**Communities of Practice - Innovations for Scaling Impact (www.scalingimpact.net)**

People, domain and practice are the building blocks of iScale Communities of Practice. Passion and interest are the cement. The outcome is not just increased competency, but networks and relationships to support your on-going development. iScale stewards robust Communities of Practice, each with a particular suite of tools and strategies for enabling people to interact and learn. This includes community face-to-face meetings, blogs, wikis, e-conferences, site visits, and telephone meetings where participants share knowledge, coach each other, work on common projects and identify key learning priorities. The community can decide how formal these activities are - relaxed discussion groups, ad hoc issue meetings, simple question and answer notice boards, more traditional seminars and papers, workshops, as well as large multi-year projects.

Participating in a community of practice reduces individual time and resource expenditures and promotes increasingly innovative solutions by capitalizing on the opportunity to learn collectively.

**Our generic principles/lessons include:**

* **Assemble a stewardship group** – Generally composed of 8-10 members. Half of the team may be "permanent" while the other half rotate on and off. This allows for continuity while also bringing dynamism and highlighting new key issues for the CoP to focus on as they emerge. The level of effort and demands required of stewards should be kept low to encourage participation. Generally this involves a hour and a half conference all every six weeks to two months and an annual in-person meeting.
* **CoPs have a life span** - Usually CoPs are phased in cycles with 3-5 broad outcome goals agreed upon by CoP participants. The CoP should start with issues and activities where there is energy, windows of opportunity, etc.
* **Use both in-person and virtual communication** - In-person meetings are absolutely critical at periodic intervals to the extent feasible. Virtual communication allows for more consistent and continuous communication between meetings and enables participants unable to attend the in-person meetings to stay informed. The virtual communication platform should be designed with the specific needs and capabilities of the CoP participants in mind. It is important to keep the CoP active between meetings otherwise even high levels of initial interest will fade.
* **Focus on both knowledge sharing and action** - Involve both broadly assembling and sharing of knowledge and practices but also action-learning projects/experiments initiated by subsets of the CoP in key areas that are then also fed back into sharing and learning.
* **CoPs require dedicated resources** - Effectively managing a community requires adequate levels of resources and time. CoPs need a small staff/"secretariat" to support stewardship group and the broader CoP especially for logistical/administrative/operational tasks but also continuity.
* **Co-create the work plan directly with the community** - Community members need to take ownership/responsibility for the CoP’s work plan. Joint co-lead community activities are an important part of keeping a community “active” and “alive.” This also helps to create a sense of community and increases the value proposition of the CoP.
* **Recognize and enable variation in level of participation** – Every CoP will have multiple types of participants from intense, engaged active participation to occasional participant who stays abreast of CoP proceedings virtually but does not otherwise actively engage. In-person and virtual communications platforms should be developed with this in mind so as to enable members from across the spectrum of participation to contribute to the community. When possible, it is good to include funders/donors in the CoP both as general members and also in specific aspects of the CoP (stewardship group, in-person meetings, action-learning projects etc…) A clear and attractive value proposition is an important part of drawing in and keeping members.