

# NurseConnect *Framework*



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## Foreword

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NurseONE is a national, bilingual, web-based health information service designed for the Canadian nursing community. The goal of NurseONE is to support Canadian nurses in delivering effective, evidence-based care by providing ready access to credible, up-to-date health-care information and helping nurses manage their careers and connect to colleagues, regardless of where or when they work.

NurseONE enables colleagues – nationally and internationally – to share knowledge and expertise, thereby promoting best practices and enhancing client outcomes. To that end, NurseConnect, the NurseONE portal’s interactive service, utilizes the latest information sharing, communication and collaboration tools to bring groups of individual subscribers together electronically to network and seek peer and expert advice and opinions.

This framework is a guide for forming communities of practice (CoP) and forums on the NurseONE portal. It presents the foundations for building a CoP, a CoP’s life cycle, the various roles involved and the terms for participating. This document is designed to assist NurseONE users in planning, implementing and evaluating professional CoPs or forums on NurseConnect. To understand the requirements and the steps necessary to carry out these tasks within the context of NurseONE, this framework provides an overview of the various elements necessary for a successful deployment.

*The NurseONE Team*

## Introduction

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The information age has heightened the availability of knowledge resources and the opportunity to share them. The evolution of technology, combined with the desire to create and share new knowledge, necessitates the growth and development of communities of practice (CoPs). Such communities support lifelong learning, and the associated technologies – considered key strategic assets by many organizations – provide a means for knowledge management.

A CoP acts as a platform for building and exchanging knowledge. It is a long-term relationship that enables participants to get to know each other and appreciate the significance of each other's contributions in ways that make their work more meaningful.

Membership in a CoP can be public (open), private (restricted), or a combination, depending on the purpose and types of information being shared. Restricted forums enable members to discuss topics candidly without needing face-to-face meetings, while open forums allow participation in professional discussions of current issues through broad networks of colleagues and experts in the field. Either way, NurseConnect is designed to be the rallying point for the exchange of information among novices, specialists and experts from across the country and around the globe.

Parties approaching NurseONE with a request to form a community are urged to consider the following:

- What is the objective and purpose of the community?
- What type of membership is appropriate: open or pre-defined?
- Is there an expert moderator willing to work toward making the community active and lively?
- How will knowledge be generated in the community? How will it be disseminated to the rest of NurseONE membership?
- Has a community administrator been identified and the responsibilities outlined?
- Have measures been identified by which the community will be evaluated and its lifespan determined?
- What human and financial resources have been secured and allocated?

Recognizing that CoPs are powerful mediums for generating, sharing and disseminating knowledge, NurseONE has developed this framework to ensure the success of all communities of practice administered through the NurseConnect portal.

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**...NurseConnect is designed to be the rallying point for the exchange of information among novices, specialists and experts from across the country and around the globe.**

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Members of a CoP share a common interest that is well-defined and focused so that members identify with it and are passionate enough to participate. As such, the goals of a CoP are:

- to connect with likeminded people;
- to share stories and experiences, capitalizing on individuals' knowledge;
- to introduce collaborative processes, tools and documents for organizing work;
- to participate in and share knowledge for problem solving; and
- to stimulate learning.

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### **What is a Community of Practice?**

**"A community of practice is a group of practitioners who share a common interest in a specific area of competence and are willing to work together."**

(Clemmons Rumizen, 2002)

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## Laying the foundation: Basic guidelines for creating a CoP

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### Guideline 1: Create a business case

Develop a business case that includes:

- a motive and rationale for the community's existence;
- possible benefits for the community;
- methodologies for sharing tacit knowledge; and
- best practices leading to reduced costs, improvements in quality, innovation, new knowledge, knowledge transfer and better outcomes for participants as well as clients.

### Guideline 2: Strengthen community culture

Follow these guidelines to strengthen the community's culture and enhance success:

- **Be empathetic.** Develop a sense of camaraderie and connectedness – both keys to active and constructive participation in the CoP.
- **Be flexible.** Consider the busy lives of CoP members, and be patient when waiting to receive a response. Know that as the membership grows, sending and receiving responses will become quicker.
- **Share anecdotes.** Anecdotes provide tacit knowledge, which can lead to the creation of new knowledge as well as evidence.

And remember: NurseONE provides an environment that can be accessed anywhere, anytime.

### Guideline 3: Determine technical features

Determine technical features required for building, supporting and sustaining a CoP on NurseONE. An appropriate mix of technical capabilities assists in supporting relationship building, learning, knowledge transfer activities and the communities' scope of work throughout the various stages and phases of the life cycle.

## Guideline 4: Determine terms of participation and use

- Participation within a CoP or forum on NurseConnect requires agreeing and adhering to the terms of participation.
- The terms of participation serve as the group's (and visitor's) team charter to govern social interactions and assure member accountability.
- Expert moderators have the ability to enforce the terms of participation and suspend a member's posting privileges.
- Each community structure needs to welcome new members and guide their participation within the community.

## Life cycle of a CoP

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A CoP follows a natural life cycle that evolves and changes over time. Often, activities, expectations and member participation undergo adjustments; questions arise about structure, subject matter experts and joint projects; and ways to measure success are discussed. A general life cycle takes the following form:

### 1. Inquire

Community leaders, or “owners,” of the CoP need to clearly identify the audience, purpose, goals and vision for the community. This may include conducting a needs assessment, defining stakeholder benefits and creating a mission statement.

### 2. Design

Owners of the CoP must define the community’s scope of work and mandate, activities, technologies, processes and roles; identify community-based tasks; develop scenarios to fulfill tasks; and create a schedule and timetable for implementation.

### 3. Build

Owners, in collaboration with NurseONE, need to launch a pilot of the community with a select group of stakeholders to test assumptions and establish a success story to ensure the activities, technologies, processes and role designations are appropriate for the community’s mandate.

### 4. Go live

Owners would be responsible for expanding membership in the community to a broader audience in ways that engage new members and deliver immediate benefits.

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**Formal structures for evaluation establish a framework within which leaders move the community’s evolution forward through leadership renewal and identification of new goals.**

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## 5. Operate

During the operational stage, owners of the CoP will need to nurture the initial excitement of developing the community's relevancy and demonstrate the value of a united effort through direction, planning and answering the question, "What's in it for me?" They will also need to engage members in collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing through routinely planned activities, which nourish individuals and the community at large by creating an increasing cycle of participation and community growth.

## 6. Evolve

Owners of the CoP must sustain the community by maximizing membership interest and participation over time. Sustainability is linked directly to the effectiveness of community leaders and their formally identified roles. Formal structures for evaluation establish a framework within which leaders move the community's evolution forward through leadership renewal and identification of new goals.

## 7. Closure

By its nature, a community does not exist forever but naturally progresses to this final phase once its goals or vision are no longer relevant. Closure is the point where, through a conscious decision or a community consensus, the membership stops the work. It is important during this phase to ensure that the knowledge assets generated by the community are not lost but are made available to the benefit of all members.

## Essential roles for a successful CoP

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### Champion

Champions represent a group of leaders, subject matter experts or stakeholders who sponsor a new community. To fulfill their role, champions agree to remain committed to the CoP throughout its various life cycle phases. In this capacity, champions:

- lead initiation, planning and pilot activities;
- establish terms of reference;
- identify and develop community leaders (e.g., moderator, administrator, key users);
- guide community leaders in fulfilling community vision and goals;
- identify partnerships and resources (including financial) to support the community and realize the vision;
- ensure community viability, growth and sustainability; and
- select membership based on an EOI (expression of interest).

### Expert Moderator

An expert moderator is recognized as the subject matter expert within the community. This person is an excellent communicator, has high ethical standards, is respected by others and is committed to the community's objectives. An expert moderator's credentials, personal network and areas of expertise must be trusted within the entire community. The moderator is the formal leader and principal member of the CoP. In this role, expert moderators:

- nurture and manage relationships within the community;
- seek subject matter experts to join the community;
- demonstrate passion about the community's goals and vision;
- identify, evaluate and communicate the community's progress regarding its goals;
- collate knowledge generated in the community, and prepare it for dissemination to other nurses on NurseOne and in the nursing community;

- make recommendations, in collaboration with all members, with respect to:
  - resources required by the community
  - changes to the community’s vision and goals
  - decisions related to community growth, sustainability and decommissioning
- work with the administrator to:
  - manage community access and membership
  - manage community assets (e.g., threads, documents, activities, collaboration tools)
  - facilitate discussions; ensure questions are addressed and information is shared among the entire membership
  - routinely monitor community activity and traffic
  - plan and schedules activities
  - encourage active community membership
  - communicates CoP statistics and information to members
- are proficient using the Internet and online communication tools, and understand etiquette for online forums;
- may be supported in these activities by other community leaders; and
- formally identify a deputy or stand-in to moderate during planned absences.

## Administrator

All the roles in a community of practice on NurseONE have to be carried out by members of the community itself. The one role that NurseONE can fulfill or support is that of administrator. The responsibilities of the administrator are agreed upon between NurseONE and the requesting party.

A CoP administrator ensures that business routines required to support the community are undertaken. This person is not necessarily a subject matter expert within the community, but fully understands its context and goals. Working closely with the expert moderator, the administrator:

- manages community access and membership, including access rights within the community’s assets (e.g., threads, documents, activities, collaboration tools);

- ensures healthy community interaction by monitoring and maintaining service levels related to:
  - unanswered questions or threads
  - length of discussion threads
  - archival activities related to community assets
  - activity and traffic
  - planned and scheduled activities or events
  - community membership
  - communication of statistics and information to stakeholders
- liaises with the NurseONE administrator and/or the NurseONE help desk to identify, report and resolve technical issues; and
- initiates the process, in coordination with the expert moderator, of welcoming members to the community by:
  - providing a brief history of the group and work to date
  - outlining the basics of how the community works
  - setting up meeting times for the champions

## Subscriber/Member

Community membership ideally includes representatives from all domains of nursing, including clinical, education, research, administration and policy. A community member is:

- anyone interested in the subject matter of the community, or who submits an EOI that is acceptable to the administrator or expert moderator;
- anyone with a passion for the work on which the community is focused who desires to share their experiences and expertise; and
- anyone who wants to collaborate and expand their network and knowledge base.

## Special roles

During the course of a community's life cycle, the requirement for special roles or responsibilities may be identified. Special roles are formally created within the business process at the discretion of champions and/or the expert moderator. However, within the NurseONE application architecture, access to NurseONE for non-nurse members will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## Challenges and opportunities

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**Developing a community is a delicate process involving interpersonal dynamics, trust and mutual commitment, which goes through many stages.**

(Langelier & Wenger, 2005)

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Cultivating, establishing and maintaining a CoP is an art that requires thought and effort. A CoP is both fragile and resilient, and depends on members' active participation and engagement, as well as on networks and individual and collective identities. Developing a community is a delicate process involving interpersonal dynamics, trust and mutual commitment, which goes through many stages (Langelier & Wenger, 2005).

### Participation

The flow of knowledge within a CoP increases when it is viewed as important to those involved. Many contributors see participation as an opportunity to give back – to share their expertise and provide mentorship to those interested in the subject matter of a particular community.

Member participation and valuing the work of its participants is key to the success of any CoP. Keep in mind, though, that all communities go through crises, and some fail before they get off the ground, primarily due to neglect, an inability to adapt to new ideas, lack of imagination or challenge or too many competing demands. Members might hesitate for many reasons such as fear of being ridiculed or abused, or lack of confidence in the relevance of the information they want to share. Having clear guidelines for postings that address confidentiality issues and acceptable codes of behaviour for online forums encourages participation.

### Evaluation

Evaluation provides an opportunity to take the pulse of the community and reflect on its activities. CoPs need to evaluate their work in the context of their mission, goals and working environment – and ideally performance indicators would be developed at the time of initiation of the CoP so that evaluation data can be collected throughout the life cycle. Accurate collection of information against clear indicators helps community leaders and members understand the value their communities create.

## Governance

CoPs run on passion and engagement. For a community to succeed, members must not only participate actively, but have a sense of ownership, which includes managing the development of their CoP. Community leadership is not just about coordinating the community as a knowledge-sharing operation, but also includes articulating the community's perspective and integrating it into a strategy-making process to be taken back to their respective environments for comments and sharing. Members of a CoP have the expertise and experience for taking charge of their own governance – this is their intrinsic value.

## Key messages for those interested in creating a CoP on NurseONE

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- The emergence and growth of CoPs are “cultivated” rather than “built.”
- Learning is a social activity, and most people learn in groups.
- Members of CoPs:
  - are distinguished by their passion for what brings them together;
  - may have some stated goals, but ones that tend to be general in nature;
  - usually share a common interest but do not necessarily produce deliverables or operate within defined timelines or schedules;
  - usually consist of volunteers who are not forced to belong or contribute and cannot be dictated to; and
  - determine its outcomes.
- A CoP team needs to determine the business requirements for each phase of the community in order to facilitate its development.
- A CoP has four primary areas of activity: relationships, learning, knowledge and action. These vary in importance from phase to phase and from community to community.
- For a CoP to succeed, the members must be willing to share knowledge within the context of the community.
- A CoP needs to build a process by which entries are approved for posting.
- The security and confidentiality of all entries need to be ensured so as to prevent self-imposed censorship.
- The role of the expert moderator is key to creating conditions for enabling interactions in an open exchange of ideas and information.
- A CoP provides a dedicated space for exchanging expertise and knowledge and for supporting innovative thinking.
- A CoP’s sustainability and duration are solely dependent on its membership.

The NurseConnect platform provides users with all the necessary structures to collaborate with colleagues locally, nationally and internationally. Within the NurseONE context, NurseConnect enables nurses in all domains – from novice to expert – to network and to provide peer-to-peer advice about common issues and shared purposes, ultimately maximizing the delivery of effective, evidence-based care for all Canadians.

NurseONE will continue to collaborate with the community through the expert moderator to ensure that knowledge generated within the community is shared with the nursing community on NurseONE.

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