ACFID Communities of Practice Management and Support Framework

1. What is a Community of Practice?

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who come together to share, learn and work together. They are held together by a common interest in a body of knowledge and are driven by a desire to solve problems together and contribute to the development of a body of knowledge. Communities of practice are self-selecting, voluntary, self-managing and collegial.

Communities of Practice are organised and run by and for their members. They're responsible for preparing their own plans, organising their own meetings, communicating with each other and following through on agreed actions.

ACFID's Communities of Practice can form around a wide variety of knowledge domains, including functions such as operations, programs and advocacy, sectors such as shelter and child rights, and geography including countries and regions.

2. Why are they important?

Knowledge is a core asset of any organisation. "Know-what" – knowledge that can be written down and shared through policies, case studies, guidelines, tools etc. – quickly degrades in value, particularly during periods of rapid and discontinuous change. "Know-how" on the other hand resides in people. It is learned by experts over long periods through observation, imitation, experimentation, reflection, learning and adaptation. This type of knowledge cannot always be stored in guidelines and tools. It circulates through unwritten routines, stories, rules of thumb. This is particularly true for complex tasks which require high levels of improvisation rather than adherence to rule and procedure. Communities of Practice provide a means for tapping into this "know-how" through enabling peers to come together to share and learn from each other, generate new insights, solve problems together and contribute to the development of a body of knowledge.

In addition, CoPs are vehicles for action and change, benefitting the group members themselves, the broader sector and membership and ACFID's secretariat. For ACFID, Communities of Practice will play a vital role in contributing to our broader change agenda and to achieving the outcomes articulated in goal three of the Strategic Plan which sees ACFID members as influential agents of change and leaders in development, humanitarian practice, NGO effectiveness and accountability.

3. Management of CoPs

Communities of Practice hold benefits for both individual members; through the provision of a space where knowledge can be shared and deepened around a common problem or passion, and for the supporting organisation by recognising that they are an organisational asset capable of aligning areas of work with strategic priorities.

Following a review in 2017; ACFID believes that a midway approach to managing and nurturing CoPs will ensure benefits continue for both CoP members and ACFID.

ACFID recognises that individual CoPs may move fluidly between the three types of CoPs indicated in the diagram below.
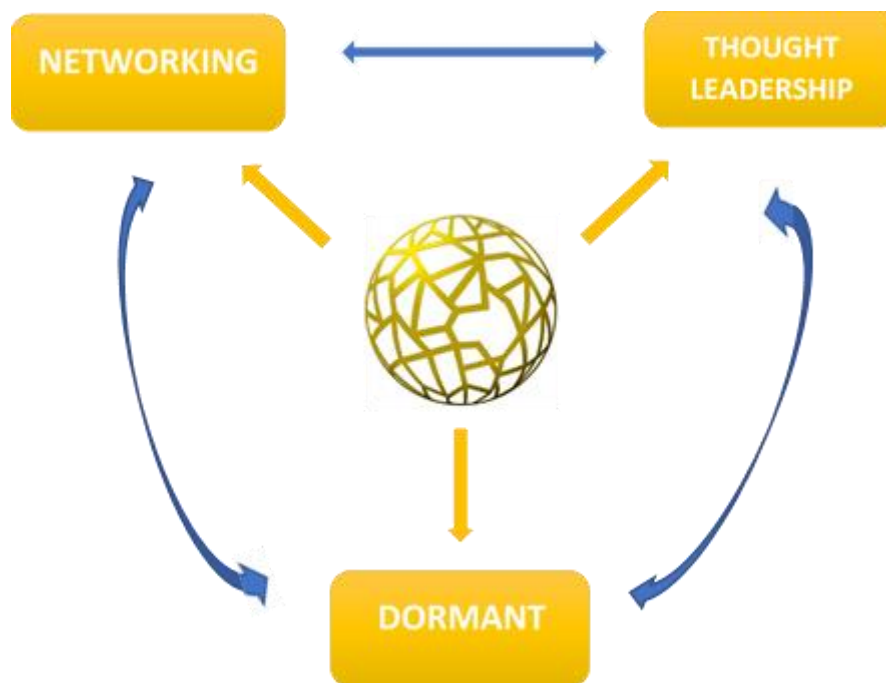
The ACFID secretariat will hold the following responsibilities:

1. ACFID's Effectiveness and Engagement Team (EET) will take the overarching responsibility for managing CoPs:

    - **ACFID CoP Lead.** The Membership and Stakeholder Engagement Lead has overall responsibility for the management of CoPs. They will act as the first point of contact for CoPs and has responsibility for maintaining an overview of CoPs, developing the frameworks and guidelines, promoting CoPs to the wider membership and development community, establishing new CoPs, registering/deregistering participants in CoPs on the

Collaborate platform and acting as the gatekeeper for communication between individual CoPs and the secretariat.

- The Learning and Innovation team will provide assistance in the development of CoP training material.

2. The ACFID Support Services Team (SST) will provide administrative support as required, including management of CoP members on iMIS. The Information Management Officer will take responsibility for the enabling technology/functionality of the web-based Collaborate platform, including the creation of new CoPs on the platform and troubleshooting as required.

3. The ACFID Policy and Advocacy Team (PAT) will provide support and advice to the ACFID CoP Lead regarding the review of content being produced by CoPs that are wanting to put ACFID's name to their work.

4. ACFID staff are able to join CoPs if participation contributes to the delivery of their job and/or contributes to their professional development. Staff may not be convenors. All ACFID staff that are part of CoPs have a responsibility to communicate the work being done back to the secretariat as required.

4. Classification of CoPs

Whilst CoPs can be classified in many ways; ACFID notes its CoPs generally fall into one of the 3 categories:

1. **Thought Leadership:** These CoPs have strong support from both members and ACFID. They are effective in providing support to ACFIDs strategic intent and also to supporting learning and knowledge management processes for members. Whilst achieving set objectives, they also support tacit knowledge sharing through stories and idea development.

   At this level, CoPs are actively contributing to pieces of work that are sector wide in a collaborative manner. This includes the development of practice notes, engagement with ACFID and DFAT on policy change, this is through their own volition or at the request of ACFID.

   Expert Task Groups: Expert Task Groups (ETGs) may be enacted by ACFID if required to help pursue its strategic plan. Whilst the preference will be to use an already established CoP, ETGs remain an important element of the model as they are management mandated, task oriented, timebound and hand selected. They are resourced by and held accountable to ACFID's Secretariat for the delivery of specific products which are identified through ACFID's operational planning process and/or address needs/opportunities which emerge through the year.

2. **Networking and knowledge sharing:** This is the most common state for COPs to be in. The CoP is being actively managed by its convenors and the group is meeting virtually or in

person up to 4 times a year. It supported by ACFID and its members, producing results that are mainly beneficial to individual members in regard to learning and knowledge management. The CoP dictates its focus and members participate when it suits them. They do not need to seek approval to conduct any work unless it is work in ACFID's name.

3. **Dormant:** For various reasons, CoPs may not have an active membership at certain times. This is often the case with many "Country" focused CoPs. These ones will reinvigorate up if a particular incident happens or a specific need that brings the members back. CoPs may remain dormant for an indefinite period of time.

As noted earlier, ACFID recognises that CoPs may move fluidly between the different classifications, pending their individual needs and those of ACFID. Classification of the CoPs into the 3 categories will be done roughly every 6 months by the ACFID CoP Lead and will be based on the following:

- Engagement with CoP convenors and where they believe their CoP is classified;
- How active the CoP appears to be on collaborate;
- Whether the CoP is undergoing work aligned with ACFIDs strategy; and
- Whether the CoP is engaging in sector wide pieces of work collaboratively.

5. Support provided to CoPs

ACFID will provide support to CoPs generally in a number of ways as follows and more specifically according to classification (see table 1):

Enable
- ACFID sees CoPs as a key part of ACFID's architecture and is committed to enabling CoPs to function effectively through providing enabling infrastructure (Collaborate and teleconference facilities), building capacity, sharing lessons and facilitating linkages.

Inform and Consult
- ACFID recognises that much of the sectors expertise in both policy and practice is located within the Communities and therefore will consult with CoPs on an as needed basis.

Managing Risk
- ACFID encourages CoPs to communicate with ACFID about their work, particularly where it may involve sensitive or controversial issues. In such cases, ACFID may work with an individual CoP to institute communication protocols which are specific to that CoP or to specific pieces of that CoP's work.

Work with to deliver
- ACFID may ask a CoP or some members of a CoP to undertake a specific piece of work on ACFID's behalf. In such cases, ACFID will provide additional support to the CoP, including either staff time or budget or both.

- ACFID can promote the work of CoPs through its public communication platforms. This can include posting a blog written by a CoP, sharing tools and other resources developed by CoPs via the Code Good Practice Toolkit and ACFID Resource Library, profiling and engaging expert practitioners from CoPs through Ask an Expert etc.

Table 1. Support to CoPs by classification

	DORMANT	NETWORKING	THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
Promotion on ACFIDs website	✓	✓	✓
Maintenance of the CoP on 'Collaborate'	✓	✓	✓
Addition and deletion of members from CoP	✓	✓	✓
Guidance on how to use 'Collaborate'	✓	✓	✓
Access to CoP Convenor teleconference	✓	✓	✓
Promotion of CoP through ACFID communication channels as required (at request of the CoP)	✗	✓	✓
4 teleconferences per year (at request of the CoP)	✗	✓	✓
Guidance from ACFID on aligning with ACFIDs work	✗	✓	✓
Provision of a template for TOR/workplan	✗	✓	✓
Ability to bid for CoP innovation funds as they arise	✗	✓	✓
Expectation of CoP to provide case studies to promote their work	✗	✓	✓
Communication of work back up to ACFID as required	✗	✓	✓
Dedicated ACFID Staff Member as required/requested	✗	✗	✓
Contributes to the strategic priorities of ACFID	✗	✗	✓
Expectation of CoP to be involved in MEL as required	✗	✗	✓

6. Establishing New Communities of Practice

A new Community of Practice can only be established with ACFID's approval. A new Community should have a clear purpose and a unique focus which cannot be addressed by an existing Community or a sub-group of that Community.

Communities of Practice are member-led. To establish a new Community of Practice you will need at least one convener, preferably two, with the backing of your agency and a critical mass of participants drawn from across several agencies. ACFID can assist with finding participants by promoting the group through the monthly Member Bulletin. *More information on the roles and responsibilities of Co-convenors is found in Section 7 below.*

To establish a new CoP please contact ACFID's CoP Lead. You'll need to supply a brief paragraph on the proposed focus of the CoP[1]. If the group meets the criteria, ACFID will seek expressions of

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[1] This paragraph should include a description of the purpose, scope and focus of work for the group.

interest for participation from across the ACFID membership. Depending on the level of interest ACFID will approve the CoP and set up the enabling infrastructure on *Collaborate*. The final authority on the establishment of a new CoP rests with ACFID's Growth and Effectiveness Manager.

CoP's may find it useful to establish a group Terms of Reference to define their purpose, scope of work and formalise group ways of working. ACFID will provide standard TOR templates on request but it's up to the individual CoP to agree to the particular terms of participation and engagement defined within their TOR.

7. CoP Convenors

CoPs are required to select a member as convenor, or two members to be co-convenors. Convenors must be staff within a Full or Affiliate Member organisation. ACFID strongly recommends that CoPs appoint two co-convenors to share the responsibility and ensure continuity when one convenor is travelling. The convenors of the Community are responsible for:
- Chairing meetings
- facilitating communication within the group
- Managing relationships with external stakeholders;
- Act as the point of contact with the ACFID Secretariat if needed;
- Decide and manage which non-ACFID members can join the group;
- Introduce new members to the work of the group;
- Participate in annual learning event facilitated by ACFID; and
- Risk management- abiding by ACFID standards.

Convenors who resign must notify ACFID's CoP Lead so that our CoP database can be updated accordingly. In the first instance all efforts will be made by the resigning convenor and existing CoP members to find a replacement for the position. In the second instance ACFID may support the process of finding a replacement convenor.

8. Composition of Communities of Practice

Communities are primarily vehicles for staff from ACFID Member agencies to share, learn and collaborate. ACFID does however encourage communities to open their membership to other people such as independent consultants, staff of managing contractors, DFAT staff, and academics from affiliated universities, including [ACFID Affiliate Members](). The objective of bringing in expertise and perspectives from outside the ACFID Membership is to foster innovation, promote problem solving, spread best practice, contribute to professional development and result in the creation of new knowledge and collaborative partnerships.

The only exception to this general rule is that staff from NGOs or academic institutions that are eligible for ACFID membership but have not joined are not permitted to join CoPs.

ACFID has delegated the authority to approve the participation of non-Member individuals or agencies to the convenor/co-convenor with the backing of the group themselves. To add an external member to the group, please follow these steps:

1. If they do not already have an account, request the new member goes to [MYACFID](#) to set one up.
2. Notify the ACFID CoP Lead via email of their name and organisation.
3. ACFID CoP Lead will then add the member to the CoP and send through a notification to the requestor when this is done.

As noted above, the only exception where ACFID may deny the user access is if the individual is employed by an organisation eligible for ACFID Membership yet chosen not to be.

At times, individuals will contact ACFID directly to be added to CoPs. In these cases, the ACFID CoP Lead will attempt to contact the convenors to obtain their approval. This is important for CoPs that want to restrict their membership.

The convenor of the group is then responsible for introducing and inducting the new participant to the group.

From time to time it may be relevant and beneficial for non-ACFID Member individuals to attend certain meetings or events but not to formally join the group. Again, ACFID delegates responsibility to the group itself to manage invitations and attendance of external members in such situations.

Communities also have the authority to refuse non-ACFID member individuals that request permission to participate in their group. Any issues regarding CoP membership which cannot be resolved by the convenors should be referred by the convenors to ACFID.

ACFID staff cannot be conveners of a Community of Practice but can participate as members as long their participation is consistent with their role and/or contributes to their professional development.

9. CoP Participants

An individual's level of participation and engagement in a CoP is self-selecting and self-managed and hence ACFID recognises and accepts that participation will vary across and within groups.
Individual participation is defined by following characteristics;

- Membership is voluntary;
- Members can belong to more than one CoP;
- Members are accountable to themselves and the group;
- Members can vary their level of participation. Whilst some group members will drive group content and action, others may observe from the sideline. Other participants may choose to engage at different times or on particular initiatives or projects depending on their own workload/capacity.

10. Closing CoPs

CoPs can exist for as long their members wish them to exist. ACFID will periodically check whether CoPs are or intend to continue to function, including through monitoring CoP communication. CoPs which no longer wish to function will be formally closed by ACFID.

11. Communication and Confidentiality

Communities of Practice communicate primarily through *Collaborate*, a custom built online communication and collaboration tool located in the My ACFID section of the website. *Collaborate* provides a platform for ACFID's CoP's to share information and resources, start discussions, organise meetings and events. All the content that is stored within *Collaborate* is only visible and accessible to the members of the CoP.

The platform also allows users to create **sub-groups** within the larger CoP, to have side discussions on more specialised issues. The content posted in the sub-group is only visible and accessible to its members.

ACFID will also continue to provide access to teleconference facilities with each CoP entitled to 4 per year. Access to teleconferences will be managed by ACFID's Cop Lead

Communities may choose to hold face-to-face meetings on occasion but ACFID funding is not available to support these. CoPs are welcome to use ACFID's boardroom for meetings, subject to availability.

Information not readily available in the public domain and any intelligence gathered through communication within the CoP, including agenda and minutes, is shared on a confidential basis. Information can be shared if permission is given by the relevant member(s).

12. Accountability and Branding

Unlike with the previous Working Group model where groups were accountable to ACFID's CEO, CoPs are essentially only accountable to themselves, allowing for greater group autonomy, flexibility and to encourage CoPs to be creative, energetic and take initiative.

As individual groups and in aggregate, CoPs will be branded under ACFID's name e.g. 'ACFID's Communities of Practice' & the 'ACFID Child Protection CoP'. However, for any external facing work undertaken by a CoP such as letters to DFAT, case studies/guidelines for external distribution, events etc, CoP's cannot use ACFIDs name unless explicitly requested/approved by ACFID's CEO or his/her delegate.

Permission to use ACFID's name will only be granted for work which aligns with ACFID's strategic/operational priorities. This includes for any formal correspondence to Government and other external stakeholders as well as less formal correspondence at meetings and events.

ACFID may ask a CoP to undertake a particular piece of work in ACFID's name i.e. to function as an Expert Task Group. If so, the CoP or a sub-set of members from the CoP will receive additional resources from ACFID to complete that task.

All requests to use ACFID's name will be managed by ACFID's [CoP Lead.](#) ACFID encourages CoPs to retain an open communication with ACFID on exciting initiatives and activities that they're undertaking.

13. Engaging with DFAT

ACFID will continue to facilitate consultation between DFAT and our members via CoPs. As in the past, when ACFID received requests from DFAT to consult with a particular group or members interested in a particular issue, we will continue to link DFAT staff with the relevant CoP. However, ACFID will only provide additional support (such as organising logistics, running pre-meeting telecons, and coordinating input/feedback from group members) where the consultation aligns with our strategic and operational priorities. In cases where there is no alignment, it will be up to the CoP convenors or volunteers from the group to take on these roles as required.

ACFID will allocate staff from its Policy and Advocacy team to participate in CoPs relevant to their individual and team work. As participants these staff members will be responsible for monitoring the group's engagement with DFAT and identifying opportunities for collaboration on work that aligns with ACFID's strategic priorities.