# Terms of Reference for a Core Group of a Community of Practice

## What is a Core Group?

A Core Group is composed of community members that are most enthusiastic about the CoP and are committed to its success. As such they are willing to volunteer to take on specific responsibilities. A core group allows the community leader(s) to include members' perspective directly in the design and development of the community, thus making it even more member-centric. This is because they are community members themselves. Second, these members will develop a sense of co-ownership of the community by designing it and contributing to it. In turns, this means that they'll have commitment to its success, and will be available to help you as it develops. Finally, core group members will be role models as they will practice those community behaviors that will be expected from members.

The ideal number of members in a core group depends on the size of the community. As a rule, it should be wide enough to be representative of the larger audience of potential members (e.g. representative of regions, areas of expertise, organizations, etc.), but small enough to be able to develop strong relationships with one another, thus contributing to the development of a sense of community. A good number would be between 8 and 15 people, but this is not set in stone. If you have only 30-50 potential members, even a core group of 3-5 might be good. On the other hand, you don't want more than 15 people because then they won't be able to quickly develop relationships with one another.

## Who should be core group members?

A mistake often made is to nominate the top experts or representatives of different organizational structures. The problem with that approach is that those who are appointed might not necessarily care much about the community and not be committed to it. Instead core group members should be those who are the most enthusiastic about the community. While core group members don't necessarily need to be top experts within the domain, it is very important that they are recognized as peers by their colleagues and other practitioners. Otherwise, they won't be able to be role models as it will be unlikely that other members will replicate their behaviors.

## Suggested responsibilities for a Core Group

Core group members are volunteers and should commit only to what they realistically have time for. Hence the following list provides an idea of responsibilities that a core group member can commit to:

1. Contribute to the design of the community
2. Be a sounding board for the development of the community and its initiatives and activities
3. Be committed and contribute to the achievement of goals and objectives jointly agreed upon
4. Participate in core group meetings and take notes or facilitate on a rotational base
5. Actively participate in CoP activities in person or virtual (webinars, online platform)
6. Role model desired behaviors that have been agreed upon during the design phase, such as sharing tools/resources, best practices and failures, answering questions from other members, providing feedback
7. Take on a specific responsibility such as communications, events, knowledge platform, filling knowledge gaps, etc.
8. Identify challenges community members are facing, propose solutions, and take the lead on the implementation

9. Suggest and take the lead on specific initiatives
10. Help grow the community by recruiting new members
11. Contribute to strengthening the community by being a connector between members
12. If representing a region, an organizational structure, or a professional category, be a connector between that group and the community by making sure that members from that group are:
    a. Informed about community's plans and activities
    b. Contributing to the community's development by expressing their needs and ideas
    c. Included and participate in community's activities and initiatives

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*This document is part of the Communities4Dev CoP Toolkit featuring practical resources to help you develop impactful Communities of Practice in the development sector. [Access the full CoP Toolkit](#).*

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