

Community of Practice at the California State University Special Collections and University Archives

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ABSTRACT

The California State University Archives and Archivists' Roundtable is a Community of Practice consisting of archivists that meet regularly online, and annually in person. Communities grow from shared interests, resources, concerns, or endeavors. *Communities of practice* can grow out of a need for connecting with other people who share the same issues, learning environment, or passions. In this article we describe how the CSUAAR group was founded, how it has evolved, and offers a potential model for other archivists to identify, create, and maintain a community of practice through common needs or interest.

The California State University Archives and Archivists' Roundtable is a Community of Practice consisting of archivists that meet regularly online. The group also meets annually in person, although the 2020 annual meeting was affected by the need for physical distancing along with limited travel and events due to COVID-19.¹ This article will describe how the group began and evolved, and will offer a potential model for other archival communities to identify, create, and maintain a similar Community of Practice.

California State University (CSU)

The CSU system consists of 23 campuses throughout the state of California serving approximately 1,000 to 40,000 students at each campus.² Most campus libraries include a Special Collections and/or a University Archives department (archives). Across the system, these departments share commonalities in their

1. "Coronavirus (COVID-19)," Center for Disease Control, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.
2. California State University. "Enrollment." Accessed November 6, 2020. <https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/about-the-csu/facts-about-the-csu/enrollment>

missions to preserve and provide access to the history of the campuses they serve, and California history as a whole. Outside of their own campus history, each archives also specializes in regional, thematic, or subject areas ranging from maritime collections to environmental sciences or microbrews.



Although all CSU archivists practice preservation and provide access to collections based on available resources, collections management policies and

procedures can vary widely.³ Each archives makes decisions internally, referring to campus-specific Executive Orders and Memorandums, Administrative and Registrar policies, or Office of the Chancellor policies, often interpreting them on a case-by-case basis as needed in the archives. Departments also experience a wide range of differences including position titles for archivists, department procedures and practices, and collection policies. The hours and staffing of these departments vary widely. A few departments are available only by appointment, others are open evenings, and still others are open only during standard business hours. In the CSU system, official titles and responsibilities vary widely as well, as do positions classifications which include tenure track faculty librarians, lecturers (non-tenure track librarians), non-exempt staff, and technicians. Some of these archivists manage specialized collections or have focused responsibilities of instruction and reference, while others are involved with all aspects of the department. These varying responsibilities can include processing, supervising student workers, managing social media platforms, working with donors, hosting outreach events, grant writing, digitization, developing exhibits, and cataloging. Those with faculty status usually have service responsibilities, outside of the department and library. Those who are classified as staff are often limited in their off-campus professional activity such as involvement with community archives, giving presentations, or attending meetings where networks could emerge. Professional development, responsibilities, titles, and schedules vary from campus to campus, creating a broad range of resource access and application between similar departments.

CSU archives often operate as separate entities within larger academic libraries. The focus of academic library coworkers is largely on contemporary literature and resources directly related to course subjects or faculty research. They collect and manage different types of collections and serve different patrons including community members, visiting scholars, and government employees. Archival science is historically paired with library science and share many theoretical and practical applications. However, archivists and librarians often speak a different dialect of information science, assume different collections practices, and focus on different areas of the work. A network of archivists provides space for holding conversations unique to archival science.

The 23 campuses of the CSU system span 800 miles between Humboldt State in Arcata, the northernmost campus, to San Diego State, the southernmost campus.⁴ It is important to note that each CSU archives is quite small, with limited archives staff, resulting in “lone arranger” status for many archivists. While CSU campuses in urban

3. In this article, the term archivist refers to people who work directly with archival collections in any format either in preservation, collections management, reference, or access. In the CSU system, position titles vary widely, as do classifications which can include faculty, librarians, staff, and technicians. We also refer to the Special Collections and University Archives departments collectively as archives in this article.
4. California State University, “2019 Fact Book,” published 2019, <https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/about-the-csu/facts-about-the-csu/documents/facts2019.pdf>.

areas may have access to local professional networks such as the Bay Area archives group that meets casually or the USC project “LA as Subject” that initiated multiple shared archives projects, those in rural and remote areas have far fewer local colleagues with which to confer on archival issues. For example, Pamela Nett Kruger, working at CSU’s Chico campus, is part of the Gold Country Archivists and has been involved with the Sacramento Archives Crawl, meaning her social and professional network events usually involve an 80-100 mile journey each way to attend. San Luis Obispo (SLO) County is a three-hours journey to either of the major city centers on the coast (San Francisco, Los Angeles) so it is difficult for CSU’s California Polytechnical, San Luis Obispo campus staff to attend archives-related events in either city. The CSU archives Community of Practice (CoP) created an opportunity for CSU archivists working in more isolated conditions to find more professional and collegial support from each other, while also connecting with those in larger metropolitan areas.

Community or Community of Practice?

Communities grow from shared interests, concerns, or endeavors. They grow out of a need for connecting with other people who are facing the same issue, share an environment, or share interests. Developing a group of shared interest and potential growth is a Community of Practice.⁵ It is a network of support to improve upon existing practices. It provides an environment for peer-to-peer learning and growth. It is a place for collaborative and collective learning and informal problem solving. It can be a place to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Social Learning theory is the foundation of a Community of Practice. It is an approach to learning by watching and interacting with others. According to Etienne Wenger, learning through social engagement and participation is about both action and belonging. That social participation in activities and engagement aids in learning. As social beings we learn from each other through our interactions. We gain knowledge through competence in what we do, and the skills we acquire. We use this knowledge in our interactions with the world and with others. These activities create meaning in our engagement with the world. Wenger explains that “a social theory of learning must therefore integrate components necessary to characterize social participation as a process of learning and knowing.”⁶ Social learning is both being and growing.

Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner defined the three critical elements—domain, community, and practice—that constitute a Community of Practice.⁷

5. Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, “Introduction to Communities of Practice,” published 2015, accessed December 2020, <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>.
6. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
7. Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, “Introduction to Communities of Practice.”

Together, as archivists we found common ground in our domain, community, and shared practice. In pursuing a shared task, the archivists were learning together and creating a shared history of learning both of which contribute to a community of practice. Ogbamichael and Warden stress the importance of an environment of sharing information particularly with newcomers from more experienced members. This environment creates an opportunity to informally share information which only resides in the minds of members, often based on experience, and is not available elsewhere. It is an opportunity to increase knowledge where members “generate new experiences and perspectives, adapt to new practices, fill knowledge gaps and avoid redundancy, contribute to community benefits and enable individuals to upgrade their individual knowledge.”⁸ This is important for relationship building and knowledge sharing. It sets the stage for a group to evolve into a Community of Practice (CoP).

The principles of a Community of Practice created by Wenger were summarized by Ghimisi in *The Communities of Practice in the [sic] Education* (2019) as:

1. *Design as a progressive structure.* Build on existing relationships while building new relationships to maintain interest and inspire new ideas.
2. *Be open to dialogue, internal and external.* Support dialogue that offers a clear picture of a problem, while working towards trust.
3. *Invite different levels of participation.* Include central, active, and peripheral involvement.
4. *Develop CoP spaces based on need, internal and external.* Create large meeting opportunities for communications and more intimate groups.
5. *Focus on value.* Appreciate the experience that is brought to the table, celebrate even small achievements, and invite those who are uncertain of skills to contribute.
6. *Combine familiarity with interest.* Create a comfortable, familiar environment that invites sharing and seeking support while piquing interest.
7. *Create a community rhythm.* Find a rhythm, though it can be difficult due to outside demands—it is vital for continuity and commitment.

Evolution of the CSU Archivists Community of Practice

Berlin Loa began working at CSU San Luis Obispo in 2016 and reached out to the latent CSU Special Collections listserv with a question hoping for a conclusive answer from the archives community. Instead, she found incongruity in the answers, but in

8. Hermon B. Ogbamichael and Stuart Warden, “Information and Knowledge Sharing within Virtual Communities of Practice,” *SA Journal of Information Management* 20, no. 1 (2018): E1-E11.

the process, met Pamela Nett Kruger at CSU Chico. The two began corresponding about procedures which grew into a plan to co-write a manual, and eventually evolved into the CSU-wide archival processing manual project. Visiting individual CSU campus websites to identify archivists, they were able to pull together a contact list and draft an initial email to invite participation in what would be the first CSU-wide meeting of archivists. Archivists were enthusiastic if a little wary of the extra work it would add to their already overloaded schedules. Monthly meetings were scheduled via an online platform, and archivists attended as they were able. With many being part-time or holding multiple and conflicting responsibilities, time was tight for many.

The first meeting was held in September 2017, consisting mostly of self-introductions and a discussion of the proposed project. During the first meeting, attendees agreed to develop a CSU-wide archival processing manual. The manual was intended to guide best practices, and potentially to be used as a training manual for new CSU archivists and student assistants. A Slack channel was established for communication dedicated to writing and file sharing. It was soon discovered that Slack⁹ was not a feasible workspace for this task. As a result, a shared Google drive was established, and content was migrated. At the October 2017 meeting, a writing schedule was established with regular milestones and check-ins. A one-year goal was set with completion by October 2018. Participants were encouraged to sign up to write preidentified sections of the manual. During subsequent meetings, the group would review each section once a section draft was complete. Writing was taking place via shared Google docs, editing took place in online group meetings, and discussions took place in online (Zoom¹⁰) meetings.

Time and writing commitment varied within the group. Some could only commit to attending intermittently, or reading and listening at meetings but not spend time writing the manual. Others were part-time employees who could not commit to more work, but wanted to learn and benefit from the group process. For example, one CSU contract archivist did not feel the agency to contribute or join in the meetings, but was interested in the processing manual. A department head new to the CSU system joined the meetings to learn about the culture of the archives departments. It was starting to become clear to us that membership was never static, and that interests and commitments varied.

By September 2018, after one year of trial and error, we found our rhythm. That same month, we sent an informal inquiry out to participants to gauge interest and ability to participate in the redirection of the group towards a more discussion-focused community. Results revealed what we had already discovered as group leaders, that discussion was the most valued outcome of the group meeting. It was evident that the writing schedule was not being met. However, we recognized that

9. Slack.com is a communication platform providing video, voice, content sharing, and chat options.

10. Zoom.us is a communication platform providing video, voice, content sharing, and chat options.

the discussions were where the group energy was most evident. It was clear that discussion was central to the community. At this point we decided to shift from writing to building a Community of Practice.

The meeting schedule was adjusted to a standing time, optional attendance, and no writing assignment. Attendance increased and became more consistent. Now with a new focus as a Community of Practice, monthly meetings continued with a refreshed perspective on our needs and interests as archives staff and faculty working in archives. The processing manual was not completed, but the group continued to work together and became the CSU Archives and Archivists' Roundtable (CSUAAR).¹¹ In the monthly virtual meetings, it became clear that the *real value* in the meetings was conversation.

It is important to note that this group was not formed because of a directive by the upper management, but instead developed as grassroots endeavor by the archivists of CSU campuses spread across the state, incorporating principles of an Invitational Educational approach in establishing and developing this CoP.¹² Invitational Education is based on an inclusive and guiding theory of the whole learning process. Therefore, creating a welcoming environment became key to successful recruitment and participation. According to William Watson Purkey, there are four core principles of the Invitational Education approach: trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality. *Trust* is about engaging with the individual at the personal level. It is important to create a connection with each individual involved in the learning process. In an inviting environment, the individual has the greatest opportunity to be present and to grow. *Respect* is part of this process by allowing participants to know their value as members and express interest in their ability to be involved. *Optimism* is the belief in the potential to grow. Recognizing members' abilities, and seeing "people as possessing untapped potential in all areas of human endeavor," is also important for creating learning environments, best practices, programs and procedures that can be effectively maintained.¹³ *Intentionality* is the way in which educators, or in our case archivists, set forth to create an invitational environment with the purposeful objective of creating an environment to support growth. It is a way for educators to guide with care and purpose. This approach offers the structure for steady growth and learning. We intentionally created a welcoming environment by applying these principles in building and maintaining the CSUAAR.

Taking an Invitational Educational approach meant incorporating these principles in a number of ways. Trust was established by giving participants an opportunity to collaborate as much as possible, to give them the space to contribute

11. We chose the term roundtable to be inclusive and inviting. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Roundtable," accessed December 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/roundtable>.

12. William Watson Purkey, "What is Invitational Education and How Does It Work?" Annual California State Conference on Self-Esteem, Santa Clara, CA, February 22-24, 1991.

13. Ibid.

and ask questions. Respect was important for inclusion as we knew our members were quite knowledgeable and had a lot to share. This meant that new archivists could feel safe in asking questions and seeking advice; for others, it was a chance to gain a fresh perspective. For the more seasoned archivists, this meant the opportunity to share theory, real life experiences and offer advice with useful examples. There was no shortage of optimism, as we had great confidence in our abilities and those of other CSU archivists. We were idealistic in our pursuit to collaborate on a task and then to build this community. We had faith that as a group we would grow and learn together. Intentionality was important for us as facilitators to make this CoP happen. CSUAAR has since become a consistent and reliable forum, and a welcoming environment for change and growth.

The community meetings continued as monthly hour-long gatherings, as before. Two weeks prior to each meeting the facilitators would meet briefly to put together the upcoming agenda. When meeting agendas were distributed via email, we encouraged members to add topics to the upcoming meetings. We kept the topics timely and incorporated issues brought forth by the community members. Often while talking about an agenda item during a meeting, more topics of interest came up. This led the facilitators to create a list of ongoing topics to be incorporated into future agendas. We wanted to build on previous discussions and also allow spontaneous discussion. For instance, when the Camp Fire was happening near Chico, shutting down the campus, the smoke, fire and the campus response became an agenda item.¹⁴ The smoke and air pollution had grown to such a point that it also shut down campuses in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹⁵ This immediate topic became a point of discussion as we all considered how we would handle a similar natural disaster. Another topic that arose was labor issues in the archives. It became apparent that archivists were undergoing similar challenges with position responsibilities, pay, status, and titles. This discussion became the inspiration to participate in a labor issues workshop that took place at the Society of California (SCA) Archivists General Meeting in 2019 where Loa and Kruger co-facilitated a CoP solutions focused discussion.

As the group continued to grow, we experimented with levels of formality, and created methods for the exchange of information and resources. This was a grassroots effort led by two non-tenure track staff members who did not have the administrative power or directives to formalize the group. Instead, we chose to focus our approach on trust, respect, optimism and intentionality in the tradition of the Invitational

14. "Camp Fire," California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, last modified on November 15, 2019, accessed December 2020, <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2018/11/8/camp-fire/>.

15. Sarah Ravani, "Smoke from Deadly Wildfire Continues to Choke Northern California," *SFGATE*, published November 17, 2018, last modified August 7, 2019, accessed December 2020, <https://www.sfgate.com/california-wildfires/article/Smoke-from-deadly-wildfire-continues-to-choke-13401413.php>.

Educational principles to support our colleagues.¹⁶ We learned along the way to see what methods worked best for our community. We created a new shared Google drive open to the community to place agendas and meeting notes. At some meetings we were great at taking notes, some not so great. But as the community developed, we became more practiced, and our documentation became more complete. At times we recorded meetings, but eventually came to the conclusion that this group was to be a space to speak freely and recording would add another level of formality that we did not want to impose. And so, any previous meeting recordings were deleted; we also made it a practice not to record moving forward. If participants missed a meeting, they could go back and read the notes. If they had any questions, they could bring it to the attention of the group at the next meeting. If a member wanted to discuss a challenge, such as what to do with a problematic collection, they could feel comfortable having an open and honest conversation.

As facilitators, we tried to create a welcoming environment, a place for archivists to support each other and grow together. CSUAAR provided an easy-to-access learning environment, a place to bring questions, to share triumphs, and seek help with struggles. The frequency of monthly meetings allowed archivists from different campuses to learn about each other's areas of expertise and knowledge, giving us access to each other as resources as well as colleagues. The bond the online group had created easily extended to in-person meetings. Because of the success of our monthly discussions, we planned a face-to-face meeting. We met face-to-face for the first time at the Society of California Archivists (SCA) Annual General Meeting in April 2018 and immediately decided it would be an annual effort. The meetings created friendships and bonds amongst our group, and forged connections between campuses that did not exist before.

The benefit of a CoP is that it is a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The roundtable became a place to talk through a problem within a group to gain the benefit of collective knowledge and problem solving. CSU archivists now had a space to speak openly without fear of judgement about their level of knowledge. Connecting with and supporting others was a way to remedy some of the isolation and concerns archivists faced. The connection and support of the CoP roundtable as a place to connect and work through problems in a supportive environment. Reaching out to a colleague that understands the challenges of working in archives at a CSU was one way to address the often-isolating work. Knowing that others were also undergoing similar issues, we had a medium for information and knowledge exchange providing recognition and validation of our skills. What was missing from our individual situations was a place and space to connect with others that *get it*.

Outcomes

A Community of Practice, as a purpose-driven endeavor, models the natural networks we build in contact with our peers. For some, this connection to community

16. William Watson Purkey, "What is Invitational Education and How Does It Work?"

occurs within our institutions; for others, connections must be sought elsewhere. It provides a professional outlet as a place of inspiration and support. It is comforting to find we are not alone in our struggles as we bring issues up within a CoP to help solve. As an informal knowledge network taking place primarily online, we were able to tap into tacit knowledge of members to overcome previous barriers to information.¹⁷

Building this Community of Practice has led to more than just solving archives processing concerns as we originally planned. Through discussion, we made connections between our related collections and increased our awareness of collection subjects such as social justice, labor issues, comic books, and environmental and conservation efforts documented in our institutions. We learned about collections that were not otherwise discoverable because they were not in the Online Archive of California (OAC), or in our library catalogs yet. The meetings provided an opportunity for discussions about collections that we would have never have had otherwise among the archivists that could then be shared with researchers.

Another outcome was discovering the tools that worked best for our community, and how other tools served the needs of the greater CSU library community. The CSUAAR explored the use of Slack, Zoom, and the existing listserv as well as an existing CSU wiki page. For instance, an early attempt at using Slack did not prove useful. We discovered it was the wrong tool for the CSUAAR which was, at the time, focused on writing the processing manual, because the topics and tasks proved too large for that format. Later, a new Slack sub-channel was added to a larger CSU system-wide libraries channel. This communication venue now works better for the current scope of the group as we are more focused on communication rather than writing. Communication still takes place via the CSU Special Collections listserv as it did before the CoP, and we created a space on the CSU libraries wiki. The listserv reaches an audience outside of the CoP while the wiki serves as a placeholder for the contact list. The multi-modal communication method allows for different types of information exchange. While meetings take place primarily via Zoom, asynchronous communication has expanded. The various levels of formality of these modalities allow for flexibility and spontaneous conversations that support the CoP.

At the 2019 Society of California Archivists Annual General Meeting, Loa and Kruger facilitated a breakout group as part of the *Archivists at Work | as Workers* session. The purpose of the breakout was to find ways that archivists could support each other in their work in a positive manner. Working from the example of the CSUAAR, the group discovered ways that CoPs could form and grow in other settings as opportunities for mentorship and learning with colleagues outside of formal training. The workshop highlighted ways that a larger professional organization, like Society of California Archivists, could support CoP practices in smaller, regional, or

17. Hermon B. Ogbamichael and Stuart Warden, "Information and Knowledge Sharing within Virtual Communities of Practice," E1-E11.

issues-based groups. Ideas such as mentorship, formally welcoming new archivists to the CSU, and monthly labor-focused meetings were explored and continue to be considered as future projects.

Although the group did not complete the archives processing manual, we developed something stronger that has helped us in understanding and applying best practices based on our available resources. By meeting regularly and discussing a wide variety of topics, we learned how differently our campuses operate. We talked about ways to come together to work within our shared and our unique technical and operational systems. Our Community of Practice not only promotes best practices in a shared domain, but supports our work and each other as professionals. Most importantly, we continue to build our knowledge, skills, abilities, and relationships. This community has created connections between campuses that did not exist before. Because of this community, colleagues now regularly reach out to each other for direct support.

Continued connections between campuses have led to more opportunities. The supportive environment of this group has allowed a safe space to ask questions, share triumphs, muddle through problems, discuss best practices, share equipment, and promote events and job postings. We could not have predicted how important this remote and virtual connection would be with the COVID-19 pandemic and increase in remote work for a system already challenged by geographic distance.

Conclusion

As an institution consisting of 23 campuses spread throughout the state, we were faced with the challenge of physical distance and incongruity in our shared mission to preserve the history of the university system and our local communities. Hours, staff classification, and resources varied widely between campuses. Collections scope and responsibilities also varied. However, we shared more in common than we shared differences. Our recognition of similarities and potential connection led to developing a Community of Practice.

As archivists, a lot of our work is already performed online. Even for archivists whose main role is managing physical collections, much of our work revolves around digital databases, online catalogs, distance reference, and virtual exhibits. We often engage more with our tools than other archivists, and do so in solitude. We solved this through human connection, leveraging the digital tools available to us. In a world becoming ever more digitally connected, we capitalized on the *human connection* through this Community of Practice.

In the spring of 2020, as CSU class instruction and libraries moved online to address the health concerns of COVID-19, the CSUAAR had a strong foundation for supporting each other through this crisis. The foundation of the group's engagement is with fellow archivists who "speak archives", work in related institutions, and face similar preservation and processing challenges. The strength and continuity of the

existing online community meant we knew how to work together in the remote work environment imposed on us by the pandemic. When our campuses closed down, with California Governor Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home executive order in March 2020, the meetings became a place to discuss our new and ever-changing work environment.¹⁸ The group increased meetings to twice a month through the summer of 2020 to discuss issues of remote instruction and reference, documenting the pandemic experience, and social justice issues on our campuses and in our communities.

CSUAAR's CoP has benefitted us as individual archivists and as a group. We now have more open lines of communication between archivists at the 23 campuses across the state and have also discovered more related collections. New collection challenges and changing approaches to archival practices bring opportunities for growth. When our conversations expanded beyond the processing manual, we developed opportunities for engaging with fellow archivists around collections topics, labor concerns, and potential collaborative projects. We have grown as a collective voice for the archives. With the support of SCA and CSU's campus professional development funds, we have been able to provide face-to-face meetings at SCA's Annual General Meetings. Through the CSUAAR meetings, online platforms, and live meetings we have formed a bond as professional colleagues and as friends.

The community has remained consistent despite changes in leadership and membership. New members have joined, positions have changed, and others have since left the CSUs, but the group continues to meet. Berlin Loa left CSU in 2019. In her absence, archivists from different campuses then took on the roles of communication and facilitators for the group. Pamela Kruger stepped down as facilitator the fall of 2020 but remains involved as a member. Other members have stepped up as leaders and facilitators. Although Loa took a position out of state, she has been able to keep connections with colleagues she met through this community. And, while membership has changed, the group continues to move forward, demonstrating the strength of the community, and the group's ability to change and adapt. The CSUAAR is dynamic and ever evolving to meet the needs of the group and to address contemporary topics.

Communities of Practice Beyond the CSU

The California State University Archives and Archivist Roundtable, as a Community of Practice, demonstrates how a group can come together through common need to the benefit of its members. Many archivists may already be part of communities and engaged in a social learning environment. Others may be seeking a community to join and make connections. Communities come in many forms and

18. Office of the Governor Gavin Newsom, "Executive Order N-33-20," March 19, 2020, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/03/19/governor-gavin-newsom-issues-stay-at-home-order/>.

engagement can be intense or minimal. The following are examples of communities related to archives that already exist in the Western archives region.

Examples of Communities	Description/Features
<p>Listservs:</p> <p>WestArch, CSU Archives, SAA-Archives</p>	<p>Professional e-mail lists</p> <p>Sharing, posting questions, and discovery of current events</p> <p>Broad interest, sometimes irrelevant content, delayed response</p>
<p>Facebook groups:</p> <p>Archivists Think Tank, Emerging Museum Professionals, Library Think Tank</p>	<p>Public or private forums on social media</p> <p>Sharing, discussion, and discovery</p> <p>Broad interest, sometimes irrelevant content, delayed response</p>
<p>Communal alliance groups:</p> <p>LA as Subject, Bay Area Community Archives</p>	<p>Professional network</p> <p>Research alliance</p> <p>Dedicated to preserving and improving access to the related historical and archival materials</p> <p>Public outreach opportunities</p>
<p>Regional groups:</p> <p>Gold Country Archivists, Arizona Archives Alliance, Pinal County Museums Meet Up</p>	<p>Professional network</p> <p>Geographically-based regional museum groups of volunteers and staff</p> <p>Focused on problem solving and resource sharing</p> <p>Public outreach opportunities</p>
<p>Institutional affiliation:</p> <p>CSU Archives and Archivists' Roundtable</p>	<p>Professional network</p> <p>Institutionally and regionally focused group with similar governance structure</p> <p>Multimodal communication forums</p>

Tips for Starting Your Own Community of Practice

The CSU archives-focused Community of Practice offers a model that could be replicated in similar archival communities.

To create your own Community of Practice:

1. *Think about your purpose.* Consider why you want to connect with others; consider your intention with creating this CoP. Perhaps find another like-minded partner to start, as Loa and Kruger did, then expand from there.
2. *Identify your community.* Think of other archivists as well as practitioners in galleries, libraries, historical societies, and museums that may share similar collection interests, or have similar collection storage issues.
3. *Solicit participation by making calls, sending emails, and posting on social media.* Reaching out starts the ball rolling; you just might find the partner(s) to get your community off the ground.
4. *Consider best ways to communicate.* We found it best to have one main way to communicate but also allow for discussion in other formats. This way the discussions are focused, but also allow for impromptu connections.
5. *Make time to connect.* Figure out if online meetings or in-person get-togethers will best support the community you build. Allow space for members to share themselves at whatever level they feel comfortable.
6. *Create a routine.* Having regular meetings at the same time each month or week can provide consistency and rhythm to help build the community.
7. *Be open to change.* Your community will likely grow and change based on the member's needs and interests. Be prepared to be flexible and welcoming to these growth opportunities.

The graphic below is a quick guide for creating a Community of Practice of your own. The graphic includes resources to learn more about the concepts of a Community of Practice.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of Practice (COP) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do better as they interact regularly.



THEME: IDENTIFY YOUR PEOPLE, IDENTIFY YOUR PURPOSE

Communities of practice grow from shared interests, concerns, or endeavors. What is your interest, issue, or need? Find the people with a shared interest or concern. Potential partners and participants in galleries, libraries, archives, museums (GLAM), or education. This may happen organically through networking or intentionally through targeted identification.



MAKE IT HAPPEN: CALL / EMAIL / INVITE

Make the call! Email or call potential participants to invite them to an initial meeting with the identified theme. Use this meeting time for self-introductions and discovery of resources and knowledge, and schedule the next meeting. You don't have to commit to a long term schedule (yet).

CONNECTING: HOW DOES YOUR COP COMMUNICATE BEST?

Potential platforms for communication include video meetings (Zoom, Teams), shared drives or drop boxes, social media spaces, workflow sites (Slack, Basecamp), or other methods. Multiple methods ensures inclusivity and promotes participation.



ROUTINE PROVIDES FOR CONSISTENCY AND OPPORTUNITY

Schedule recurring meetings using a perpetual link or calendar. This allows participants to commit dedicated time in advance. By offering a consistent foundation members can focus on discussion and tasks, immersing in social learning rather than focusing on the technology or access.



GROWTH

Be open to change as needed. Focus may change over time to align with current issues or stay rooted in long term concerns. Members attrition is normal and leaves room for growth of ideas and methods. Check in with members after a given period to ensure the schedule is viable.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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