Building an educator community of practice (CoP)

To strengthen 4-H professionals' leadership to coordinate a sustained learning and support group of educators to teach the iCode curriculum.

iCode Curriculum
Identity · Culture · Code

Purpose

This document is intended for 4-H professionals who are preparing and coordinating groups of educators to facilitate the *iCode* curriculum. The guide is designed to help professionals start a community of practice in order to deepen educators' expertise by engaging in mutual interaction, sharing, and learning. This guide focuses on creating and sustaining a community of practice and is a companion to the iCode curriculum **introduction and background** and the **educator toolkit**.

Community of Practice

Communities of practice (CoP) are organized networks of peers who have a similar role, such as 4-H volunteer educators, and who deepen their expertise by interacting with, sharing with, and learning from one another. They provide a forum for participants to grow as practitioners through collaborative exploration of topics that are directly relevant to their practice. Synonyms include learning networks, collaborative learning groups, learning community, or learning circle.

The intended outcome of a robust community of practice is to help educators build relationships, a sense of belonging, build equity skills, and advance professional confidence and identity.

Key elements

- **Extended duration:** Iterative, involving multiple meetings (no defined number) that occur over an extended duration.

- **Active learning:** Educators share, discuss, and reflect on issues related to their teaching. Educators engage in problem solving, reflecting on practice, exploring case studies, role plays or more.

- **Authentic:** Learning is situated in real-world contexts (i.e., implementing *iCode*).

- **Learner-centered:** Centered around the needs of members, focused on improving their teaching skills.

- **Shared Leadership:** Shared leadership structure (rotating leader, notetaker,

What a Community of Practice is Not

A community of practice differs from professional development/learning because it is more collaborative in nature and builds on the expertise and goals of the participants (learner-centered), and not directed or led by an outside expert or professional. A CoP is also not an episodic one-time workshop.

timekeeper).

Strengthens and challenges.

A CoP may involve a small group of educators (for example, 6–10 people) and is suitable for educators who are at one site or are distributed across multiple locations (i.e., place-based or virtual meetings). CoP's work well with mixed groups—that is, when novice and experienced educators work together. The approach requires a commitment of time by educators as its not a one-time workshop.

Key Components

Purpose (Domain, Goals, Subject)

- Focus on facilitating the *iCode* curriculum.
- Topics/Subject: Will the group focus on all aspects or only some?
  - Computational thinking
  - Scratch
  - BBC micro:bit
  - Culturally relevant pedagogy
  - Social justice youth development
- Who are the youth?
- What is the context/setting (4-H club, afterschool, summer program)?
- What are the connections to the broader organizational mission?

Community (People, Members)

- Who are the members of CoPs?
- What roles will members play?
- How and how often will members meet?
- What are the community's norms and rules?

Practice

- What activities will the group undertake, like meetings, group discussions, presentations?
- How will the community of practice be proactive in sustaining constructive conversations among group members?

iCode Content

We encourage the following content, relevant to *iCode* curriculum, be included in the group's purpose. To gain greater understanding of:

- Computational thinking
- Ethnic-racial identity
- Social justice youth development
- Culturally relevant pedagogy
- Increasing family involvement

Step-by-Step Process (Flexible)

- **Define** – outline the three factors of purpose (domain, goals, subject), community, and practice. Planning should include as many CoP members as possible to ensure buy-in and sustained participation of group members.

- **Design** – Identify a few critical members (4 to 6) and begin to engage them in conversation about the community of practice. Begin to delegate leader, notetaker, and timekeeper roles and expectations for rotating roles and how often these roles will rotate. What kinds of activities will be the most valuable and useful to members (open discussions, expert talks, demonstrations)? Where will the group save and share documents and notes?

- **Grow** – Invite more members, share the purpose, and develop community commitments (e.g., meeting agreements), set regular meetings.

References

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Acknowledgements