2016-17 Communities of Practice (COP) Co-Chair Application
Deadline: August 5, 2016  Info Session: July 18, 2016, 3 – 4 p.m. via video call

Why Communities of Practice?

Those in a community of practice share a common concern or passion and learn how to advance that passion through regular shared interaction. The members of a community of practice share a domain of interest, engage in joint activities, and have an ongoing, sustained interaction over time contributing to their shared practice. Communities of practice can serve varied functions, including solving problems, sharing information, providing experience, utilizing shared assets, coordinating and strategizing, building a case for action, documenting projects, mapping knowledge, gaining confidence, and more. (Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

Minnesota Campus Compact (MNCC), in partnership with the University of Minnesota’s Office for Public Engagement, is facilitating a set of communities of practice (COPs) to explore the effectiveness of COPs in advancing higher education community engagement efforts. Our purpose in convening these COPs is:

- to enhance individuals’ capacity to do community engagement work in higher education;
- to harvest resources, research findings, program models, insights, webinars, conference sessions, etc., to share with those beyond a specific community of practice; and
- to build the field’s knowledge about communities of practice as a model for professional development.

What issues will MNCC COPs address?

The 2016-17 Communities of Practice, offered by MNCC in partnership with the University of Minnesota’s Office for Public Engagement, are intended to support collaborative learning and leadership around key issues related to fulfilling the five commitments laid out in Campus Compact’s 30th Anniversary Action Statement:

- We empower our students, faculty, staff, and community partners to co-create mutually respectful partnerships in pursuit of a just, equitable, and sustainable future for communities beyond the campus—nearby and around the world.
- We prepare our students for lives of engaged citizenship, with the motivation and capacity to deliberate, act, and lead in pursuit of the public good.
- We embrace our responsibilities as place based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically.
- We harness the capacity of our institutions—through research, teaching, partnerships, and institutional practice—to challenge the prevailing social and economic inequalities that threaten our democratic future.
- We foster an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.

The following possible issues are based in learnings/priorities that have emerged from MNCC’s Cultural Agility Collaboration and campus Civic Action Planning sessions. You may apply to co-lead one of these or suggest another topic of your choosing. If you are interested in more than one topic, please rank your preferences.

- Supporting the engagement and success of low-income students
- Infusing attention to race and racism in community engagement courses and initiatives
- Building students’ civic agency
- Developing students’ capacity to work across differences
- Facilitating difficult conversations and reflection among students
- Overcoming institutional silos (e.g., connecting community engagement and career development)
- Developing a campus-wide culture of civic learning and engagement
- Capturing the results of community engagement and telling powerful public stories
- Advanced community-engaged research methods
Who will participate in the COPs?

COPs will be open to faculty, staff, administrators, students, and community partners affiliated with MNCC member campuses who have demonstrated a commitment to and passion about each COP’s selected issue. MNCC operates on the belief that regardless of formal role, we all have valuable knowledge to share and learning to do. The COPs are designed to leverage connections and open conversations that might not otherwise occur. Our goal is to have three to four COPs with 8-12 participants each. People interested in participating will complete a very short application, to be reviewed by the COP co-chairs and MNCC and UMN staff.

What are the benefits of co-chairing a community of practice?

COP co-chairs will have the unique experience of collaborating with other change-oriented people from an array of roles and institutions across the state in a collaborative and asset-focused environment. They can expect to learn with participants and gain experience facilitating this type of collaborative learning process, including using remote digital engagement tools and harvesting resources and shared knowledge. In addition, co-chairs will each receive a $1,000 stipend.

What is the commitment required?

Co-chairs will prepare for and co-facilitate at least four video call conversations with their Community of Practice over the academic year. They will also convene for one in-person gathering in February. Co-chairs will need to participate in an orientation provided by MNCC and the University of Minnesota’s Office for Public Engagement via video call. The University of Minnesota’s Office for Public Engagement will coordinate the recruitment of COP participants, schedule the video calls, provide technical assistance, organize the in-person February convening, and have periodic check-ins with co-chairs.

Why video calls?

The values of inclusion and openness lead us to use digital strategies. While there are both distinct opportunities and challenges that accompany this web-based strategy, our experience with previous projects suggests video calls will allow a wider range of individuals from a broader geography to learn from one another. It also saves time and expense related to travel, lowering barriers to participation. If the video calls prevent accessibility for a participant, staff will work to develop appropriate accommodations within reason.

How will co-chairs be selected?

Applications must be submitted online no later than August 5, 2016. The MNCC staff will review applications and select participants using the following criteria:

- demonstrated commitment to leadership on the issue you select
- experience facilitating collaborative group processes
- willingness to commit to co-chairing a COP for one academic year (September 2016 – May 2017)
- interest in both developing their own leadership and co-creating resources and learning opportunities for others
- creation of co-chair pairs with complementary skills and perspectives
- affiliation with an MNCC member campus (see www.mncampuscompact.org for list)

Please note that we encourage those in faculty and/or staff roles and community partners to apply. In this pilot year, up to four COPs will be formed.
How do I apply?

Please submit a cover letter, resume/CV, and three references to Amber Cameron at acameron@umn.edu no later than August 5, 2016. In your letter, please describe:

- the issue you would like your COP to be focused on and why (choose from the provided list, or propose another; if you’re interested in multiple topics, please rank them);
- whether you can commit to participating in the video call orientation, preparing and co-facilitating at least four video call conversations with a Community of Practice over the 2016-17 academic year, and convening for one in-person gathering in February;
- what skills you bring to the co-chair role; and
- how you would define success for your COP.

If you’re interested in co-chairing with a specific person, please submit separate applications and indicate your desired co-chair. Please note that we will give preferences to co-chairs affiliated with different campuses.

Have more questions?

We will offer an information session on July 18 from 3 – 4 p.m. via Zoom video conference call. Contact us (see below) for the link to join the call. With any questions, you’re welcome to contact Sinda Nichols, Associate Director of Minnesota Campus Compact, at sinda@mncampuscompact.org or 612-436-2080, or Amber Cameron, Associate Director for Public Engagement Initiatives, Office for Public Engagement, University of Minnesota, at acameron@umn.edu or 612-624-1706.