




**Communities
of Practice**

Leading Communities of Practice: Roles and Responsibilities



Education
and Training





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Introduction

The Victorian context

The Education State sets out a powerful vision for Victoria's future. It is a vision built on a strong pedagogical foundation, and driven by a clear moral purpose. We are building a system that supports, challenges and inspires our young people.

Great schools, great teachers, giving every child the best chance in life means we are lifting an entire system. This is transformational work, not individual work. It is a long term collective commitment.

We have established highly ambitious state-wide targets and issued an imprimatur for principals to work together to establish, deepen and excel in collaborative cultures through the Communities of Practice (CoP) approach. Bringing principals together in this way to share their expertise, learn together and deepen collective efficacy for system-wide improvement is at the heart of our mission.

CoP is an approach that challenges our assumptions about the nature and scope of leadership and encourages us to understand it as a collective responsibility.

We know that the best systems in the world do this work together and not in isolation. In collaborating purposefully in productive cycles of design, action, feedback, learning and improvement we create real, tangible growth - and we take shared responsibility for student outcomes across all of our schools.

The CoP approach that guides the work of networks enables educational leaders to be a key part of shaping a self-improving education system. It is for this reason that the Department has produced a set of guidelines to assist with network governance.

Guidelines for network governance

This resource has been co-constructed by Bastow and Network Chairs following consultation across the four regions to identify supports that might assist Network Chairs and Network Executives to more confidently and effectively fulfil their roles.

It is organised into six sections:

1. The work of the network
2. The Network Chair
3. The Network Executive
4. The network meeting
5. Network sustainability
6. Appendices.

Principles of good governance

At its essence, 'good governance' refers to systems and processes that are put in place to ensure good decisions are made and implemented. Good network governance has the following characteristics:

- **Accountability**—to network members and their school communities and the wider education system
- **Transparency**—network members can clearly see how and why decisions have been made
- **Responsiveness**—decisions are responsive to the needs of network members and their communities and balance competing needs within the network
- **Consistency**—decisions are consistent with DET strategic priorities and relevant legislation
- **Equitable and inclusive**—all network schools feel their needs have been considered in the decision-making process
- **Effective and efficient**—decisions make the best use of available people, resources and time to ensure the best possible result for network schools and their communities.

*Adapted from The Good Governance Guide - <https://www.vlga.org.au/advocacy/local-government/good-governance-guide>

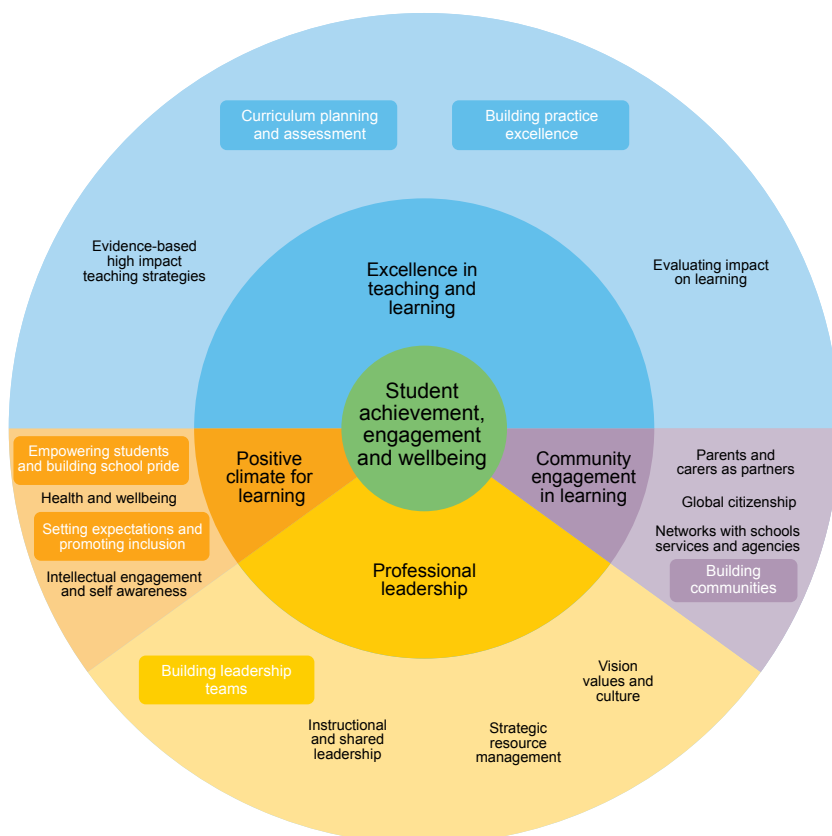
1: The work of the network

The CoP approach builds the collective efficacy of principals to strengthen and align effective practice, to improve the outcomes of all students. It represents an opportunity to empower networks to take ownership of their own learning, to drive impact at the school level.

By building on principals' instructional leadership skills, knowledge and dispositions, networks can positively influence change across our system.

CoPs form around a shared need identified by rigorous investigation of student learning data. Principals collaborating purposefully in productive cycles of design, action, feedback, learning and development create real, tangible improvement – and a shared responsibility for student learning growth across all schools.

Using the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) and the FISO Improvement Cycle as a basis for investigation, this approach enables principals the best opportunity to learn from their peers and expand their understanding of leadership and its unlimited potential.



What is a Community of Practice?

A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

To achieve the Education State vision, each network in Victoria must adopt the CoP approach. Great schools and great networks harness the power of great school practice to achieve great outcomes for all students.

The CoP approach is a lever for system-wide improvement that enables capacity building of leaders to be student-centred. A CoP builds knowledge and practice to enable deep learning within the network, fosters a culture of joint accountability and internal commitment for student outcomes, and has a strong focus on professional learning and governance.

CoPs build the capacity and knowledge of system leaders to:

- engage with the FISO model and the FISO Improvement Cycle
- reduce the variation of teaching quality across all classrooms and within all schools
- promote purposeful collaborative teacher behaviours e.g. joint curriculum planning, moderation of assessment, peer observation and feedback, within and across schools
- use the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model
- engage in rigorous analysis of student data – aiming for at least one year of learning growth for one year of school.

The following table provides some examples of what a CoP is, and what it is not.

A Community of Practice is/has...	A Community of Practice is not...
A way of working together	An administrative meeting
An identity defined by a shared domain of interest	A loose network of principals who meet at a set time
Principals who engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information	A meeting of people with the same job title with the same key improvement strategy
Principals who develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—shared practice	A group of principals who focus on individual problem-solving within a limited time frame
Focused on collective responsibility for learning and translating this to performance	A professional development event with a passive role for principals
At its heart the social construction of learning: learning by doing	A meeting to be provided with information or learning by another

A CoP is different from a team in several significant ways.

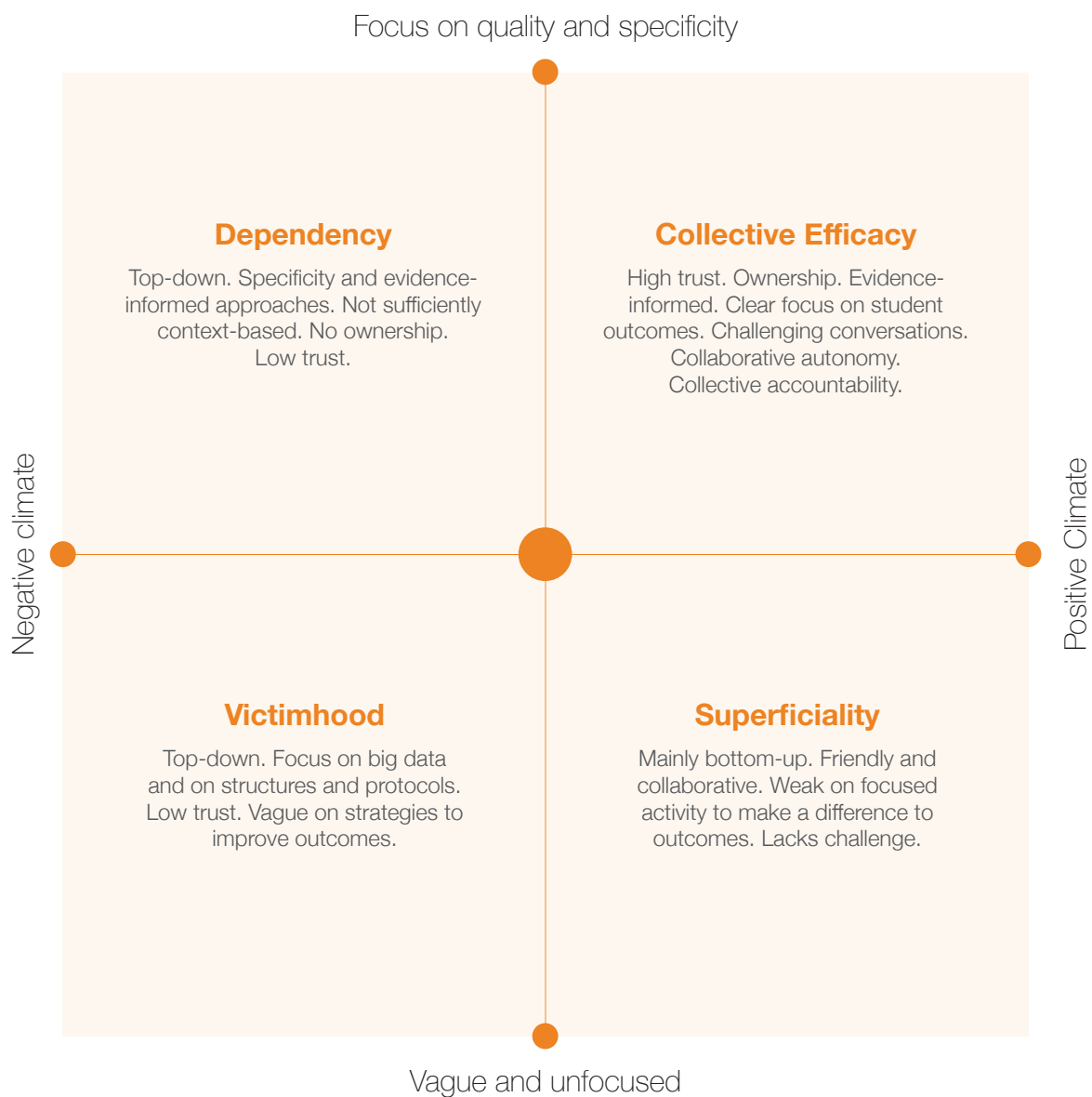
	Community of Practice	Team
Objective	To share knowledge and promote learning in a particular area	To complete specific projects
Membership	Self-selected	Selected on the basis of the ability to contribute to the team's goals
Organisation	Self-organising; leadership may vary according to the issues	Hierarchical, with a project leader or manager
Process	Making connections between members; ensuring learning is co-constructed and translated into practice	Coordination of many interdependent tasks
Termination	Evolves; disbands only when there is no interest	When the project is completed (in some cases, a team may evolve into a community)
Value proposition	Group discovers value in exchanges of knowledge and information	Group delivers value in the result it produces

*Adapted from the Innovative Learning website: www.innovativelearning.com/teaching/communities_of_practice.html



Towards collective efficacy

Enabling factors for effective, purposeful collaboration include a positive climate for change, and a shared focus on student learning.



*Adapted from Michael Fullan

2: The Network Chair

The role of the Network Chair

Network Chairs play a key system leadership role in enabling school leaders to collaborate and take collective responsibility for all learners in their network. They are key to ensuring a robust, evidence-informed CoP approach is taken to improving student outcomes.

The following table describes in more detail the role of the Network Chair.

The Network Chair

Provides **leadership for the network**, playing a lead role facilitating the network's vision and future direction, in collaboration with the Network Executive and Senior Education Improvement Leader (SEIL)

Provides **leadership of the Executive** by building a culture of active collaboration through role modelling the CoP approach at the Network Executive level and within the network

Focuses network collaboration on the **effective implementation of the FISO Improvement Cycle**, including supporting the establishment of smaller, initiative-specific CoPs within the network or across networks as necessary

Facilitates a **CoP approach** to network activity that has a relentless focus on improving student outcomes, through mutual accountability, collective responsibility and a rigorous evaluation of the impact of key milestones towards improvement

Ensures that the network is a key forum for **building capability**, holding professional, evidence-based conversations, sharing practice and sharing and analysing school performance data

Provides opportunities for the network and CoPs to embed the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model and discuss the **implementation of other DET student-related policy and practice** (e.g. transitions, wellbeing, and shared operational matters such as OHS, facilities and staffing) as required

Facilitates opportunities for the network to **engage with the broader school and local communities** and with key partners across the government, business and community sectors to improve student outcomes

Collaborates with SEILs and other area-based multidisciplinary team members on behalf of the network as required, facilitating **two-way communication, consultation and feedback** between the Department and network schools

Represents the network as a member of the region's Network Chair Forum

Undertakes **succession planning** for the network chair position in collaboration with the network and SEILs

Other (network-specific)

Download the [Skills, Expertise and Dispositions appendix](#) outlining the requirements of a Network Chair.

Network Chair appointment

The Network Chair will be elected through a process supported by the network SEILs. The election will take place in Term 4 each year and principals may self-nominate for the position.

See the Network Executive section for information on Executive appointment and tenure.

Selection

Prior to the election, network members will discuss the role of the Network Chair and how it applies to their network context. The role of the Network Chair in leading Communities of Practice should form the basis for this discussion.

The election must be conducted by secret ballot. Each school in the network is entitled to one vote. The school principal (or acting principal) is eligible to vote.

Candidate statement

All nominating candidates must provide a statement that demonstrates they have capacity to provide the skills, expertise and dispositions of an effective Network Chair. In addition candidates should demonstrate their ability to successfully lead a Community of Practice.

The Network Chair Expression of Interest will be circulated to all network members. **You can download it as an appendix from the [Bastow website](#).**

Election

The process for the election is as follows.

- The SEIL (or SEIL nominee) sends an email to all network members calling for nominations to the position of Chair, with a clear closing date for nominations. Nominations must be accompanied by a candidate statement.
- If more than one nomination is received, the SEIL (or SEIL nominee) coordinates the election process.
- If there are no nominations for the position the SEIL will consult with the Network Executive to appoint an interim Chair, which may be the SEIL.
- Candidate statements are made available to the network 10 days prior to the election.
- Voting is conducted at a Term 4 meeting.
- Principals who are unable to attend the election meeting may lodge a proxy vote by informing the SEIL (or SEIL nominee) of their preferred candidate in writing at least 24 hours prior to the election.
- The SEIL counts the votes with a scrutineer nominated and agreed to by the network, and declares the result of the election.
- Where the vote is tied, the Area Executive Director has the casting vote.
- The result of the vote is binding.



Tenure

The Network Chair is appointed for one year, with appointments commencing on 1 January and concluding on 31 December.

Current and former Network Chairs are permitted to re-nominate; the maximum consecutive tenure is three years.

To assist with transition, the incumbent must receive a handover from the retiring Network Chair prior to taking over the position.

Network Chairs can be invited to stay on the Executive for one year following their retirement as Chair, to act in an advisory role.

Development

Network Chairs and SEILs have the opportunity to participate in WISE: System Leaders, a Bastow program designed to support them in their network roles.

Regions will hold regular Network Chair forums/meetings.

Gratuity and Network Administration Allowance

Network Chairs will receive a gratuity of \$10,000 (pre-tax) per year. This will be paid through a fortnightly allowance as part of their salary.

Network Chair schools may also be reimbursed up to \$5000 per year for network-related administrative activities. This must be claimed via the Schools Targeted Funding Portal. Network Chairs should retain all relevant receipts in order to submit a reimbursement request.

The Network Chair is expected to provide the Network Executive with an administration allowance budget, to enable regular monitoring.

Leave arrangements and resignations

Network Chairs taking leave of two weeks or less will be covered by internal arrangements decided by the Network Executive.

Network Chairs undertaking leave for a period longer than two weeks must be replaced by an Acting Network Chair selected from the Network Executive. The SEIL will inform Bastow immediately of Acting Network Chair arrangements to ensure timely HR and payroll notification.

Acting arrangements will cease on the date the Network Chair resumes duty, or on 31 December, whichever occurs first.

A Network Chair resigning from the position will be replaced by an Acting Chair until the Term 4 election process commences.

The Acting Network Chair will be selected through an Expression of Interest. This process will be conducted according to the principles of merit and will be overseen by the SEIL. The merit principle reinforces quality, open and transparent decision-making.

The SEIL (or nominee) will send out an Expression of Interest via email to the principals of the network, calling for nominations. Principals may self-nominate for the Acting Network Chair position. The SEIL will form a panel to select the best candidate for the position.



Roles and responsibilities: Network Chair and SEIL

The Network Chair and the SEIL are responsible for leading the learning of the network in a **collaborative partnership** to strengthen the CoP approach for improvement across all schools in the network.

Network Chair	SEIL
Builds a culture of collaboration characterised by relational trust and the DET values	Promotes the importance of all network principals enacting and modeling the DET values
Facilitates the planning of the network's future direction with a focus on FISO, building a culture of learning excellence within the network for all principals	Contributes to the planning of the network's future direction and improvement priorities with a focus on FISO, enabling a culture of learning excellence for principals
Promotes evidence based practices that enable effective decision-making and accurate problem identification	Promotes evidence based practices that enable effective decision-making and accurate problem identification
Prioritises the capacity of the network to operate as an authentic and active CoP	Supports the network to prioritise progress towards excelling CoP practices
Leads rigorous evidence-informed dialogue aimed at improving student outcomes within the network	Provides information and insight to enable rigorous improvement-focused dialogue within the network
Plans the meeting agenda with a focus on learning with the executive	Informs the meeting agenda of DET priorities and provides two-way flow of information and feedback
Collaborates with the network and CoPs to facilitate professional learning	Supports, takes part and leads professional learning that builds collaborative practices and engagement in CoPs
Supports and encourages principals to fully participate in CoPs	Encourages principals to actively participate and engage in CoPs
Ensures all administrative tasks are undertaken, including the budget acquittal	Assists with administrative support where required
Undertakes succession planning for the Network Chair position and keeps track of their own tenure	Collaborates with the Network Chair on succession planning for the Network Chair position
Supports and welcomes new members	Regularly informs the Network Chair of new principal class officers as appointed

3: The Network Executive

The role of the Network Executive

Network Executives support the Network Chair in their system leadership role. They model collaboration and co-learning and provide a channel for succession planning.

The following table describes in more detail the role of the Network Executive.

The Network Executive

Provides **leadership of the network**, playing a key role in supporting network collaboration and planning the network's vision and future direction with the Network Chair and SEIL

Focuses collaboration on the **effective implementation of the FISO Improvement Cycle**, including supporting the establishment of CoPs

Reinforces a **focus on improving student outcomes**, through mutual accountability, collective responsibility and a rigorous evaluation of the impact of key milestones towards improvement

Supports the Network Chair in **ensuring the network is a key forum for building capability**, holding professional, evidence-based conversations, sharing practice and sharing and analysing school performance data

Contributes to network discussions on the **implementation of other DET student-related policy and practice** (e.g. transitions, wellbeing, and shared operational matters such as OHS, facilities and staffing) as required

Supports the Network Chair to facilitate opportunities for the network to **engage with the broader school and local communities** and with key partners across the government, business and community sectors to improve student outcomes

Undertakes **succession planning** for Network Executive positions in collaboration with the Network Chair and the SEILs

Other (network-specific)

Download the [Skills, Expertise and Dispositions appendix](#) outlining the requirements of a Network Executive.

Network Executive appointments

The appointment of the Network Executive is managed within the network with support from the SEIL. Appointment should be undertaken in Term 4 each year.

Composition

Each network determines the Executive composition that best meets their needs. Examples include:

- representation from each of the types of schools within the network (e.g. secondary—large and small, primary—large and small, P–12 / P–9, specialist sector, geographic location)
- position mix of assistant principals and principals
- appointment based on skills and expertise needed to achieve the improvement goals and priorities of the network
- chairs of initiative-specific groups within the network, using the CoP approach.

Selection

Networks will need to agree the preferred method of Network Executive appointment, ensuring that the process is open and transparent. In the process of agreeing the method, network members should discuss the role of the Network Executive and the network context, together with consideration of alternative approaches of appointment. The agreed method should be collaboratively constructed, agreed, documented and must be conducted by a secret ballot.

The Executive may be appointed in any of the following ways:

- election by all network principals
- election by all network members
- election by specific network members for a particular category (e.g. just primary school members for the election of a primary school member)
- Expression of Interest to, and selection by, the SEIL and Network Chair
- other.

The skills and expertise elements of the 'Skills, Expertise and Dispositions Matrix: Network Executive' should be used as Key Selection Criteria for the role.

Expression of Interest

Applicants for Network Executive roles should provide the following:

- a current Curriculum Vitae
- a cover letter outlining the skills and attributes that would assist them in the position together with an explanation of why they would be a suitable Executive member for the network; ideally this would include:
 - » demonstrated experience in participating in working parties / reference groups
 - » demonstrated understanding of the role of the Executive
 - » willingness and ability to commit to the time and workload associated with being an Executive member
 - » demonstrated leadership skills and experience.
- contact details for two current referees.

Election

The type of election undertaken will depend on whether it is open to all network members, to principals only, or to specific network members for a particular category. Whichever method is chosen, a few key practices are suggested as follows.

- The Chair / SEIL sends an email to all relevant network members calling for nominations to positions on the Network Executive with a clear closing date for nominations.
- If more than the required nominations are received, the SEIL / Chair coordinates the election process.
- Voting is conducted at the Term 4 meeting.
- The SEIL / Chair counts the votes and declares the result of the election.
- Where the vote is tied, the SEIL / Chair has the casting vote.
- The result of the vote is binding.

Tenure

Network Executives are appointed for a term of one year. Former Network Executives are permitted to re-nominate.

4: The network meeting

Networks will devote time for CoPs in the meeting but it is expected that to lead effective change and ensure this work is impacting in a timely way, CoPs will meet outside of network time.

The agenda

Each network determines the structure of its meeting agenda; the Chair is responsible for setting the agenda.

The main consideration is that the agenda reflects a CoP approach, with the focus on collaborative learning aimed at building knowledge and practice to improve student outcomes.

We encourage the adoption of a 70:20:10 structure for the network agenda.

70% of the meeting: Privileging principal learning to use action research to investigate priority areas

20% of the meeting: Working on common issues, hot topics and exchange of information

10% of the meeting: Reflecting on progress of network and Communities of Practice

Some networks factor in time for members to work on:

- externally provided professional learning opportunities
- real work within member schools (e.g. working with a challenge partner to monitor and update Annual Improvement Plan)
- principal health and wellbeing.

Many networks also allow a short period of time at the end of the meeting for DET updates.

It is expected that principals utilise the FISO partnerships from within their network to further develop the work between meetings and apply it to their own school.

Minutes

Each network determines the structure of its meeting minutes. Good practice (as described by the Australian Institute of Company Directors) is to pull out action items into a separate action list.

Minutes should provide:

- guidance to those who are responsible for implementing actions decided
- the basis for checking that actions have occurred
- records of past decisions
- the Executive's authority for action
- compliance with budget reporting requirements.

Minutes should not record the remarks of individual network members unless there is a good reason for doing so. A brief dot-point summary of key discussion points, followed by a clear resolution where appropriate, is sufficient.

Action lists

The action list records:

- a brief description of the action to be taken
- by whom
- by when
- a reference to the minute/agenda item
- a means of recording that the action has been taken, or a revised date for completion, as necessary.

Network and Community of Practice facilitation tips

CoPs:

- connect people
- build trust
- provide a shared context
- enable dialogue
- stimulate learning
- capture and diffuse existing knowledge
- introduce collaborative processes
- help people organise
- generate new knowledge.

It is important that the Chair of a CoP has effective facilitation skills.

An effective CoP facilitator:

- sets the initial mood or climate of the CoP to build trust and collaboration
- keeps the CoP focused on task and process
- remains as objective as possible
- is an informed guide helping the CoP chart its course and accomplish its goals
- asks probing questions to challenge thinking and deepen learning
- listens more than they talk
- encourages everyone to participate, while remembering that different people participate in different ways
- protects members of the group from threatening behavior, verbal and non-verbal
- is gender and culturally sensitive
- energises a group or slows it down as needed
- recaps, occasionally, what has happened in the CoP and helps the group to make connections between meetings.



5: Network sustainability

Induction

Each network will have its own induction process, but all induction processes should include:

- a personal welcome from the Chair, by phone or face-to-face, depending on geography
- a document that provides an overview of the network:
 - » members and their contact details
 - » the purpose and values of the network
 - » network governance structures, including role statements for the Chair and Executive and the membership
 - » protocols and/or guiding principles for how the network works together, including participation expectations, meeting protocols, financial commitment etc.
 - » a meeting calendar
 - » the annual work plan/network strategic plan and initiative-specific plans
- a formal welcome at the network meeting
- assistance in identifying principals with similar schools within the network, or in neighbouring networks where appropriate.

Succession planning

Good governance ensures intentional succession planning for the Network Chair and Executive positions, and considers questions such as:

- **Mentoring**—are future network leaders identified, and encouraged and mentored to take on Executive positions?
- **Availability**—is the outgoing Chair available to coach the incoming Chair or act as an advisor as needed?
- **Diversity**—are members from diverse settings and/or with diverse views encouraged to take on Executive positions?
- **Support**—are larger schools willing and able to provide support (e.g. administrative or financial) to enable principals from smaller schools to take on leadership roles?
- **Exposure**—are future leaders provided with opportunities to understand the scope of the work of the Executive and Chair?



6: Appendices

The appendices are provided as a separate document and are available for [download](#).

They include example templates, protocols and ideas that can be used by networks, as well as examples of practice from different networks.

Appendix A	Skills, Expertise and Dispositions Matrices
Appendix B	Network Chair Expression of Interest
Appendix C	Network Feedback
Appendix D	DET Resources and Further Reading
Appendix E	Structure for Kingston Executive
Appendix F	Kingston Network Data Protocols
Appendix G	Northern Goulburn Network 2016-17 Strategic Plan
Appendix H	Casey South Network 2017 Annual Work Plan
Appendix I	Wellington Network 2016-17 Strategic Plan
Appendix J	Wellington Network 2018 Plan on a Page Draft
Appendix K	Yarra Valley Network 2017 Handbook
Appendix L	Wellington Network Meeting Agenda
Appendix M	Wellington Network Improvement (WNIT) Agenda
Appendix N	Northern Goulburn Newsletter

DET'S VALUES



RESPONSIVENESS

We respond in a timely way with our best work



INTEGRITY

We are honest, ethical and transparent



IMPARTIALITY

We behave in the best interests of the public by making fair and objective decisions



ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others to account for the work that we do



RESPECT

We value others and accept their differences



LEADERSHIP

We are genuine, supportive and do the right thing



HUMAN RIGHTS

We uphold and respect the rights of others



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