

## Guidelines for Managing Virtual Discussion Groups

*Refer to these guidelines as you think through the setting up a virtual discussion group. As you can see in the table below, depending on the desired purpose, duration, types of participation and the required roles/effort levels of the moderator(s) may vary. The guidelines also provide ideas about how you might measure the success/effectiveness of your virtual discussions. These are just guidelines to consider to help emphasize the importance of thinking through what level of effort you will need to commit to make your virtual discussion topic a success.*

Purpose/Objective	Duration	Participation	Key Moderator Roles and Estimated Effort Levels	Sample Evaluative Measure
<p><b>Informal Learning and Knowledge Sharing</b></p> <p>(e.g., topical interest groups and Q&amp;A's, Announcements, Events)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Longer term Duration – e.g. 12 months</li> <li>❖ Renewable upon evaluation of effectiveness and usefulness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Membership may be pre-defined or voluntary – can be open to internal and external members.</li> <li>❖ Members participate as time and interest permits – many may just be “lurkers” - reading postings only – and may only contribute when they have something to add to the discussion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Low-maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Does not need to be a SME but should be able to access SMEs</li> <li>❖ Regularly review messages/contribution</li> <li>❖ Pose questions and post materials to spur dialogue</li> <li>❖ Moderate any chat discussions</li> <li>❖ Facilitate/seek responses to member questions not answered by other members</li> <li>❖ Monitor and respond to any inappropriate communications</li> <li>❖ Obtain periodic evaluation feedback from members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Volume of Traffic/use</li> <li>❖ Periods of down time /silence ok</li> <li>❖ Users indicate using and/or just lurking is beneficial to their individual learning</li> <li>❖ Users indicate that they have identified at least one “new” practice that can be directly applied to their work</li> </ul>
<p><b>Peer Learning Circles/ Communities of Practice</b></p> <p>(e.g. Regional or Global HR Net work, Academy Learning Council, Inter-agency Emergency Response Resource Group, Q&amp;A's on Technical issues/topics)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Longer term Duration – e.g. 6-12 months</li> <li>❖ Renewable upon evaluation of effectiveness and usefulness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Membership pre-defined – can be open to internal and external members</li> <li>❖ Regional, Global or inter-agency groups collaborate, share knowledge, and problem solve around specific areas of interest. More likely to be functionally or topically driven</li> <li>❖ May be primary group of contributors with some members just “lurking”</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medium-maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Can be a central coordinator or a peer member with rotating moderator duties</li> <li>❖ Organize and moderate periodic topical discussion</li> <li>❖ Regularly review messages/contribution</li> <li>❖ Organize the storing/sharing of resources and materials' so all members have access</li> <li>❖ Seek responses to member questions not answered by the group</li> <li>❖ Obtain periodic evaluation feedback from members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Users indicate that just-in time peer support helps to enhance their own knowledge abilities</li> <li>❖ Users indicate that they have identified at least one “new” practice that can be directly applied to their work</li> <li>❖ Users indicate that access to peer advice and lessons result in quicker time to adopt new tools/practices.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Formal Learning or Group Process Support</b></p> <p>(e.g., Pre-workshop or event preparation, Post-workshop follow-up learning activities, support for distance learning courses)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Duration limited and predefined around the a specific meeting or learning event, e.g., 3 months before an event to plan and prepare and 3 months after to evaluate, draft and work on follow-up activities</li> <li>❖ Upon completion of intended activities and evaluation, the group may cease to exist or may evolve into some other level/type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Membership pre-defined - limited to organizers, Participants, and contributors to the meeting or learning event</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medium-high maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Should be the facilitator or organizer of the event</li> <li>❖ Convene discussions as needed to plan and prepare for the event (i.e., develop agenda, materials, etc.), work on follow up activities (i.e., drafts of final report, etc.), and ensure work objectives are being met</li> <li>❖ Moderate/facilitate group chat discussions</li> <li>❖ Review messages/ contributions as needed</li> <li>❖ Organize the storing/sharing of resources and materials' so all members have access</li> <li>❖ Obtain evaluation feedback from members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ User feedback endorses use of forums as viable alternative to face-to-face or conference call meetings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Virtual Teamwork</b></p> <p>(e.g., geographically dispersed work teams working jointly to complete specific work or team objectives)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Duration limited and pre-defined according to duration of team assignment, e.g., 3-6 months time to complete a work objective such as a joint proposal, white paper, strategy etc.</li> <li>❖ Upon completion of intended activities and evaluation, the group may, renew to undertake new team activities, cease to exist, or evolve into some other level/type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Limited to in tact work groups or teams</li> <li>❖ Mostly internal groups however may also include inter-agency collaboration teams</li> </ul>	<p><b>High maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Should be the Team Leader</li> <li>❖ Convene discussions as needed to plan team work, monitor progress, provide feedback and coaching, and ensure work objectives are met by members.</li> <li>❖ Moderate/facilitate group chat discussions</li> <li>❖ Regularly review messages/ contributions</li> <li>❖ Organize the storing/sharing of resources and materials' so all members have access</li> <li>❖ Obtain evaluation feedback from the team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ User feedback endorses use of forums as viable alternative to face-to-face meetings</li> </ul>