

# Value Chain



# Partnerships

*An Iowa-Based Network for Food  
and Agriculture Working Groups*

## **Community of Practice Resource Guide** *For use with the Community of Practice Workshop*

[www.communitiesofpractice.ning.com](http://www.communitiesofpractice.ning.com)

**July 21, 2009**

**8:30 a.m. – 9 p.m.**

**July 22, 2009**

**8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.**

**Stoney Creek Inn**

**5291 NW 84th St.**

**Johnston, IA 50131**

*Developed by the Value Chain Partnerships Core Team and edited by:*

**Rich Pirog**

Associate Director

Marketing and Food Systems Program Leader

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University

Ames, IA 50010-1050

Phone: 515-294-1854

Fax: 515-294-9696

Email: [rspirog@iastate.edu](mailto:rspirog@iastate.edu)

[www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu)

**Beth Larabee**

Value Chain Partnerships Program Assistant

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State University

Ames, IA 50010-1050

Phone: 515-294-8530

Fax: 515-294-9696

Email: [blarabee@iastate.edu](mailto:blarabee@iastate.edu)

[www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu)

For more information, go to [www.valuechains.org](http://www.valuechains.org)

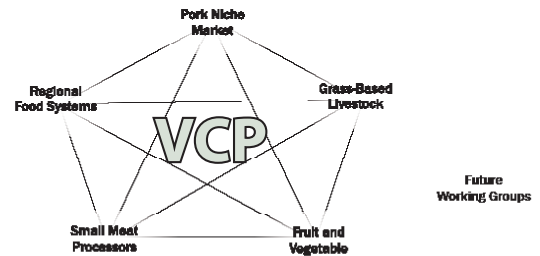
# Value Chain



## Partnerships

*An Iowa-Based Network for Food and Agriculture Working Groups*

Value Chain Partnerships is an Iowa-based network for food and agriculture working groups that brings together producers, businesses, and state and federal organizations. We work to deliver social, environmental, and economic benefits to our clients and communities. Our community of working groups does this via four core functions: acting as information hubs, catalysts for cooperation, magnets, and scouts. VCP's core functions set it apart from other food and agricultural networks.



VCP's community of working groups drives its collaborative process.

### **Value Chain Partnerships Core Functions**

<b>Information Hubs</b>	<b>Catalysts for Cooperation</b>	<b>Magnets</b>	<b>Scouts</b>
Provide an information clearinghouse	Create solutions collaboratively	Attract funding	Identify food and agriculture challenges
Benefits include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to larger portfolio of knowledge and expertise</li> <li>• Greater awareness of available programs/expertise</li> <li>• Research opportunities available</li> </ul>	Benefits include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate more effectively</li> <li>• Coordinated use of resources</li> <li>• Deconstruction of organizational boundaries</li> <li>• Access to a support network</li> </ul>	Benefits include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to leverage resources within the private and public sectors</li> <li>• Increased probability of funding because network is established</li> </ul>	Benefits include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better grasp of emerging challenges</li> <li>• Improved decision making to modify strategies</li> <li>• Ability to bring in new partners and champions</li> </ul>
Benefits provided to farmers, other businesses, and state and federal organizations within a collaborative multi-organizational environment			
<i>Pork Niche Market + Regional Food Systems + Small Meat Processors + Fruit &amp; Vegetable + Grass-Based Livestock</i>			

#### **Pork Niche Market Working Group (initiated 2001)**

This working group is comprised of niche pork companies and supporting groups. Its aim is to create and maintain more competitive and viable operations for smaller-scale players in the pork sector.

#### **Regional Food Systems Working Group (initiated 2003)**

This working group is comprised of practitioners and community leaders organized by geographic location. Its aim is to increase the investment in and support for local and regional food businesses in Iowa.

#### **Small Meat Processors Working Group (initiated 2006)**

This working group is comprised of small meat processors, state agencies, and producer groups. Its aim is to improve the vitality of small-scale meat processing plants in Iowa.

#### **Fruit and Vegetable Working Group (initiated 2007)**

This working group is comprised of fruit and vegetable growers and buyers and their assistance providers. Its aim is to build the production, handling, and marketing capacity of Iowa's fruit and vegetable industries.

#### **Grass-Based Livestock Working Group (initiated 2008 – a Leopold Center cross-initiative group)**

This working group is comprised of people from grass-based farm and food businesses and the outreach professionals who support them. Its aim is to promote viable grass-based livestock production, diverse market opportunities, and environmental services in Iowa.

## Definitions

**Communities of Practice** (CoPs) are groups of people in organizations who come together to share what they know, to learn from one another regarding some aspects of their work and to provide a social context for that work.<sup>1</sup>

Through our work in Value Chain Partnerships, we have found that communities of practice (CoPs) function strategically as:

1. *Catalysts for cooperation* of diverse interests to create solutions for food and fiber producers and businesses;
2. *Hubs* which create, capture, document, and leverage knowledge and deploy this knowledge as technical assistance to assist value chain partners;
3. *Magnets* to attract funding, and for leveraging, channeling, and distributing funding to research and development efforts for differentiated food and fiber products; and
4. *Scouts* to identify emerging value chain opportunities with high potential to deliver economic benefit to sustainable agriculture stakeholders.

**Knowledge Management** is a framework for designing an organization's goals, structures and processes so that the organization can use what it knows to learn, and to create value for its customers and community.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William M. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

2 W.C. Choo, The FIS Knowledge Management Institute, session presentations, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto.

### **Conditions for success when selecting a Community of Practice (CoP)**

- Critical Mass
  - » Are there enough active, enthusiastic and committed potential participants (producer-led businesses and people representing organizations that provide services to those businesses) to form a functional community of practice?
- Line of Sight to Benefits and Impacts
  - » Are there clear and measurable economic, social and/or environmental benefits for target clients for this particular community of practice?
- Focused on an unmet need
  - » Will this community of practice be appropriately focused on an unmet or underserved need?
- Interest from stakeholders
  - » Is there sustained interest from community members, local businesses, local government and/or regional government?
  - » Is there a grass roots effort already underway? If yes, will this group duplicate existing efforts?
- Leadership Potential
  - » Are there a set of key champions for this issue within local and/or state organizations and businesses?
  - » Are there skilled facilitators identified in Iowa State University Extension and/or other organizations who can assume the responsibility to coordinate the group?
- Potential to attract external resources.
  - » What federal, state and local funds would be available to this Community of Practice (from university, state, federal, private business, angel investors, nonprofit organizations, etc.)?
- Market Potential
  - » Is there a clear, growing demand for the issue or market on which this group will focus?
- Policy Incentives
  - » What agency or government policies are in place that would support or inhibit the success of this CoP? How will policy issues be handled by the CoP?

## ***Suggestions for initiating a CoP***

(Requires advance planning and several group meetings)

- Convene key stakeholders and conduct a thorough needs assessment of the issue, including the challenges and opportunities
- Agree on key challenges the group has the capacity to address with existing and potential resources
- Identify individuals and organizations willing to make an initial commitment to work together to address the challenges. This commitment could consist of time, money, or in-kind resources
- Form follows function. Determine if a community of practice or other collaborative group is the best “form” to address the challenges
- Develop a mission, goal, or purpose statement for the group
- Develop a draft work plan and resource plan (see section on funding communities of practice)
- Form a leadership group (steering team) made up of a cross-section of members that will provide input to direct the CoP, and that has the authority to approve uses of CoP resources to assure wise choices, reduce redundancy, etc.

## ***Considerations for managing an effective CoP***

- An appropriate amount of discretionary funds is available to conduct projects that will help address needs (see section on funding)
- Shared purpose. The mission, goal, or purpose statement provides direction and a way to choose appropriate activities to keep the group focused
- Shared responsibility. Participants work together to address needs
- Shared ownership of the CoP by its members, which results from conducting activities in a way that empowers members and organizations to believe in the group
- Accountability for performance on research and technical assistance projects
- Consistent, ongoing evaluation to provide feedback on the CoP performance
- Membership is open and can shift over time, with a core group base that provides continuity and direction. An appropriate balance of membership between businesses and/or community leaders and assistance providers/agencies personnel so that the majority of technical assistance needs can be met by group members
- Recurring (quarterly) face-to-face meetings to discuss progress on addressing key challenges, identify other pressing issues that may have arisen, and facilitate member-to-member networking and trust-building
- A clear agenda for every meeting, with adequate time for each agenda item and an opportunity for participants to suggest topics for future meetings
- Regular between-meeting communications via list serves, newsletters, web sites, and phone conversations between the coordinator and members
- Internal communication within partner groups and an environment of trust and openness to assure effective contributions
- The willingness and ability of the group to address sensitive and controversial topics in a respectful manner

- Safeguards to maintain confidential business or client information (where needed)
- A capable, mature coordinator with excellent facilitation and listening skills
- The capacity to recruit new members with the necessary skills to address identified challenges

### ***Considerations for funding a CoP***

- Adequate staff time for coordination and sufficient resources for projects are critical for successful CoP operation
- Commitment of in-kind and financial resources from key organizations is important to establish the CoP and to attract grant dollars
- All funders and investors want to see their resources leveraged
- A community of practice approach can help expand the funding pie to get work done rather than increasing competition for limited resources
- Funders will be more attracted to multi-organizational CoPs with similar goals that perform efficiently and show visible results than to individual organizations that cannot demonstrate collaboration with others
- A CoP that operates effectively and builds a reputation for success will find it easier to recruit new members with expertise and financial resources
- Resources devoted to evaluating the impact of the CoP and its project(s) are well worth the investment
- It is critical for projects undertaken by the CoP to have clear and easily measurable metrics as indicators for success. If you can clearly demonstrate through the CoP that you are making a difference, you are more likely to receive additional funding and increase the support for your work
- Grant writers need to cultivate relationships with funders, understand the goals of individual funders, and clearly communicate CoP project goals, objectives, outcomes, and impacts
- Requests for additional financial and in-kind resources should be coordinated across key members of the CoP to increase likelihood of added support

### ***Considerations and suggestions when branding a CoP***

#### **Considerations**

- Branding will give you the tools to clearly, concisely, and consistently communicate who you are, what you do best, and why it's working
- A more clear, concise, and consistent identity will help you to more effectively reach out to your target audience
- Targeted communication will generate support and increase your group's ability to make an impact

#### **Suggestions**

- Determine your objective
  - » What is the objective of your CoP?
  - » Ensure that it is quantifiable
- Identify your target audience
  - » Who will help you achieve your objective?

- » What do they believe in?
- » What can they do for your group (and what can your group do for them)?
- » Identify core and peripheral supporters
- Determine your brand positioning
  - » Identify your frame of reference
    - What type of organization do you have?
  - » Identify your point of difference
    - How is your organization different from other organizations within your frame of reference?
    - What benefit do you want people to associate with your organization?
  - » Identify the reason to believe
    - Why is your organization so successful?
    - What is the most convincing support behind your point of difference?
  - » Develop your positioning statement
    - The positioning statement is comprised of the *frame of reference*, *point of difference*, and *reason to believe*
- Evaluate your CoP's name
  - » Does your name reflect the objective of the group and clearly communicate the work being done by the group?
  - » When used consistently, a tagline can help clarify a name
- Determine your marketing objective
  - » What does your target audience need to do in order to achieve your business objective?
- Determine the marketing challenge
  - » What is the behavior or belief that needs to be overcome in order to get to the marketing objective?

## The Roles and Skills Needed for the Leader/Coordinator of a CoP

### Roles

- Help people think about sharing information and resources in new ways
- Ensure participants are aware of decisions being reached
- Engage participants (especially quiet or timid people) to keep them involved and contributing
- Maintain a balance between processes and goal-related activity
- Keep the discussion focused on the topic (maintain the fine line between diversionary off-topic items and helpful related-topic discussion)
- Approach controversial issues in an honest and respectful manner and seek common ground
- Synthesize ideas, concepts, questions, and concerns expressed in the group to provide focus and purpose
- Convene meetings and be the contact for questions from other parties interested in the work of the CoP
- Recruit for a diverse membership, and ability to communicate goals, expectations, ground rules, and direction
- Encourage a culture of collaboration across organizations, businesses, and/or communities

### Personal skills and qualities for CoP leaders

- Positive mental attitude
- Strong commitment to the CoP mission
- Strong organizational skills and attention to detail
- General expertise in the CoP topic area
- Excellent facilitation skills
- Good listening skills
- Well-developed interpersonal communication skills
- Appropriate sense of humor and timing
- Ability to help the group reflect on its discussions and information being shared
- Capacity to summarize ideas and concepts in a clear and concise manner
- Ability to remain neutral until everyone has contributed ideas
- Awareness of what is *not* being said, and the ability to bring it into the discussion
- “Big picture” thinking balanced with attention to detail
- Capacity to be a “servant leader.” A “servant leader” is a *steward* of the resources (human, financial and otherwise) provided by the CoP, and remains focused on achieving results consistent with the CoP’s values and integrity.



## Organizational, professional, and business benefits to leading or participating in a CoP

<b>CoP Functions</b>	<b>Key Benefits for Producers and Businesses</b>	<b>Key Benefits for Organizations</b>
<p><b>Information hubs</b> that create, capture, document, leverage, and deploy knowledge as technical assistance to create solutions for value chain partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater awareness of a wider range of support providers and services</li> <li>• Greater awareness of and access to research-based information</li> <li>• Access to larger “portfolio of expertise to draw from” and “tacit knowledge”-- information unavailable anywhere else (i.e., not in print or electronic form)</li> <li>• Improved business skills and competencies</li> <li>• Opportunities to participate in research that creates new knowledge used to inform the industry/work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding of challenges facing producers and businesses</li> <li>• Greater awareness of complementary technical assistance offered by other participating organizations</li> <li>• More effective organizations and employees due to improved knowledge and work competencies</li> <li>• Access tools others are using to encourage involvement and participation in food systems work</li> <li>• Participating organizations are better able to manage “local politics” associated with doing food systems/ sustainable agriculture work</li> </ul>
<p><b>Catalysts for cooperation</b> of diverse interests that create solutions for food and fiber producers and businesses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater sense of teamwork and low level cooperation (low risk information-sharing)</li> <li>• Opportunities for “high-level” cooperation (where businesses share some risk, resources, and profits)</li> <li>• Access to support network</li> <li>• Private sector access to no or low-cost public sector support and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More coordinated use of existing organizational and state resources</li> <li>• Participating organizations work more with other groups and recognize other organizations as assets/ potential partners</li> <li>• Better relationships with an expanded group of partners, including commodity producers, people in other disciplines, and non profits</li> <li>• Deconstruction of organizational boundaries and negative organizational stereotypes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Magnets</b> that attract funding, and leverage, channel, and distribute funding for research and development of differentiated products</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private sector links with research agendas and consultants who initiate work that benefits producers and businesses</li> <li>• Participating organizations invest more resources such as money and staff time on work that supports the industry and benefits producers than otherwise possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating organizations collaborating with unlikely partners, including commodity groups, are more successful at receiving grants</li> <li>• Increased credibility that CoP brings to the work helps focus, coordinate, and leverage new sources of support</li> <li>• Participating organizations are better able to leverage their own organizational resources to commit more staff time and resources to food systems work</li> </ul>
<p><b>Scouts</b> that identify emerging value chain opportunities with high potential to deliver economic benefits to sustainable agriculture stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased access to new markets</li> <li>• Increased sales</li> <li>• Increased production</li> <li>• Improved financial stability</li> <li>• More efficient operations</li> <li>• Greater business viability due to better decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants engage elected officials and government agency staff in conversations emphasizing the need for policy to support the work, producers, businesses, and communities</li> </ul>

## Books and Articles about Communities of Practice

Bierema, Laura, *Adult Learning in the Workplace: Emotion Work or Emotion Learning?* New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education. No. 120. Winter 2008, Wiley Periodicals Inc.

Choo, W.C., The FIS Knowledge Management Institute, session presentations, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto.

DiBella, Anthony J. and Edwin C. Nevis, *How Organizations Learn*. Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1998.

Dixon, Nancy M., *The Organizational Learning Cycle Second Edition*. Gower Publishing Limited, 1999.

Fontaine, M.A., *Keeping communities of practice afloat: Understanding and fostering roles in communities*. Knowledge Manage. Rev. 4, 4 (Sept./Oct. 2001), 16-21.

Herrenkohl, Leslie, *Sociocultural Theory as a Lens to Understand Organizational Learning*, American Journal of Education 114 (August 2008).

Kerno, Steven J., Jr. *Tapping communities of practice: enjoying the benefits and avoiding the pitfalls*. (Statistical data), Mechanical Engineering - CIME 130.10 (Oct. 2008):22(5).

Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Lesser, E. and J. Storck, *Communities of practice and organizational performance*. IBM Systems Journal 40, 4 (2001).

McDermott, Richard, *Knowing in Community: 10 Critical Success Factors in Building Communities of Practice*, IHRIM Journal, March 2000.

Millen, David, Michael A. Fontaine, and Michael J. Muller, *Understanding the Benefit and Costs of Communities of Practice*. Communications of the ACM, April 2002/vol.45. No. 4, pg 69-73.

*Reference Guide: Creating "SMART" Objectives; Identifying Outcomes, Outputs and Measures for Your SEAC Proposal, Teacher and Education Development*. <http://hsc.unm.edu/SOM/TED/Index.htm>

Saint-Onge, Hubert and Debra Wallace, *Leveraging Communities of Practice for Strategic Advances*. Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003.

Wenger, Etienne, *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Wenger, Etienne, Richard McDermott, and William M. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Vandeventer, Paul and Myrna Mandell, *Networks that Work: A Practitioner's Guide to Managing Networked Action, Community Partners®*, 2007.

## Internet Resources About Communities of Practice

<http://cpsquare.org/CP>

Square is a diverse community of practitioners that has gathered to share knowledge and build a practice around their passion for and belief in the potential of communities of practice as a vehicle for positive organizational and world change.

<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/foundationfundinggrants/tp/grantproposalhub.htm>

About.com provides information on grant proposal writing geared for not for profit entities, also includes information on foundations and non-profit management.

[www.ewenger.com/theory](http://www.ewenger.com/theory)

A brief introduction to communities of practice by author Etienne Wenger.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community\\_of\\_practice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_practice)

Wikipedia's definition of communities of practice.

[www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/index.shtml](http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/index.shtml)

Community-enabled Strategic Results from Self-Organization with George Pór. The Community Intelligence Lab focuses on social, business, knowledge and technical innovation.

[www.infed.org/biblio/communities\\_of\\_practice.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm)

Infed.org is the encyclopedia for informal education which explores informal education, lifelong learning and social action. This link features the proceedings from a conference on informal education within a formal setting.

[www.funderstanding.com/content/communities-of-practice](http://www.funderstanding.com/content/communities-of-practice)

Funderstanding's mission is to inspire in people the love of learning. They achieve this by helping educators design better programs and products that engage learners fully, where the learning process is fun, meaningful, deep, and long lasting. This is their take on communities of practice.

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED466030&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED466030](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED466030&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED466030)

From the Education Resources Information Center, ED466030 - Conceptual Analysis and Research Questions: Do the Concepts of "Learning Community" and "Community of Practice" Provide Added Value?

[www.anecdote.com.au/archives/communities\\_of\\_practice](http://www.anecdote.com.au/archives/communities_of_practice)

Anecdote helps business leaders engage their people to be even better collaborators, leaders and change agents using the power of business narrative. Their clients often select us because their approaches are unashamedly pragmatic and practical and are based on our long experience in using these approaches to deliver business value. This page deals with stories of communities of practice.

[www.a-i-a.com/capital-intelectual/KnowingInCommunity.pdf](http://www.a-i-a.com/capital-intelectual/KnowingInCommunity.pdf)

Richard McDermott, Knowing in Community: 10 Critical Success Factors in Building Communities of Practice,