**VOTA Community of Practice Guidelines**

Background:
VOTA is committed to establishing Communities of Practice (CoPs) as an evidence-based strategy for building networking opportunities and professional occupational therapy connections across the state. CoPs allow occupational therapy practitioners, students and educators to connect across geographical boundaries and to focus on shared interests or concerns. As a VOTA member benefit, CoPs facilitate connections between members and strengthen not only individual practice, but also the organization.

 What is a Community of Practice?

A community of practice (CoP) is a “group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et. al., 2002, p.4.). CoPs are social learning groups that focus on networking, sharing information, and creating new knowledge together to advance a domain of professional practice.

What is the purpose of a CoP?

* Engage people in learning more about a common theme, topic, passion or interest.
* Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight.
* Enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities.
* Stimulate learning through collaborative processes that include communication, coaching, and self-reflection.
* Introduce collaborative processes to groups and organizations as well as between organizations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information.
* Share knowledge to help people engage in evidence based practice to inform changes in needs and technologies (Cambridge et al., 2005).
* Facilitate knowledge translation and ultimately improve practice in changing contexts.

What are the benefits of a CoP?

CoPs provide opportunities for participants to come together and have a shared learning experience around a common passion or interest. This can happen virtually, making participation possible across a wide geographical area and without the need for travel time! The evidence indicates that collaborative learning experiences are at the heart of CoPs (Pyrko et al., 2016) and as such, they are an effective and efficient strategy for professional development. CoPs are a good fit for individuals at all stages of their career as they focus on the sharing of experiences and ideas (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Provided that accurate documentation is kept, participation in a CoP can contribute to earning professional development units (PDUs).

How do CoPs work?

CoP members determine the frequency of the virtual meetings. Many CoPs meet on a monthly basis as this builds collaboration and sustainability. Each CoP needs 2 facilitators who can guide the group (e.g. organize the virtual platform, facilitate group discussions to identify future topics etc.) . CoP decisions are collaborative in nature. Some CoPs invite guest speakers to give short presentations and the content is then discussed by participants. Other strategies include “deep dive” discussions about focused topics, reviewing articles, podcasts or webinars, or simply sharing practice stories that highlight the different occupational therapy has made. While the primary focus of CoPs is on collaborative learning, a CoP may identify a need to create a resource for VOTA; in this situation, the idea should be forwarded to the Continuing Education Chair and the Board for consideration before a resource is developed.

VOTA’s CoP Process

All VOTA members are eligible to participate in a CoP. An application form can be found here <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1xdy1p7jDsFD3t3RsgjH4GYmIXRYJA_Dmz8STWg7nL6w/edit?usp=drive_web> and it should be completed and returned to the VOTA office electronically. The VOTA office will connect new participants with the relevant CoP co-facilitator.

Process for establishing new CoPs

Members who have ideas for new CoPs should submit them to the VOTA office using this form (link here). Each submission should contain information that demonstrates the need for the CoP.

Process for sunsetting CoPs

If CoP participants are continuing to engage with one another and find benefit in the collaborative learning experience, then the CoP should continue. If participants determine that the learning experience has halted, or if attendance at meetings has significantly declined, then participants should re-evaluate whether there is still a need for the CoP. Each CoP will determine how long the CoP will be sustained on a periodic basis.

Continuing Education

Participants could receive CEU’s for their time and involvement in CoP’s. NBCOT has more information on their website but according to the site on 2/2021

Participates in a professional study group/ online study group designed to advance knowledge through active participation. 2 hours = 1 unit 18 units you may earn up to 18 units. The way to verify this is by group attendance records verifying time spent, study group goals and analysis of goal attainment and learning. There is a form available at [www.ncbot.org](http://www.ncbot.org) called Study Group Report that can answer more questions or reach out to the CoP Liaison

This is a working document and will be updated or adjusted as necessary in response to VOTA member needs.