations. Between meetings, CoP members may post inquiries that lead to running conversation online. Example types of inquiries might include:

- Problem-solving: "I'm working on X and I'm stuck. Anyone have a suggestion?"
- Requests for information: "I'm looking for a way to… Where can I find…?"
- Seeking experience: "Has anyone dealt with a [board member/employee/donor] who…?"
- Offering resources: "I have a proposal I wrote last year for X; I'm happy to share it and you could tweak it for your situation."
- Seeking feedback/growing confidence: "Before I do this, would someone take a look at my plan and tell me what you think?"
- Discussing developments: "What do you think of the just-announced merger? How might it affect our work?"

When you see this sort of robust conversation occurring online between virtual CoP meetings, you'll know the group is really succeeding!

Online platforms: share and store materials, keep conversation going

Each group can choose which platform or online space to use to share and store resources, materials, articles, and links and to carry on threaded conversations between meetings. But we recommend strongly that you choose *some* platform. Sharing materials solely as email attachments may seem efficient at the time but what is lost is the sense of accumulated knowledge and ease of access whenever a group member is looking for "that resource someone mentioned a few months ago."

Options for easy to use and readily accessible platforms include (but are certainly not limited to): a LinkedIn group, a closed Facebook group, a Google Group, a Yahoo Group. You may want to use and link to Google Docs or Sheets from within a group site if you are working on writing something together or keeping a running set of group session notes.

How to make decisions

Because CoPs are learning groups, and are not necessarily geared toward taking collective action, there may be a limited number of situations in which the group needs to make a consequential decision. Nevertheless, there will be times when the group may need to reach agreement on matters such as its own direction and continuation, on norms and boundaries of conversation, or on how to spend its time.

The group should ideally decide at the outset how it will reach decisions—whether by majority rule or consensus (the two most common and familiar methods). Consensus decision-making (see overview articles here and here) does not necessarily signify 100% agreement; rather it may mean everyone is willing to live with and abide by the decision. One organization's operational definition of consensus was "80% comfort, 100% commitment."

Two simple tools you can use to check for consensus are "Fist-to-Five" and "Six Levels of Consensus"

Six Levels of Consensus

1. I can say an unqualified "YES" to the decision. I am satisfied that the decision is an expression of the wisdom of the group.
2. I find the decision perfectly acceptable.
3. I can live with the decision; I'm not especially enthusiastic about it.
4. I do not fully agree with the decision and need to register my view about it. However, I do not choose to block the decision. I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group.
5. I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision.
6. I feel that we have no clear sense of unity in the group. We need to do more work before consensus is reached.

Pre- and Post-CoP meeting tasks

Well in advance of each session (if sessions are monthly, try to get notice out soon after the prior month's session), send an email (or message through whatever platform you've chosen, assuming everyone in the CoP has joined the online group) announcing the **date and time** of the meeting, the **topic**, and, if applicable, the person who will present or lead the discussion of the topic, and any **preparation** required.

Within a week of the session, send a reminder about the session including the Zoom log-in information and a reminder about any preparation (along with any materials required for the preparation e.g. a link to an article). It may be possible to set up Zoom to send a reminder automatically at a preset interval.

Between meetings, you may also want to stimulate ongoing conversation, especially when a topic is provocative and group members are very much engaged when the session comes to a close. See the "Ways to stay in touch between CoP meetings" section above for suggestions.

Meeting Content—Core Conversations

The first building block for learning in a CoP is the knowledge and experience that each member brings to the table. Members can share knowledge by simply exchanging stories with one another. That is one reason why diversity of thought and experience in a CoP can be an important asset. We learn little in an echo chamber filled with people whose views and experience are identical to our own; we learn a lot from people with different experiences and perceptions.

Members also can provoke their own and others' learning by bringing to the group the questions, dilemmas, and challenges they face in their work. The curiosity borne of a meaningful and consequential question will drive more learning than a hundred presentations.

Generally speaking, each scheduled CoP session will have some content as its "centerpiece" that drives its core conversation (see Meeting Process below). The centerpiece content can take as many forms as your imagination generates. Common types of core content include:

- **Case study:** one individual brings a story from their experience. Usually the story provides context and tees up a dilemma that the presenter faces and on which s/he seeks input or suggestions from the group. A case also can be the story of a situation that has been resolved (for better or worse) but grappling with the situation (without revealing the outcome) can be instructive to the group. It may be the presenter's choice whether to share the actions s/he took and the outcome with the group. The key to choosing a case is understanding what the group can learn that is relevant to their area of shared interest, curiosity, and passion. To be productive a case discussion should be nested within a clear protocol that spells out the steps in the discussion (see below in Meeting Process for more on protocols).

- **Article**: A variety of types of articles may be worthy of discussion as the centerpiece of a CoP session. An article may put an issue in a new light, report on a development in the field, or offer a new approach to addressing the topic around which the CoP is convened. In choosing an article as the basis for conversation, consider what it adds to what CoP members already know, or what counter-intuitive message it brings that may provoke valuable learning.

- **Research report or proposed project**: similar to articles that share new developments in the field, research can challenge assumption or shed light on changing conditions that render familiar approaches useless. Researchers tend to ask very focused, carefully crafted questions that may challenge practitioners to think differently about their practice. Helping members stay in touch with developments in the field can be an important role for a CoP to play.

- **Panel discussion**: A panel is most useful when several people bring parallel but diverse experiences or points of view that invite comparison. Otherwise panels can be frustrating if the group ends up not hearing enough from anyone to be useful. A successful panel usually requires a moderator to set the topic and tone and play "traffic cop" among speakers to keep the conversation moving and productive. It is generally helpful if each panel member gets a few minutes (with a pre-agreed time limit) to share her/his experience or perspective. Then the moderator may engage panel members in responding to and conversing with one another and/or responding to questions from the group. If possible, holding a preparatory call with panel members to discuss scope and focus of the conversation, pre-set topics or questions each will address, and the sequence or format of the conversation.

- **Guest expert**: After a CoP group has been working together for a while, perhaps focusing in on a topic that goes beyond the group members' knowledge, you may want to consider enlisting and expert to share specialized knowledge with the group. You may be able to use members' networked connections to find an expert who will share with the group on a pro bono basis. If not, members may have to contribute funds or find another source to support an expert's honorarium.

- **Shared practice discussion**: as the CoP proceeds and members become comfortable with one another, you are likely to discover that group members encounter similar situations, perform similar tasks, wrestle with similar choices, or wonder about similar puzzles. Sharing these among the members of the group—the situations, tasks, choices, or puzzles and how various members of the group have dealt with them can itself be a rich source of peer learning and is, in some ways, the core of a community of practice. These conversations become most valuable when the group defines a clear focus and when they draw out generalizable lessons learn from a wide-ranging conversation. Seeding the conversation with a few people who plan in advance to share their experience can "prime the pump" to get the conversation going. Asking everyone to reflect on what they are "taking away" at the end can help concretize lessons learned.

Both within and across CoP conversations, be sure to incorporate a variety and diversity of perspectives on whatever the issue or topic is at hand. You can ensure this either by planning for people with differing approaches to present their work (e.g. through case studies or a panel discussion) or by facilitating the conversation in a manner that intentionally invites multiple voices.

Meeting Process

Meeting structure

In its purest form, a CoP is a conversation among people who share a practice, a concern, a passion. Some conversations start and remain lively and productive spontaneously. But most require a little structure to make sure they end up feeling worthwhile to participants. And making the conversation worthwhile is critical to motivating community members to keep coming back. Putting some shape and structure around the conversation also helps accomplish some other important goals: it gives the conversation an understandable and satisfying arc, it helps mix and balance learning with and from each other and providing support to one another, and it helps make sure all voices can be heard; it encourages active participants to "step back" and makes room for quieter participants to "step up" and be heard.

Five Meeting Elements: Welcome/Framing, Connection, Core Conversation, Reflection, Next Steps

The centerpiece of every CoP meeting is the conversation about the chosen topic. See the "Meeting Content" section above for a discussion of various types of "centerpiece" conversation and the sample protocols below for ways of structuring those conversations. Preceding that core with a Welcome/Framing and a Connection question and following it with a few minutes of Reflection and an articulation of Next Steps will give the session a feeling of completeness and couch the learning in a sense of community. Here is how each element adds to the conversation:

Welcome/Framing

Welcoming everyone acknowledges the importance of the group and their participation. It also signals that it's time to begin. Framing the meeting by explaining the topic and the goal of the conversation gives people the "lay of the land" and helps them understand how to participate productively. They also know how to gauge progress and success.

Connection

A connection question enables people on the call to know one another and connects to the topic of the day. Responses can be written in a chat box or spoken. Particularly early on in the life of a CoP, or when new people join, connection can be an important way to establish the *community* part of community of practice. A very basic way to build community is to learn more about each other's lives than just names, hometowns, family circumstances, and organizations/jobs. By sharing memories, experiences, perspectives, and opinions about matters of importance to us, we create connection. It's often a good idea to craft a question that also connects to the topic of the session. For example, if the session topic is about alignment, you might ask people to share a time in their lives when something (their car, their back, their values) felt in or out of alignment.

Reflection

Saving a few minutes at the end of each session for reflection gives participants time to pause, think more deeply, make meaning for themselves and the group from the conversation, and identify take always. Oftentimes the real learning comes not in experiencing the core conversation itself but in reflecting on it in order to integrate it into your own practice. Reflection time brings closure to a meeting and its topic. A reflection question also can focus on how people felt or what they thought about the process of the meeting and can yield valuable insights about how people are feeling about their experience in the CoP.

Next Steps

The final bit of closure and "housekeeping" for each meeting should be an articulation, by one of the co-leaders, of next steps. This can include informing the group of the next session's topic, any advance preparation needed, and reminding them of the date and time. It also can involve asking for volunteers to take the lead on future sessions, e.g. by presenting a case, leading a shared practice discussion, suggesting an article or piece of research, or organizing a panel.

Meeting Planning Worksheet

A worksheet for planning your CoP meetings using this five-part meeting structure is available on the Kenissa website here.

Using Jewish texts to ground the work in our tradition

Whether your CoP focuses on organizational culture, scale and growth, sustainability, funding, leadership, or any number of other possible foci, the context we share is contemporary Jewish life. Studying text together can be a way to ground our organizational and leadership conversations in our Jewish tradition and values. Drawing on that tradition brings attention to the fact that we are not corporations or businesses. A text study of traditional or contemporary sources can enrich the conversation and remind participants that this work takes place within a sacred context. It also can provide shared language for the group.

You can incorporate text into the Connection part of a meeting, can ask someone to offer a brief *D'var Torah*, discuss a text (with pre-planned questions) in the full group or facilitate a *hevruta* text study which gives everyone a chance to voice their thoughts about the text. Many kinds of text may be appropriate; you may either choose something like the weekly *parsha* or select a text for its particular relevance to the meeting topic. Many text study source sheets are available on Sefaria.org. In addition, many text studies on leadership and change management topics are available on The Toolbox.

Using Protocols For Core Conversations

Although "protocol" may not be a familiar word, the term is used particularly in the education field, to refer to what you might think of as formats, processes, or templates for conversations with a particular purpose. The Glossary of Education Reform defines protocol this way: "A **protocol** is a set of step-by-step guidelines—usually in the form of a simple one- or two-page document—that is used by educators to structure professional conversations or learning experiences to ensure that meeting, planning, or group-collaboration time is used efficiently, purposefully, and productively. The National School Reform Faculty and the School Reform Initiative are the two primary sources of protocols in the United States, and hundreds of protocols can be downloaded from their websites."

Using a protocol to guide the core conversation of a CoP meeting helps to keep a focus, to foster listening, and to provide an opportunity to construct knowledge both individually and collectively. You may be familiar with protocols you have learned or experienced elsewhere and found effective. Feel free to introduce them to your CoP, making sure you know all the steps and facilitation requirements and that the protocol fits the topic and goals of the conversation.

As time allows, you may want to explore the sites linked above to find protocols that you find particularly useful. The following are examples of protocols available on those sites that fit each type of content "centerpiece" listed in the Meeting Content section above:

- Case Study: SMP Modified Consultancy Protocol
- Article or Research Report: Four "A"s Text Protocol
- Panel Discussion: No particular protocol. Options include soliciting questions for panelists from the rest of the group and/or among panelists. You might ask listeners to pose two different types of questions: those directed to a particular panel member and those designed to spark dialog among panel members regarding their disparate points of view or experiences. You might also considering soliciting questions from CoP members in advance for panelists to consider as they prepare.
- Guest expert: Learning From Speakers Protocol
- Shared Practice Discussion: Success Analysis Protocol with Reflective Questions, Success Analysis for Individuals, Probing Protocol, and/or

An additional excellent resource on protocols is **Protocols for Professional Learning (**Easton, 2009)

Group Dynamics and Conflict

Managing and Engaging Your Peers

Leading a CoP requires that you continually engage and enlist your peers not just in robust conversation but in tasks to prepare for, contribute to, and/or take a lead role in CoP sessions. In order to contribute to a CoP, its members need to feel that it is worthwhile, that they are learning, that their needs and interests in being part of the community are being met. That means that, over time as a leader, it will be valuable to get to know CoP members as individuals, to learn the gifts they can bring to the group, and to listen to them in order to understand what they are looking to gain from their involvement. That will give you hints about how and when to involve them and what sorts of requests they are likely to say "Yes" to.

Depending on peers to make the CoP operate also means the CoP won't operate well (or at all) if members don't do what they agree to do (or never agree to contribute). At the outset of each group, it's important to agree on norms and expectations about contributing to the community (see "Establish Mission and Ways of Working" above and "First Meeting Template" below). Common reasons people don't deliver on their commitments to a peer group include:

- Feeling that the group is not meeting their needs;
- Lacking a sense that the group is really counting on them or their part;
- Feeling they are not really "part of the team";

- Being "too busy"—which may occur because circumstances have changed since they agreed to take something on, or because the person has difficulty assessing and managing their own capacity and habitually overpromises and under-delivers; and
- Thinking they understood the task when they agreed to it but discovering—once into it—that they don't understand and don't know where to go for help or clarification (perhaps due to embarrassment).

Remaining alert to these and similar issues can equip you to head them off at the pass, e.g. by making the "ask" as clear as possible, checking in with people ahead of a session at which they've agreed to a crucial role, periodically taking the pulse of the group (and of individuals as needed) to make sure people are receiving value, and expressing appreciation in the group—Including describing the difference each person's contribution makes—so that everyone understands that their contributions are needed and valued.

When Conflict Arises

Leading and facilitating a CoP meeting is a balancing act—balancing attention to the content learning and to building and sustaining relationships in the group. Using the five meeting elements described above along with shared text study can help strike that balance. Even with scrupulous attention to both, not every conversation will be harmonious; conflicts can arise.

Your first instinct might be to try to avoid, suppress, or separate conflict from the CoP. Sometimes that's okay—you may find that you can employ humor to reduce tension and anger, particularly if you think the conflict stems from a source outside the realm of the CoP. But often it's best to resist the temptation to flee from conflict; conflict can be an important teacher. One of the keys to helping the group and individuals learn from conflict is for you (or whoever is facilitating the conversation) to refrain from getting caught up in or escalating the conflict. Rather, try to maintain a stance of curiosity and inquiry, an open mind, and a commitment to serve the needs and learning of the group.

This guide cannot present a thorough lesson on conflict resolution; a few excellent resources are referenced below. Try to avoid assuming and instead ask open-ended questions of the parties in conflict to discover what the conflict is really about. Is it a genuine disagreement about content? If so, it's perfectly okay to agree to disagree; a CoP is not usually a decision-making group, it's a learning group. Alternatively, are the conflict's roots in some aspect of the CoP and its process?

Conflicts in peer-drive groups like CoPs often revolve around perceptions or feeling that some members are not:

- Delivering on what they promise;
- Coming prepared to the conversations;
- Engaged or present in the sessions (multi-tasking anyone?); or
- Pulling their weight in some other way.

Like teams, CoPs will function best with clarity about goals, roles, processes, and relationships. Often when conflict arises that we may initially attribute to a problem in an interpersonal relationship, it turns out that the conflict is actually a symptom of lack of clarity or agreement about the group's goals or focus, about what roles various members are supposed to play, or about group processes like how the group is supposed to reach decisions or what norms the group members will agree to abide by. Listening to what conflicting parties are saying with an ear toward these four areas can often help surface the issue so it can be resolved.

Remember, also, that this is a group whose purpose is learning from and with one another. Try to reframe conflict as a source of learning. What blind spots might the conflict help us to recognize? What can the conflict teach us about the powerful emotions associated with our topic? How each of us responds within and to the conflict can also teach us about ourselves.

Resources for learning more about conflict resolution:

- **Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life** (Rosenberg, 2015),
- **Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In** (Fisher and Ury, 2011),
- **Standing in the Fire: Leading High Heat Meetings with Clarity, Calm, and Courage** (Dressler, 2010)

First meeting plan

A plan for the first meeting of a CoP, following the meeting process outlined above, is available on the *Kenissa* website here.

Fifth Meeting (check-in) plan

This meeting plan is under development and will be available on the *Kenissa* website in the coming weeks.

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* Portions of this guide were inspired by the "Reconstructionist Learning Networks Facilitator Handbook" generously shared by Cyd Weissman, Assistant Vice President, Innovation and Impact, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Jewish Reconstructionist Communities.