THE ESSENTIALS OF BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
Setting the Context

Developed by National Convergence Technology Center National Science Foundation (NSF) Advanced Technological Education (ATE) Center led by Collin College

- 2004 forward
- Consortium with 50+ college and university partners
- Primarily in the area of networking infrastructure/mobility/data communications
- Developed to address the downturn in IT in the early 2000’s
- Designed with lock-step cooperation with regional and now national business to ensure employment for graduates
What is a CoP

- 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.

(*from Communities of Practice 2002 by E. Wenger, R. McDermott, & W Snyder).
Similar Groups

- Community of Practice – practitioners, organic, passion, genuine striving for deepening of knowledge, and cultivation of relationships;
- Networks – nodes, linkages, information flows;
- Project Team – Driven by deliverables; defined by roles and tasks;
- Community of Interest – Not experts or practitioners, just interested.
Problem #1:

- Needed to find a way to share curriculum, materials and processes developed by the grant

Idea #1

- Curriculum in a Box – disseminated on website through module packaging (syllabus, learning modules, labs, classroom slides and assessments)
This created Problem #2:

Potential adopters wanted to know:

- What lab equipment is needed?
- How does curriculum fit within my existing IT degrees and certificates?
- How does convergence fit into the existing context of IT?
- Do businesses hire students with convergence education and training?
- How do I bring my faculty up to speed in this technology?
This generated Idea #2:

- Colleges needed some mentoring beyond the free curriculum, so...
- Components of mentoring relationship developed:
  - Create a business team to provide direction and validate job skills
  - Identify and fill curriculum gaps
  - Ensure instructors are prepared to teach updated and new courses
  - Develop strategy to recruit students
CTC – Evolution of a CoP

- National Visiting Committee challenge:
  - Spread the program throughout the region based upon the success of the grant’s college partners
  - Target 6 new colleges
    - Based upon the capacity of grant staff to handle one-on-one mentoring
    - Grant staff: 1 full-time director, 1 part-time program manager, 1 PI and 2 Co-Pi’s working limited hours
CTC – Evolution of a CoP

This generated Idea #3:

- Program did not need to be *replicated* but could be *adopted* and *adapted* to meet colleges’ needs
- Spread this adoption beyond one-on-one mentoring
  - Conference calls
  - Yearly face-to-face meetings with entire group
This was the beginning stage of a type of community of practice:

CTC – Evolution of a CoP

- Continuing growth of network spurred:
- Idea #4:
  - Evolve the group into an active group of colleges who participate and help grow convergence programs
  - Created Mentored College Advisory Board
    - 4 mature college leaders from network
    - Helped determine direction of program and started mentoring new members
CTC – Evolution of a CoP

- This generated Idea #5:
  - College leaders on Advisory Board became hubs in their region
    - Active mesh network is the same as a CoP
    - Mesh network model supports expansion of colleges participating
    - Mentoring still occurs with new members
    - Mature members share information, best practices and leadership
CTC – Evolution of a CoP

What CTC offers CCN:
- Free professional development (Working Connections)
- Travel reimbursement help
- Robust resource wiki
- Way to plug into network of IT faculty
- Access to National BILT meeting content
- Help maximizing your own local BILT relationship
- Virtual labs
- Feedback from CTC leaders on grant proposals
Responsibility of CCN Members:

- Engage with the group/share expertise
- Develop an active Business & Industry Leadership Team that meets regularly and to prioritize KSAs and guide programs
- Attend CCN meetings/activities
- Help recruit other schools to CCN
- Submit yearly CCN report
CTC – Evolution of a CoP

- Two levels of engagement:
  - Level 1 – receive more benefits/more responsibilities
  - Level 2 – receive fewer benefits/fewer responsibilities
  - Points system developed for accountability and encouraging engagement
## CTC – Evolution of a CoP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convergence College Network POINTS - due April 1, 2016</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MANDATORY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide yearly evidence of two local/regional BILTs (attach minutes)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of your two yearly local/regional BILTS must validate job skills annually (after first list, then you’re only submitting the revisions)^</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit yearly CCN status report (enrollment #s, graduation #s, etc)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POINTS SYSTEM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in one CCN meeting (phone call or in-person) - July 17, 2015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in second CCN meeting (phone call or in-person) - Oct 9, 2015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in third CCN meeting (phone call or in-person) - Dec 17, 2015</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in fourth CCN meeting (phone call or in-person) - Feb 26, 2016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend one National BILT call/meeting - May 12, 2015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend second National BILT call/meeting - August 11, 2015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend third National BILT call/meeting - Nov 10, 2015</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend fourth National BILT call/meeting - Feb 9, 2016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in one “CCN admin” call - May 15, 2015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit an administrator to participate in one &quot;CCN admin&quot; call*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CTC – Evolution of a CoP - 2006
CTC – Evolution of a CoP - 2016
How FVTC originally got involved

- Need was the driver
  - Our employer’s needed graduates with a skill
  - Our instructor’s needed proven curriculum to teach the skill
  - And, everyone wanted to know what others were doing to get the two items above accomplished
Benefits Were the Rewards

- What FVTC reports as benefits from their relationship with the community
  - A network of talented professionals working together
  - Shared talent and resources
  - Open dialogues across the county
  - Integration of resources
  - Camaraderie, friendships, and contacts
FVTC Statement of Benefits for the Future

- Better positioned to deal with upcoming change
- Supported by a system of hundreds of instructors, deans, department managers and employers all with the same focus
- Lessons learned along the way
  - Flexibility is key when dealing with change and growth
  - Working together on a concerted effort takes time to mature and grow
Learning Leadership Skills
Learning team skills: Collaboration
Networking and Sharing in person
CCN Enrollment and Graduates

- Almost 120,000 enrollments in Convergence-related courses
- 8810 graduates
CCN by the Numbers

21: Updated Courses
15: New Courses
13: New Degrees
41: New Certificates
22: Modified Degrees
5: Modified Certificates
92: Conferences attended/presented
5 Essentials For Building a CoP

- Must be a shared need
- Requires a lead and structure, especially in the beginning
- Takes time – often years
- May start with a hub network, but needs to evolve to a mesh network whereby more mature members mentor others
- Replication is not the goal
- Structure evolves to meet the needs of the group
To Get Assistance:

The NSF National Convergence Technology Center (IT and Communications)

Join the Convergence College Network and obtain many benefits including mentoring

Details https://www.connectedtech.org
Collin is lead for the Centers Collaborative for Technical Assistance (NSF sponsored)

Webinars, best practices, and convenings are provided for DOL and NSF grantees and others leading workforce programs

For more information:
http://www.atecenters.org/ccta
abehele@collin.edu
Questions and Follow-up

Ann Beheler
abeheimer@collin.edu