Building Learning Communities to Sustain Program Efforts

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Agenda

- What are learning communities?
- How do they help sustain programs?
- What are some good examples?
  - NDCommunities (Community of State Title I, Part D, coordinators)
What Is a Learning Community?

- It is a group of teachers, administrators, and other staff that
  - meets regularly,
  - reviews practice,
  - asks questions and focuses on learning,
  - then uses this learning to implement program improvement.
What Is a Learning Community?

The make up of LCs reflect a spectrum of configurations.

Group of people in different locations

Group of people in same location
What Is a Learning Community?

The make up of LCs reflect a spectrum of configurations.

Group of people in different positions

Group of people in same position
What Is a Learning Community?

The content of LCs reflect a spectrum of focus.
What Is a Learning Community?

The work of LCs reflects a spectrum of collaboration.
What Is a Learning Community?

The content of LCs reflect a spectrum of focus.

Range of topics

Narrow topic
Question for You!

By a show of hands...

Have you participated in a learning community?
Benefits of Learning Communities

- Reduction of isolation
- Increased commitment and vigor
- Shared responsibility
- Creation of new knowledge
- Increased understanding of content
- Increased understanding of roles played
- Help to sustain efforts
How Do Learning Communities Sustain Programs and Initiatives?

- Build relationships
- Maintain focus (knowledge, skills)
- Develop ownership for focus of the community
- Develop systems (communication, processes)
- Develop tools
- Continue focus independently
What Is a Good Example of a Learning Community?

- NDTAC has learning communities for State Title I, Part D, coordinators: “ND Communities”.
About ND Communities

- A pilot group started in 2007.
- It was rolled out as 6 communities, but reduced to three communities in 2009.
- Communities meet on bimonthly basis via conference call.
- The agenda is developed by the community, based on TA requests received, and/or based on upcoming activities or deadlines.
- Members wear many hats and tend to have little time for Title I, Part D. The Focus of communities tend to be on program administration.
- Notes and materials are posted on a website designed specially for all the ND communities.
Lessons Learned: Logistics

- Start a community that will be meeting remotely at a face-to-face meeting.
  - Introduce each other.
  - Identify issues to address.
  - Decide how community wants to operate.
- Set schedule so meeting is on everyone’s calendars.
- Call in advance to remind community members and get input on the agenda.
- Send agenda/discussion questions a few days in advance.
- Start on time.
- Create special place to save information, resources & materials for future reference (website, shared work space).
Lessons Learned: Content

- Align content with activities of group (agenda topic aligned with common deadline).
- Meet after webinar is presented to clarify the content and discuss how to apply it.
- If appropriate, invite knowledgeable guests or have members do short presentation.
- Walk through resources.
- Review related requirements.
- Allow flexibility to address a new burning issue—ask at the start of the call to ensure there is time to discuss it.
Lessons Learned: Engagement

- Make it as interactive as possible!
  - Start discussion as soon as possible; save updates for the end.
  - Use open-ended questions and practice active listening.
  - Integrate with different platforms (e.g., use webinar interface, poll participants).
- Connect with members who can speak well to a topic to consider discussion questions for a call and recruit as facilitator.
- Use polling questions on webinar platform and facilitate based on responses.
- If quiet, reach out to members you know have information/practices to share.
What Do We Hear?

- “It is always good to listen and talk to my colleagues who are **dealing with the same sorts of issues** I am.”
- “I always get **good ideas** from these calls.”
- “I **gather support for my superiors**; it shows how other states are being affected and how the majority are dealing with their issue.”
- “**Quick, efficient way to learn** more while still being available to my division director and others when necessary.”
For More Information

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