**FAO Knowledge Sharing Network / Community Design Aid**

**Office of Knowledge Exchange, Research and Extension (OEK)**

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# Background

The world in which FAO operates is getting more and more complex and connected. The challenges in front of the Organization are bigger than ever, and require collaboration among and input from a variety of partners and stakeholders, both within and outside of FAO. How to identify, access, and collaborate with these partners and stakeholders?

In addition, outstanding performance, to which FAO aspires, is no longer a matter of just delivering solutions. It is increasingly a matter of building capacity in our stakeholders and partners, to identify and implement their own solutions, and work better together. How to go about connecting our partners with one another and with ourselves, and building that kind of a capacity?

Knowledge Sharing Networks / Communities are the answer to these two questions. Networks / Communities connect people sharing similar interests and mandates within and across organizations. They allow them to learn from each other, share information and lessons learned and collaborate. They also allow them to know who knows what, and when, and have access to the right people with the right knowledge at the right time.

As part of its mandate, FAO has been engaged in the creation of such Networks / Communities covering a broad range of topics and areas ranging from food security to animal diseases and from biotechnology to fisheries. A complete list of FAO-led or co-managed Networks / Communities is available from: <http://www.fao.org/knowledge/knownetcomm/en/>.

# Introduction

The below network / community design aid offers a quick and easy way to creating, building and maintaining a network / community. It is based on a 2008 FAO Review[[1]](#footnote-1) of experiences with a pilot phase of knowledge sharing network / communities. It is also based on an online community purpose checklist of Nancy White[[2]](#footnote-2), a Community of Practice Planning Worksheet proposed by Lucie Lamoureux and a Knowledge Network Checklist proposed by Andrew Nadeau.

The design aid should be approached by answering all questions in all categories. There are no right or wrong answers. After having answered all the questions, the answers should be discussed with peers and / or network / community experts. As a result of these discussions, an action plan for the network / community should be created and implemented.

# Design Aid

## Part 1: Identify the Need for and Viability of the Network / Community

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| What are the purpose and goals of the network /community? Do they fit with your organization's goals and objectives? |  |
| What outputs do you envisage as a result of the network / community activities? |  |
| Where did the demand for the network / community come from? |  |
| Who are the network / community potential members? How will you involve them? |  |
| Is there a manager sponsoring[[3]](#footnote-3) the network / community? Who is it and what is their vision for the network / community? |  |
| What short-, mid-, and long-term resources and tools do you have available? Are there any resource constraints (money, staff time, etc.)? |  |
| Are there already networks / communities with similar or the same purpose? If yes, why should your network / community be established? If it is established, should it be in partnerships with already existing networks / communities? How will it add value? |  |
| Does the time network / community members and the facilitators / moderators spend on the network / community count towards their work plan (e.g. Performance Evaluation Management System)? If not, could they be less motivated to participate? How does this affect the sustainability of the network / community? |  |

## Part 2: Facilitate your Network / Community

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| What is the gender, professional and cultural make-up of the network / community potential members? How will this affect network / community interactions? |  |
| Do you want your community to be public or private? If private, what determines eligibility? |  |
| Who will facilitate the network/community? Are there experts willing to lead discussions? |  |
| How will the community interact? (face-to-face, online discussion space, combination of both)? |  |
| Assuming the network /community activities will be mostly online, are the proposed facilitators familiar with online facilitation or do they need training? If yes, will such training be provided? |  |
| Will there be controversial issues being discussed? Are there any power issues (i.e., people may feel disinclined to participate because people of power are participating)? If yes, how will you tackle those? |  |
| Are there any language issues such as the need for translation, a common language or set of (or no set of) common languages? If yes, how will you tackle those? |  |
| What approaches will the facilitator need to apply in order to ensure knowledge sharing and learning in the network / community? |  |

## Part 3: Identify the Necessary Functionalities of the Network /Community Support Technology

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| What are the activities (regular discussions, asking and answering questions, producing joint documents, uploading documents, etc.) the group will engage in? Which tools best support these activities at the moment? |  |
| Will there be the need for data and information sharing and email archiving? |  |
| Will there be synchronous (same time) and/or asynchronous (different time) interactions? Which tools best support these activities at the moment? |  |
| Is there already a means of interaction (i.e., an online platform like Facebook, or some other group or forum) connecting the participants? If yes, how will you use and build on this? |  |
| Do participants have adequate computer/internet/emailing skills? If not, how will you overcome this? |  |
| What kind of Internet access do most participants have? |  |
| What technical support can you offer your participants? |  |

***Part 4: Network / Community Monitoring and Evaluation***

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| What qualitative measures will you use to monitor and evaluate? (Member satisfaction, feeling of belonging, sense of usefulness in their work, case studies, etc.) |  |
| What quantitative measures will you use to monitor and evaluate? (Page views, # members, # posts, time elapsed for questions to be answered, tasks accomplished, etc.) |  |
| What evaluation methodologies or approaches (Desk reviews, Surveys, focus groups, etc.) will you consider and how might they work online? |  |
| How will you communicate the results from the monitoring and evaluation to members and potential members? |  |

1. Here is a link to the FAO 2007 Knowledge Sharing Network and/or Community Review:

   <http://www.fao.org/documents/pub_dett.asp?lang=en&pub_id=269593> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Nancy White’s Online Group/Network/Community Checklist [http://km.fao.org/tkncc/resources/resource/en/news/6036/icode/?tx\_ttnews[cat]=24](http://km.fao.org/tkncc/resources/resource/en/news/6036/icode/?tx_ttnews%5bcat%5d=24) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A ***sponsor***is *a* senior officer who is promoting the creation of a network/community in his/her areas of work and often has access to funds. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)