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Work in Progress

Empowering our Communities of Practice

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Several weeks ago, I asked four very smart and talented leaders in our Association to help draft some operational guidance to assist our International Communities of Practice (CoPs). The goal was to provide non-mandatory guidelines for operating within the new structure and facilitate a framework for thriving, yet independent, CoPs to be created, nurtured and empowered.

In late 2014, this group delivered an excellent document which is now available to all of our CoPs to experiment with and ideally, expand upon. Hopefully, this gives you a taste of the exciting direction our CoPs are taking, as well as the new opportunities we have to share our collective body of knowledge and experience throughout our industry with members and non-members alike. Many thanks to Ben Ward, SR/WA, Aimie Mims, RWP, R/W-AMC, Rick Pino and David Harrah, SR/WA, for their dedication and ongoing contributions to the Association.

Get Involved!

If you would like to know more about our CoPs, check out the "About Us" section on IRWA's website at www.irwaonline.org. Then, when you're ready, just register with our Member Network at http://irwa.ep.memberfuse.com and start getting involved with one or more of our communities.

We need your ideas, your expertise and your experience, and I know you will benefit from ours. I'm already signed up and participating, so I look forward to seeing you there! ✪

What, Why and How for COPs

The following is an excerpt from the "Guide to Cultivating IRWA Communities of Practice."

In 2013, IRWA began restructuring a number of International Committees—namely Relocation Assistance, Valuation, Asset Management, Environment and Survey and Engineering—into Communities of Practice (CoPs). By definition, a CoP is a group of people who share a passion for something that they do, and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. The primary purpose of a CoP is to increase organization performance and member value. IRWA CoPs are designed to provide peer-to-peer learning opportunities that are complementary to our traditional education course offerings and publications. Every IRWA member is welcomed and encouraged to be a participant in one or all of the CoPs, and non-members are also welcome to join in the discussions. Membership in a CoP is free and participation is voluntary.

Transitioning from a Committee to a Community of Practice:

IRWA's International Discipline Committees historically focused on committee administration, supporting IRWA's Annual Conference with educational sessions, as well as a limited discussion on current issues. Member participation was limited to the appointed chapter and region representatives, though the general membership was welcome to meetings and events if they wished to participate in the discussions.

The Discipline CoP will allow all members to easily participate in topic discussions. IRWA CoPs are focused on the member and the social structure that enables them to learn with and from each other. Participation will be achieved with teleconferencing and in-person meetings. The CoPs still have some administrative duties by supporting the Industry Committees, but the main focus is to engage the general membership. The CoP should entice the members to talk about their experiences and share with others how they were successful. The table below provides a few examples of activity categories.

Activity Categories	Example Topics and Questions
Problem-solving	How can we best reach out to our Chapter agency members? Let's brainstorm some ideas; I'm stuck.
Requests for information	Where can I find the URA regulations on the FHWA website?
Seeking experience	Has anyone dealt with a displacee in this situation?
Coordination and synergy	How can we share this topic with all of the industry committees?
Discussing developments	What is the best way to educate members on the new FERC regulations?
Documentation projects	Who has implemented the new Turbo Relocation software?
Visits	That is a really interesting transit project; let's plan a field trip for the Chapter.
Reusing assets	Who has an outline to write a new course?