



PURPOSE  
BUILT  
COMMUNITIES



Knowledge  
Communities



## VALUE AND IMPACT OF THE PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: 2019-2021

PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES  
KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITIES

August 2021

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living.”  
~ Parker J. Palmer<sup>i</sup>

Purpose Built Communities (Purpose Built) brings together Network Members (NMs) — leaders and staff of organizations working to improve equity and opportunity in neighborhoods across the country — in a networked Community of Practice (CoP) structure. Knowledge sharing and collaboration helps leaders tackle the complex challenge of intergenerational poverty to achieve racial equity, improved health outcomes and upward mobility for residents.

### THE PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES NETWORK

At its core, Purpose Built Communities and its Network Members (NMs) believe that “Everyone deserves to live in a healthy, thriving neighborhood.” Today’s neighborhoods of concentrated poverty are rooted in systemic policies and practices—both past and present—that feed off and fuel entrenched racist conditions, beliefs and stereotypes. Purpose Built’s holistic model seeks to eradicate the long-standing

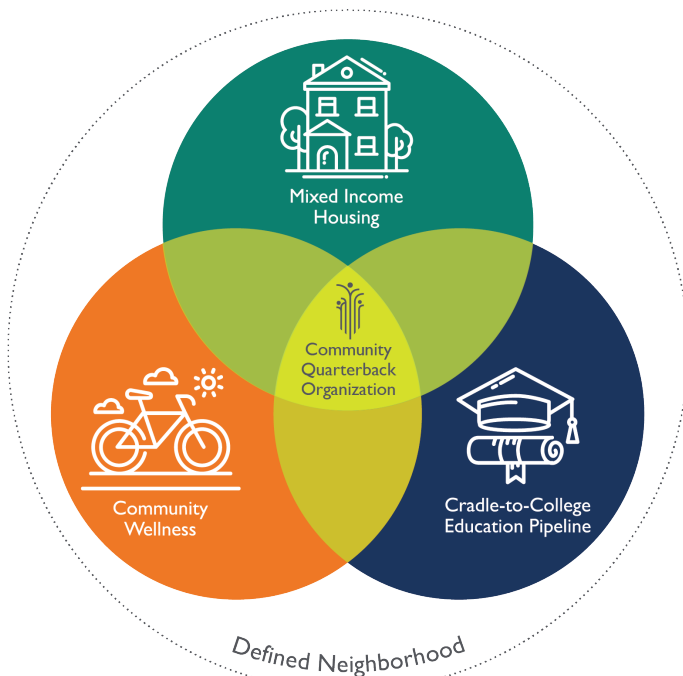
racial disparity of opportunity, in a defined neighborhood, by focusing on mixed-income housing, cradle-to-college education and community wellness.

The Purpose Built Communities Network comprises non-profit “Community Quarterback”<sup>ii</sup> (CQB) organizations in 28 neighborhoods across 24 cities in the Central, Eastern, Northern and Southern United States. CQB organizations coordinate implementation of this holistic model in partnership with residents and other organizations/entities in the community.

### LAUNCHING A PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP)

During Purpose Built’s first 10 years, staff primarily provided one-on-one consulting support to individual CQBs. In 2019, with the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Purpose Built began moving from a hub-and-spokes structure (with Purpose Built serving as the hub), to a Community of Practice model, also known as a networked model. This shift allows Purpose Built to more effectively support revitalization efforts that result in healthy, vibrant neighborhoods.

Leaders of the 28 CQB organizations in the Purpose Built Communities Network—mainly executive directors (EDs)—make up the core community of professionals in the CoP. As the COVID-19 pandemic began and then a swell in



*Purpose Built Communities holistic model*

### WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

**Communities of Practice bring together professionals who:**

- Share a purpose and common set of challenges
- Solve problems collaboratively and learn from each other on an ongoing basis

The CoP model has been validated by research and practice to identify emerging problems, opportunities and promising solutions; deal with complexity; learn from experiments; spread and apply innovations; and move a field forward in the fastest way possible.



attention to racial justice grew in summer 2020, EDs shared COVID-19 relief resources and supported each other as they grappled with how national and local events impacted them on personal and professional levels. Leaning on this peer group for immediate practical, emotional and moral support during this time accelerated the launch of the Purpose Built CoP and provided a strong foundation for the initiative.

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP TODAY





Purpose Built Communities serves as the CoP convener, providing leadership and staffing support, social capital and funding resources. A core team of Purpose Built leaders, staff and Network executive directors meet regularly to reflect on community structure and tools that support the community. To assist them, consultant Naava Frank LLC/ Knowledge Communities provides strategic and tactical guidance.



Meeting with Network EDs and Purpose Built staff, December 2020

The Purpose Built staff team functions as the CoP facilitators, establishing routines such as monthly meetings for EDs, getting to know member needs through surveys and individual conversations, and building a shared purpose and culture by modeling and articulating a non-judgmental stance. Topics come from Network Members, Purpose Built staff and outside experts.

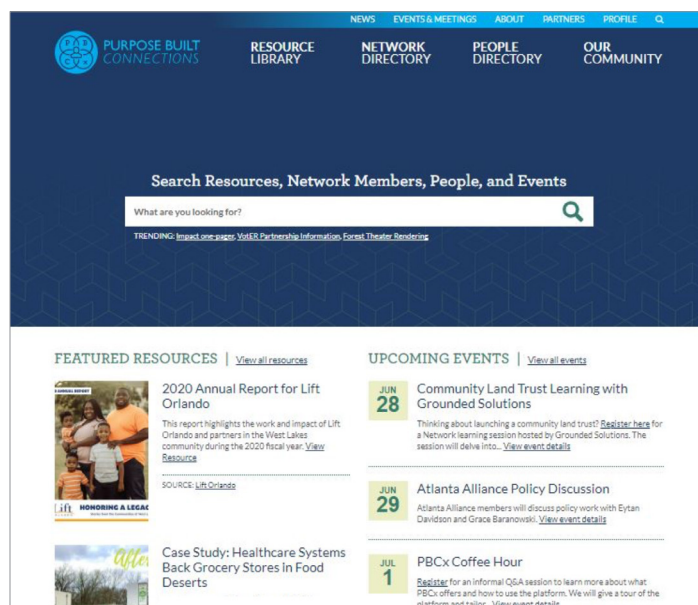
## IN 2020, THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE HELPED NETWORK MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS TO:

-  Provide COVID-19 relief to their neighborhoods
-  Incorporate racial equity strategies in their work
-  Expand fundraising opportunities
-  Receive emotional support and raise morale

Today, the Purpose Built CoP is growing in depth and breadth. Numerous CoP subgroups (e.g., Fundraising, Policy, Early Learning, Truist Foundation Racial Equity Ambassadors) meet regularly. Most of these subgroups started at the initiative of Network Members. They respond to a wide array of practical learning needs and support Network staff to build organizational excellence and seize learning opportunities.

As NMs take ownership of their own learning, Purpose Built leadership and staff have embraced cultural change — pushing power to the edges — which is often challenging as an organization moves to a networked model.

An online platform, Purpose Built Connections (PBCx), provides an easy way to store, share and access knowledge resources, as well as find colleagues with common interests or those who may help resolve a problem or shorten the learning curve.



Purpose Built Connections (PBCx) homepage

## MEASURING IMPACT

Purpose Built developed a three-part framework to track and measure the progress and outcomes of the Community of Practice: stronger relationships, increased learning and excellence in application. In surveys and interviews of Network Members and Purpose Built staff to date, it is clear that the CoP is helping the Network and Purpose Built staff at all three levels.

December 2020 survey results illustrate the strength and impact of the CoP for EDs so far. NMs trust one another more, have a stronger sense of community, solve practical problems and continue to grow professionally over time.

## SUMMARY

The Purpose Built Community of Practice stimulates problem recognition and the creation, exchange and application of innovations to serve place-based neighborhood revitalization that moves people out of poverty.

### The CoP's structure and interactions help Network Members:

- Respond rapidly and flexibly to changes in circumstances
- Accelerate knowledge sharing
- Shorten learning curves to gain skills and expertise that is fundamental to Network Member excellence
- Successfully implement the Purpose Built Communities model
- Access supportive peers and their knowledge resources
- Make informed decisions that create stronger outcomes

The Community of Practice allows Purpose Built Communities to respond to its members' evolving needs in a rapidly changing world. Supporting NMs as they find solutions to professional challenges will ultimately serve the organizations and communities that they lead. Given the state of our world today, it is hard to imagine being a leader without a Community of Practice.



*Responses from December 2020 survey of Network EDs measuring the value and impact of the CoP*

# INTRODUCTION

Purpose Built Communities (Purpose Built) brings together Network Members (NMs)—leaders and staff from organizations representing dozens of efforts to improve neighborhoods across the country—in a networked Community of Practice (CoP) structure. Knowledge sharing and collaboration helps local leaders in the Network tackle the complex challenge of intergenerational poverty to achieve racial equity, improved health outcomes and upward mobility for residents.

Communities of Practice bring together professionals who share a common set of challenges (e.g., place-based community development professionals) on an ongoing basis to collaboratively solve problems and learn from each other. CoPs have become even more necessary and effective as the U.S. navigates the current moment of COVID-19, racial reckoning and economic shifts that contribute to enormous new stresses and challenges for professionals working to make neighborhoods healthier places to live.

This paper—intended for Purpose Built Communities staff, supporters, partners and Network Members—articulates Purpose Built’s successful and compelling journey to adopt and implement a CoP strategy. Specifically, the paper describes the Purpose Built CoP startup process, the status of the Purpose

Built CoP as of early 2021 and success factors to date. Finally, the paper links to tips for practitioners who support and manage CoPs and networks.

The ordered structures of many organizations are effective during stable times, but they are less effective in adapting during today’s increasingly volatile and complex society. Communities of Practice have fluid social structures that promote knowledge sharing and facilitation that simultaneously follow and drive the learning needs of members. CoPs allow for a necessary and always changing learning focus, responsive to the rapidly evolving environment.

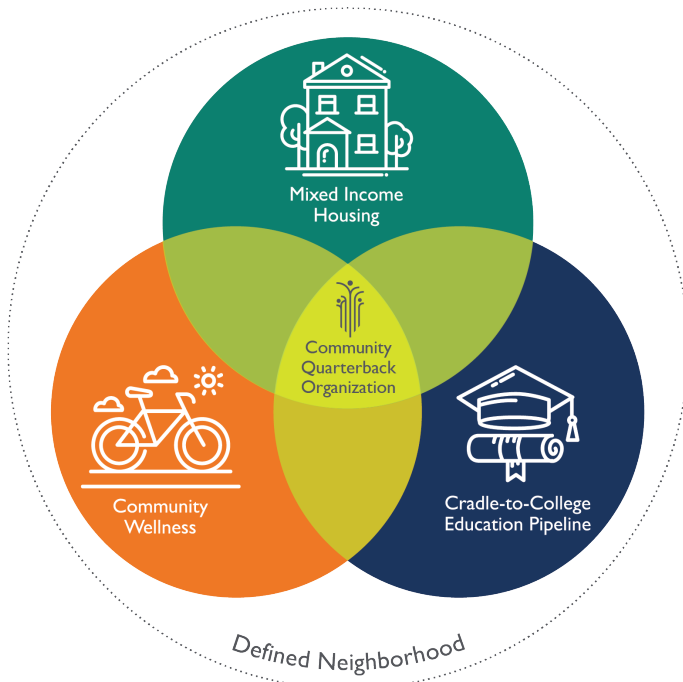
## THE MISSION OF PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES

At its core, Purpose Built Communities and its Network Members believe that everyone deserves to live in a healthy, thriving neighborhood. Today’s neighborhoods of concentrated poverty are rooted in systemic policies and practices—both past and present—that feed off and fuel entrenched racist conditions, beliefs and stereotypes. The Purpose Built holistic model seeks to eradicate the long-standing racial disparity of opportunity, in defined neighborhoods, by focusing on three pillars: high-quality, mixed-income housing; an effective cradle-to-college education pipeline; and comprehensive community wellness resources.

Purpose Built takes a holistic approach rather than focusing on “point solutions” designed to solve a singular problem, such as opening an early learning center, offering after-school programming or providing financial literacy classes. Changing fundamental neighborhood conditions provide families and children with greater opportunity for upward mobility, racial equity and healthy outcomes.

In 28 neighborhoods across 24 cities in the U.S., this approach is coordinated and sustained by a non-profit “Community Quarterback”<sup>ii</sup> organization (CQB) in partnership with neighborhood residents and a diverse array of organizational entities. Partners include business owners, school boards, developers, housing authorities, other nonprofits, philanthropic individuals and foundations, and elected officials.

Since the Purpose Built model is relatively unique, it is easy for the staff and leaders coordinating CQB organizations to feel isolated and alone in their work. With the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Purpose Built created the CoP to focus on professional learning, stimulating new ideas and spreading innovation. CoPs, which support learning from experimentation, fit the “realities of creating social change in a complex world.”<sup>iii</sup> Throughout 2020



*Purpose Built Communities holistic model*

and into 2021, Senior Vice President Michelle Matthews, Knowledge Manager Ashley Bozarth and the CoP core team have served as the guiding force for the effort, taking ownership for its successful launch and development.

## WHY PURPOSE BUILT SHIFTED TO A CoP MODEL

A Community of Practice, as defined by Etienne Wenger, is a “community of professionals who share a common set of challenges and systematically share their knowledge, expertise and tools in order to improve their practice and the performance of their organization by interacting on an ongoing basis.”<sup>iv</sup>

Executive directors (EDs) of the 28 CQB organizations in the Purpose Built Network make up the core community of professionals in the CoP. Implementing the Purpose Built model requires EDs to address challenges associated with leadership, organizational development, fundraising, strategic partnerships, community partnership and engagement, and much more. They each face the realities that social change is complex, as are the neighborhoods they serve. These EDs and their respective staff must learn how to support holistic, place-based approaches in collaboration and coordination with a diverse set of partners—who often operate in silos, focusing on unique projects or delivery of direct services. Additionally, with rapid change, it is difficult to keep up with new policies and practices—be it a tax policy, a research study, or a recently elected or appointed governmental partner. A professional CoP is an effective way to keep up with the pace and vast amount of learning required to successfully manage place-based revitalization.

Having a community of peers to learn from shortens the learning curve by leveraging the knowledge and experience of others in the field and provides emotional support. By interacting in ways that include in-person conferences, video calls and email threads, EDs can learn from each other (e.g., sharing creative solutions to home repairs for seniors), solve problems together (e.g., increasing visibility with national funders) and grow as professionals (e.g., how to lead at a distance during COVID-19)—becoming stronger leaders and strengthening their organizations.

As CQB organizations navigate COVID-19 and demands for a racial reckoning, they face even more shifting demands, contexts and stresses to support people in their neighborhoods. Michelle Matthews, senior vice president and leader of the Purpose Built CoP initiative, articulates, “Place-based work is a very different way of working and there is much that still needs

to be learned. A partnership between Purpose Built staff and CQB practitioners on the ground who are applying Purpose Built’s research-based methodology is a very effective way to move forward.”

## A DISCLAIMER

Every CoP has its own unique personality based on whom it serves, what is being learned and many other factors. Peter Plastrick and co-authors write that “network building practice isn’t based on applying a one-size-fits-all formula. It involves selecting from a repertoire of possible decisions and actions, based on an understanding of the context and specific situation.”<sup>ii</sup> This can be frustrating, at first, for those seeking the “right way” to build a CoP. While this paper will share recommended practices, these practices should be thoughtfully adapted to fit the specific characteristics, cultural context and culture of the unique CoP.

## A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE — WHY AND HOW

The CoP model has been validated by research and practice as a way to identify emerging challenges, deal with complexity, learn from experiments, optimize collective intelligence, share resources, spread innovation and move a field forward in the fastest way possible.



*Communities of Practice tap collective intelligence*

According to research, the benefits of participation in a CoP for its members include responsive support (technical, moral and emotional) and ongoing access to innovation and best practices. Although the demands of participation can be significant, they have been found to be worth the effort.

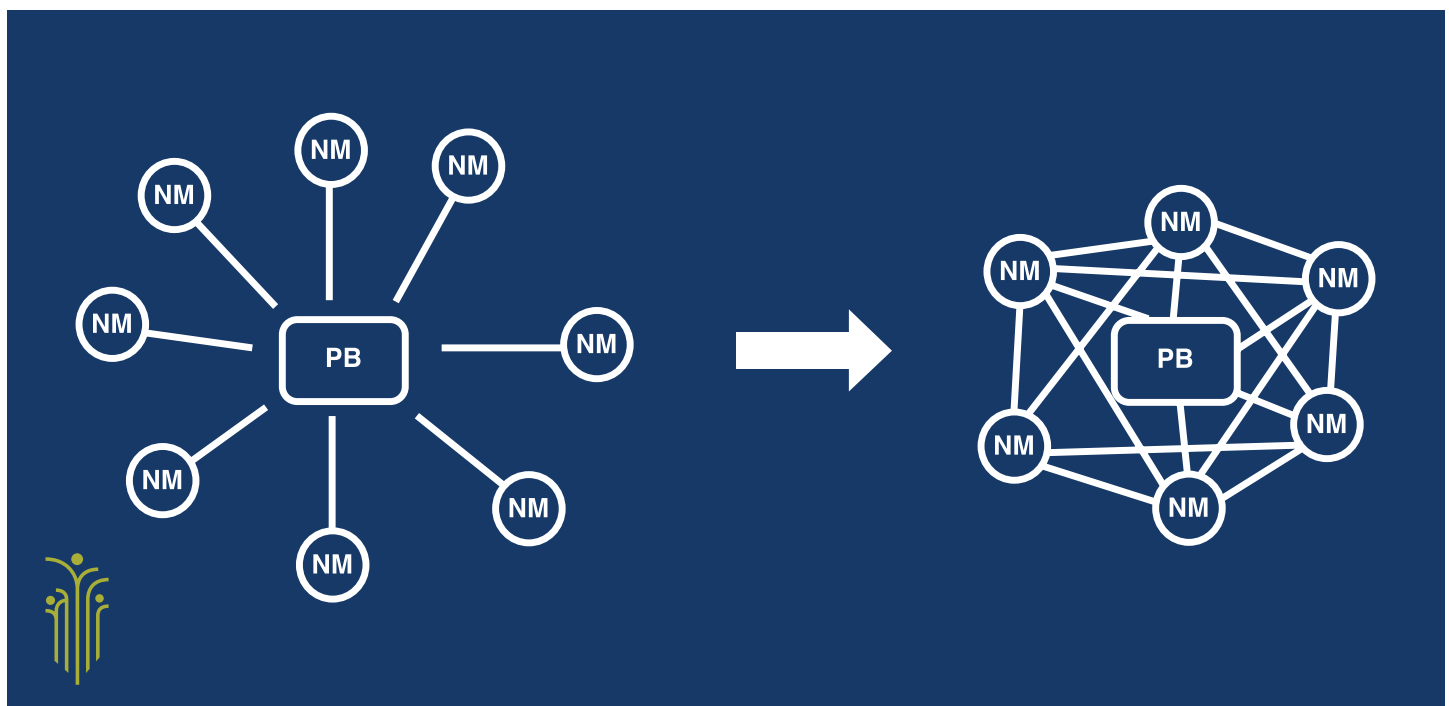
Many nonprofit and government organizations are successfully using CoPs: [Brookings Institute](#), [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [Center for Positive Organizations](#), [Doctors Without Borders](#), [National Center for Deaf-Blindness](#), [RStudio Community](#), [Police Data Initiative](#), [Project Management Institute](#), [Rotary Charities](#), [Urban Sustainability Directors Network](#), [WeObserve](#), [World Bank](#) and more.

There are many barriers to bringing a group of professionals together to learn from one another. Those challenges range from the practical — time, logistics and communication — to the interpersonal — building trust, understanding what needs to be learned and creating resources and wisdom to share. To assist Purpose Built Communities in this endeavor, Naava Frank LLC/ Knowledge Communities was engaged to provide strategic and tactical guidance for overcoming those barriers.

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP STARTUP PROCESS AND SUCCESS FACTORS

### PURPOSE BUILT MOVES FROM HUB-AND-SPOKES TO NETWORK

For the first 10 years of Purpose Built Communities, leadership and staff liaisons primarily provided one-on-one consulting and coaching support to individual Community Quarterbacks. Beyond one or two annual convenings, executive directors and staff of CQB organizations did not have an ongoing structure to get to know and learn directly from one another. In 2019, with the rapid growth of local communities joining the Network, Purpose Built embraced a strategic shift from a hub-and-spokes model with Purpose Built at the center to a Community of Practice model, also known as a networked model. With the launch of the CoP, Purpose Built Communities continues to support NMs one-on-one and, in addition, both Purpose Built staff and NMs now have an active and intentional pathway to learn and problem solve together. NMs and Purpose Built staff also gain strategic access to high-quality, relevant expertise on an ongoing basis.



*Moving from hub-and-spokes model to networked model*



## COVID-19 ACCELERATES CoP STARTUP

During Winter 2019, a small core team of EDs were recruited to provide input into the planning and launch of the CoP. Together, they fielded a pre-launch survey to gather information about the interests of members that would inform the overall design and initial launch event. Since CoPs move at the speed of trust, they generally agreed about the importance of progressing slowly.

However, the arrival of COVID-19 accelerated Purpose Built's CoP development and required a significant pivot. In March 2020, when one city after another moved to "shelter at home" status, Purpose Built leaders invited EDs to convene via video call. Almost every organization in the Network was represented, and at the end of the conversation, the group collaboratively decided to convene weekly.

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP PROVIDED PRACTICAL SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Having an outside peer group during the COVID-19 crisis provided CQB leaders with immediate practical support. EDs began to share COVID-19 relief resources and tools, both on video calls and in follow-up emails. Examples included COVID-response fundraising materials, a survey template for collecting COVID-related needs from neighborhood residents, communications about a micro-loan fund for small businesses, strategies for ensuring families and students had access to devices and stable Internet, and — eventually — ways to help local residents gain access to COVID-19 vaccines.



*Virtual meeting with Network EDs and Purpose Built staff, December 2020*

One example of the power of knowledge sharing is illustrated by three Atlanta Network Members who seized an opportunity to collaboratively develop a public service campaign to support COVID-19 relief and recovery efforts.

The #StayCoveredTogether campaign, funded by The Harlem Children's Zone through The Audacious Project, encourages safe practices to keep communities and individuals healthy. Atlanta members shared branding guidelines and marketing materials with the other CQB across the Network and with external stakeholders, spreading the potential impact to neighborhoods across the country.

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP PROVIDED EMOTIONAL AND MORAL SUPPORT DURING A PERIOD OF RACIAL RECKONING

In addition to encouraging NMs to share practical tips, the Purpose Built team understood the need for making time and space for emotional support. With the death of George Floyd, broader support for Black Lives Matter, and the launch of national and international demonstrations demanding racial justice, weekly meeting agendas were sometimes put on hold to just "be together" and listen. Forgoing the agenda allowed EDs, many of whom are Black, the time to support one another as they grappled with how national and local events impacted them on personal and professional levels.

As EDs and the Purpose Built team shared their challenges openly, an almost "sacred" space formed that quickly strengthened relationships and reportedly reduced feelings of isolation (and sometimes despair). The emerging CoP demonstrated how supportive and powerful the group was and reinforced on a weekly basis that no one needed to face the crisis alone. Likewise, hearing about the successes of peers inspired NMs to persevere.

As the CoP for EDs was taking off, other CQB staff expressed interest in participating in CoP activities. Purpose Built has been gradually expanding learning opportunities for CQB organizations and CQB board members as specific topics of interest emerge.

The strong culture of the Purpose Built Community of Practice is, to some extent, baked into its DNA at an early stage in its development. Coalescing of the CoP in response to COVID-19 and racial justice efforts provides a strong foundation and likely will contribute to the long-term strength of the CoP initiative.

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP STARTUP SUCCESS FACTORS

Participation in most Communities of Practice is voluntary.<sup>vi</sup> Indeed, the Purpose Built Communities CoP is optional and originated as a suggestion from Network Members. Purpose Built also did not start a CoP from scratch. There were many elements of a CoP infrastructure already in place: a Network of 28 CQB organizations, relationships between Purpose Built staff and EDs of CQB organizations, two annual convenings and, of great importance, a shared purpose among NMs achieved through Purpose Built's careful membership screening. This shared purpose is an important success factor in the ongoing strength of the Purpose Built CoP.



*Truist Foundation Racial Equity Ambassador cohort members*

Prior to the launch of the CoP, many CoP practices were piloted through the Truist Foundation Racial Equity Ambassador cohort program, launched in 2018 to advance conversations and action around racial equity and justice across the Purpose Built Network. Purpose Built knew they wanted to move further in the direction of a CoP after hearing participant comments like, “the curriculum is valuable, but the most valuable piece is the informal settings and the personal perspectives you will get when you build relationships.”

NMs and Purpose Built continue to co-create the vision, culture and practices of the CoP (another CoP design principle).<sup>vii</sup> The core team of EDs and Purpose Built staff that met to launch the CoP continues to meet regularly. Over time, initial core team members will rotate out, allowing other

NM leaders to serve. Ongoing consultation with a core team guides Purpose Built staff on how to enhance the way NMs interact and learn from each other.

## SUCCESS FACTORS IN PURPOSE BUILT'S ROLE AS CoP SPONSOR

Purpose Built serves as CoP “sponsor” or “convener.” In this role, Purpose Built determined the goal of the CoP:

To support and advance organizational excellence among Purpose Built NMs that will, in turn, accelerate development of healthy, thriving neighborhoods and opportunities for residents to achieve racial equity and upward mobility.

Purpose Built Communities also provides staffing support, social capital and resources required to fund the CoP. Critical to the role of convener, Purpose Built empowers Network Members to take leadership and ownership of their own learning.

To codify the importance of this initiative within Purpose Built Communities, the organization took specific and deliberate steps including:<sup>viii</sup>

- Incorporated the CoP into Purpose Built Communities' strategic plan
- Assigned a highly competent senior executive to champion the initiative, and attend and lead CoP events
- Assembled a core team with the required expertise and personal commitment to the project
- Engaged an outside expert to support the process
- Identified missing capacities and hired a full-time knowledge manager dedicated to launching and supporting the CoP
- Included all Purpose Built staff in CoP learning activities
- Funded the CoP with a three-year grant secured specifically for this purpose

In 2020, Purpose Built hired Ashley Bozarth as knowledge manager. In that role, Ashley provides leadership for the day-to-day management of the CoP, including making connections, managing shared knowledge, planning and facilitating meetings, and tracking, measuring and leading evaluation of the CoP.

Under the leadership of Michelle Matthews, senior vice president, Purpose Built Communities has not shied away from the cultural change that can go against customary ways

of working—pushing power to the edges—which can be awkward as an organization moves to a networked model. Letting go of some measure of “control” is challenging and yet necessary to unleash the power of a network. The Purpose Built team sets aside time to discuss how to move from a stance of being “the experts” to being partners with NMs in a reciprocal learning journey, where each influences the other’s practice.

Purpose Built leadership works to integrate the CoP into the work of the organization. Alongside NMs, all Purpose Built staff are members of the CoP and attend Network events, providing staff with ongoing professional development. The Purpose Built team devotes specific staff meetings to discussing topics emerging from the CoP and how these learnings impact their work and organizational priorities. In the CoP’s second year, Purpose Built—with strategic support from Naava Frank LLC/Knowledge Communities—is focused on building the capacity of Purpose Built staff to facilitate and further integrate the CoP into their work.

While the level of trust and partnership between the Purpose Built team and NMs is strong, Purpose Built is discovering that there are times and places (e.g., Zoom breakout rooms) where the presence of Purpose Built staff may affect the authenticity of conversations—and in turn the learning—among CQB leaders. Sensitivity to the inherent power dynamics between Purpose Built staff and NMs, and allowing NMs space for private conversations, maximizes the overall outcomes of the CoP. As Purpose Built Communities CEO Carol Naughton says, “Purpose Built Communities will be successful when each individual CQB initiative is successful.”

When asked to reflect on the start-up process, Senior Vice President Michelle Matthews noted that as an executive leader, “Having experience with a facilitative coaching and consulting approach made it easier to transition to the framework of a CoP—that way, I was not starting from scratch. For me, having that background made it easier to understand and provide leadership with tools to incorporate a CoP approach into the way Purpose Built Communities worked. It was also important that there was no pushback: NMs, donors and partners understood the value of moving in this direction. In less than a year, we are seeing the results of what we hoped the CoP could bring.”

See page 16 to read more [Tips for Executive Leaders of Sponsoring Organizations](#).

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: FACILITATION, SUBGROUPS, MEETINGS, NETWORK WEAVING

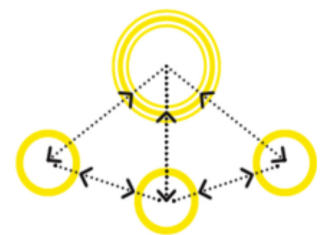
### CoP FACILITATION IS THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR

In some organizations, CoP facilitation is managed by a separate division or outside entity. However, since Purpose Built Communities is a knowledge-based organization, all staff have some CoP facilitation role. To support Network progress as CoP facilitators, the Purpose Built team establishes routines (like monthly meetings for EDs), gets to know member needs (through surveys and individual conversations), and builds a shared purpose and culture among Network Members and Purpose Built staff (modeling and articulating a non-judgmental stance). Topics come from NMs, Purpose Built staff and outside experts, and are not limited by the knowledge and experiences of a single perspective or individual. A critical success indicator of a flourishing and sustainable CoP is the degree to which members bring their unique skills, passions and challenges to the community.

### TEACHING VS. FACILITATING



One directional dissemination of  
knowledge through a teacher



Accompanying and shaping  
a learning process together

*Facilitation of learning brings more knowledge to bear*



## CoP FACILITATION INVOLVES JUDGMENT AND BALANCE

The work of CoP facilitation is not a cookie-cutter approach or formula. It involves sensing the needs of members and making judgments and choices about what an appropriate next step might be, as well as modeling community values of welcoming, safety and inquisitiveness by asking insightful questions.



*Communities of Practice function best with a culture of generosity*

CoP facilitation also involves experimentation and risk-taking, trying something out and discovering what works—be it the pacing of how often to meet, selecting a guest speaker or even when to hold a virtual dance party to cheer everyone up—something the Purpose Built Team did when COVID-19 first hit. At times, being a facilitator can feel overwhelming, like drinking from a firehose of opportunities and possibilities. Decision-making about learning priorities involves balancing the needs of individual NMs, the Network as a whole and strategic goals of Purpose Built Communities.

Creating a culture of safety and reciprocity is a critical focus for the CoP facilitation team. June Holley, a leader in the field of networks, explains that networks “operate best by adopting complex reciprocity—you do not expect direct return from the individual you give to, but expect them to give to others in the network. The ‘gift is always giving’ approach creates greater flow of resources to where they are needed.”<sup>ix</sup>

[See page 16 to read more Tips for CoP Facilitation.](#)

## SUBGROUPS ALLOW PURPOSE BUILT TO ADDRESS A WIDE DIVERSITY OF NM LEARNING NEEDS

In order to ensure the CoP is able to address the wide array of members’ learning needs, facilitators should proactively identify and convene smaller groups of individuals who share interests. The entire network does not need to be involved in every topic. When the Purpose Built team notices an important new topic emerging amongst Network Members, a subgroup is formed to rapidly go deep, ensure relevance and stay connected to the larger CoP. Subgroups can come together in a regular cadence of meetings (see more about meetings in the section below).

Today, the Purpose Built Communities CoP is dynamic and growing in depth and breadth. Numerous CoP subgroups, many started at the initiative of CoP members, meet regularly and support one another in tackling challenging issues. Beyond the group of executive directors, subgroups include Fundraising, Truist Foundation Racial Equity Ambassadors, Early Learning, Bridging the Digital Divide and Economic Development & Mobility. Over 90% of Network EDs are participating in at least one of the subgroups. They also provide opportunities for other Community Quarterback staff to participate in the CoP. Highlights include:

- The Fundraising group, made up of both CQB EDs and development staff, developed its own subgroups that are tackling collaborative projects, including capital campaigns and collective fundraising for the Network as a whole.
- The Truist Foundation Racial Equity Ambassador subgroup is helping members integrate a racial equity lens into local implementation efforts and day-to-day operations.
- The Bridging the Digital Divide subgroup, which emerged organically during conversations at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, is led by two



CQB EDs and focuses on how to bring affordable Internet service, devices and technology literacy to neighborhood residents to provide equitable access to education, health care, financial opportunities and full participation in society.

- The Economic Development & Mobility subgroup was initiated and led by a CQB staff member in response to identifying this topic as an explicit focus for a growing number of NMs. Shown below is an invitation to an initial conversation on strategies that address economic mobility.



*Invitation to the launch meeting of the Economic Development & Mobility subgroup*

Senior Vice President Michelle Matthews brought to the Network “buddy quads,” a subgroup structure that is proving to be successful. Four EDs are grouped together and meet informally to build relationships over the course of a year. Purpose Built Communities formed the buddy quads with input from NMs, accounting for overlapping organizational priorities, similar neighborhood contexts and range of experience. Buddy quads are encouraged to set their own meeting cadence and are sometimes provided with time to meet during Purpose Built-led sessions. As described later in this paper, EDs have indicated how deeply they value this structure.

[See page 17 to read more Tips for CoP Subgroups.](#)

## REGULAR MEETINGS ARE A STRUCTURE FOR LEARNING AND SHARING RESOURCES

In collaboration with NMs, Purpose Built staff facilitate well-attended monthly meetings on specific topics for EDs and other subgroups of CQB staff. This one-on-many approach creates efficiencies in expertise delivery, allowing Purpose Built to increase the support they provide and the value-add of being a Network Member.

After each CoP meeting, Purpose Built staff promptly and routinely shares video recordings, notes and resources, for members who missed the meeting, for future members and for those who may want to revisit learnings. A CoP recognizes that members will engage in different ways over time, some will be very active, constituting the ‘core’ of the community, while others will be ‘lurkers’ and benefit in their own way. Designing for multiple levels of participation is another CoP design principle,<sup>x</sup> and this ensures knowledge is available to members over the long-term.

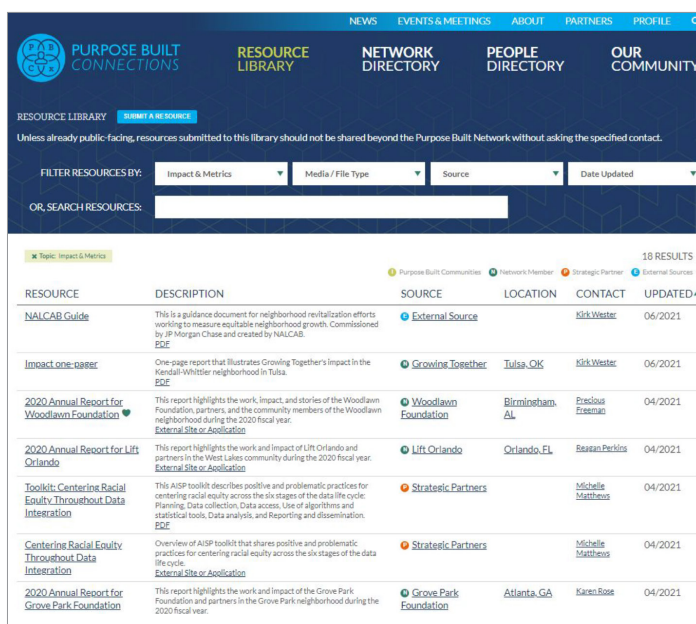
[See page 17 to read more Tips for CoP Meetings.](#)



*Logo of [CoP in Northern Ireland](#) that brings together local health care professionals and patients to improve patient care*

## NETWORK WEAVING BUILDS SOCIAL CAPITAL

June Holley coined the term “Network Weaving” to describe the ongoing practice of connecting members with common interests, creating a “rich fabric of connectivity.”<sup>xi</sup> Deeper commonalities and similarities like worldview, values and organizational culture may not be visible at first glance. Therefore, a CoP facilitator’s job is to build a productive relationship with NMs, then listen and be a catalyst for introducing members to one another.



RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	LOCATION	CONTACT	UPDATED
NALCAB Guide	This is a guidance document for neighborhood revitalization efforts working to measure equitable neighborhood growth. Commissioned by JP Morgan Chase and created by NALCAB.	External Source		Click Here	06/2021
Impact one pager	One-page report that illustrates Growing Together's impact in the Kendall-Whitler neighborhood in Tulsa.	Growing Together	Tulsa, OK	Click Here	06/2021
2020 Annual Report for Woodlawn Foundation	This report highlights the work, impact, and stories of the Woodlawn Foundation, partners, and the community members of the Woodlawn neighborhood during the 2020 fiscal year.	Woodlawn Foundation	Birmingham, AL	Precious Freeman	04/2021
2020 Annual Report for Lift Orlando	This report highlights the work and impact of Lift Orlando and partners in the West Lakes community during the 2020 fiscal year.	Lift Orlando	Orlando, FL	Reagan Perkins	04/2021
Toolkit: Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration	This ASP toolkit describes positive and problematic practices for centering racial equity across the six stages of the data life cycle: Planning, Data collection, Data access, Use of algorithms and statistical tools, Data analysis, and Reporting and dissemination.	Strategic Partners		Michelle Matthews	04/2021
Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration	Overview of ASP toolkit that shares positive and problematic practices for centering racial equity across the six stages of the data life cycle.	Strategic Partners		Michelle Matthews	04/2021
2020 Annual Report for Grove Park Foundation	This report highlights the work and impact of the Grove Park Foundation and partners in the Grove Park neighborhood during the 2020 fiscal year.	Grove Park Foundation	Atlanta, GA	Karen Rose	04/2021

All Network Members can access and share resources in the Purpose Built Connections (PBCx) Resource Library

Purpose Built Communities launched an online platform, Purpose Built Connections (PBCx), to provide an easy way to store, share and access knowledge resources, as well as find colleagues with common interests or those who may help resolve a problem or shorten the learning curve. Purpose Built Knowledge Manager Ashley Bozarth, who manages the development of this tool, shares that, “It is really important that technology is guided by the needs of the Network, and not the other way around. Form follows function. In this way, PBCx is a living tool, developed with ongoing input from NMs and Purpose Built staff, and something that will continue to evolve to support the CoP’s activities and goals.”

See page 18 to read more Tips for Network Weaving.

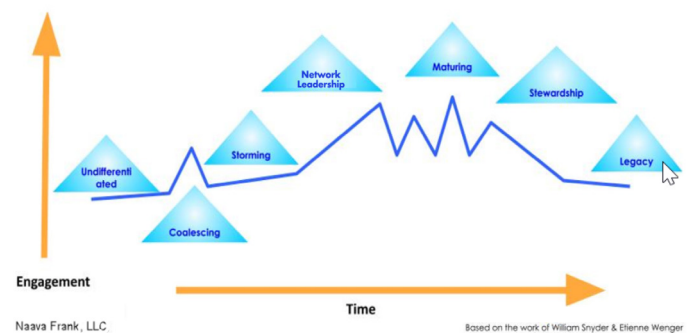
## BUILDING CoPs: RECOGNIZING PHASES, EXPANDING LEARNING AGENDA, MEASUREMENT

### PURPOSE BUILT CoP EVOLVES AND MOVES THROUGH PHASES WITH INCREASING NM LEADERSHIP

The role of the Purpose Built Communities facilitator evolves as the CoP community evolves and moves through different phases. Phases are heuristic and not a perfect model: there are zig-zags, ups and downs, spikes of energy and movement, periods of downtime, and/or reverting to older ways of being together.

Given these phases, the Purpose Built facilitation team is adapting their strategies. In the early phases of the CoP, the facilitator focused on inviting members to join and making the case for the value of the CoP. Once launched, the CoP facilitation team shifted to supporting individual members, helping members find common ground, prioritizing the learning focus, organizing subgroups, facilitating learning activities, encouraging members to step up to take on leadership roles and more.

### Phases of Community Development



Adapted from the work of Etienne Wenger and William Snyder

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP MEMBER LEADERSHIP STRENGTHENS AND GROWS

As the Purpose Built Communities CoP continues to mature, relationships between Network Members strengthen, engagement deepens and an increasing number of members take on leadership. Over time, leadership and facilitation are likely to rotate between Purpose Built leadership/staff and NMs. For example, NMs worked alongside Purpose Built staff to identify the need for the Economic Development & Mobility subgroup (image on page 11) and continue to take ownership for advancing the group's goals. Additionally, a subgroup has emerged with leadership from two directors of Early Learning Centers. NMs taking on leadership roles both reflects and increases their identity within the community. Gradually, as CoP leadership grows, the facilitator may hand over elements to the community and focus on new elements to further expand the CoP.

[See page 18 to read more Tips for Moving through Phases and Increasing NM Leadership.](#)

## PURPOSE BUILT CoP MAINTAINS A BROAD LEARNING AGENDA

The holistic nature of the Purpose Built Communities model for neighborhood revitalization makes the learning focus broad and over time, the learning agenda will need to expand. The model includes well-documented topics (codified knowledge), like organizational development and leadership, and not-yet-documented topics (uncodified knowledge), such as how to apply a new tax law or respond to a new reality, like COVID-19.

The Purpose Built CoP learning agenda may include the following distinct bodies of knowledge that staff at CQB organizations need to master:

**Codified/well-documented (research, books, consultants, courses, etc.):**

- **Organizational Development:** Growth of the CQB organization itself includes a trajectory from organizational start-up through maturity, which is documented in a vast literature (e.g., best practices in strategic planning, board development, HR, management, finance and fundraising).
- **Leadership:** The skills and capabilities required for CQB EDs to be successful, such as leading change, creating a compelling vision, negotiation, managing politics, communication and staffing decisions.

**Uncodified/not yet documented (little-to-no research, books, courses; few consultants):**

- **Purpose Built Communities Pillars:** The holistic approach of place-based work is still evolving. How do the three core parts of the Purpose Built model interact: mixed-income housing, an education pipeline and community wellness and health (including economic development)?
- **CQB Role:** What is the unique role and vision of the CQB organization working in specific neighborhood contexts as catalyst, convener, partner and coordinator, rather than a direct service provider?

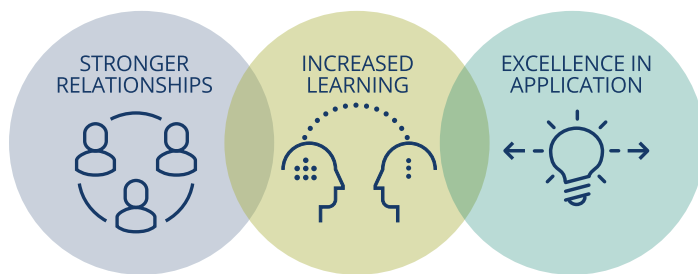
A flexible learning structure helps Purpose Built Communities know what is important to Network Members in real time and guides creation of codified knowledge. For example, if a NM poses an important question, NMs and Purpose Built staff will respond with strategies they've applied to address this issue. The Purpose Built team can collect and synthesize responses, and connect them with Purpose Built's model and theory of change. Incrementally, uncodified knowledge becomes organized and codified thanks to the open space for inquiry and sharing. In the future, NMs with the same question will have a resource to consult.

[See page 19 to read more Tips for Managing a Broad Learning Agenda.](#)

A Community of Practice is uniquely suited for sharing knowledge and learning from the practice and experience of others. Given the evolution of place-based neighborhood revitalization, a CoP is the ideal model for the Purpose Built Communities Network.

## MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PURPOSE BUILT CoP

Purpose Built Communities developed a three-part framework to track and measure progress and outcomes of the CoP: stronger relationships, increased learning and excellence in application. The team reviewed various existing tools and, with input from NMs and Purpose Built staff, created a CoP Evaluation Scorecard based on survey data collected at the start of the initiative, mid-year and end of 2020. Getting clear on goals early on allowed Purpose Built Communities to measure initial progress and to continue ongoing measurement as the initiative evolves.



A NM reflecting on the CoP at the one-year mark commented that, while previously he might have felt competitive at hearing others NM accomplishments:

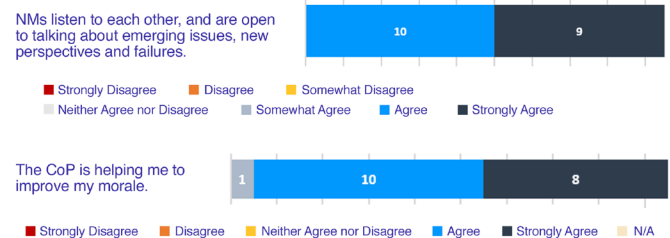
“What I was feeling was like those successes were my successes. I was feeling so much joy... I don’t know how to explain how that happened, but it’s been a delightful surprise. Purpose Built has always been a lifeline for me, but this has been an incredible gift and a surprise beyond my expectations this year, what it’s meant to journey with you all.”

In surveys and interviews of Network Members and Purpose Built staff, there was strong agreement that the CoP is helping NMs and Purpose Built Communities at all three levels.

- 1. Stronger Relationships** are the foundation of learning in a CoP. Peers speak the same language. Since trust is at the core of knowledge sharing, NMs need to have a cohort of peers that they know well enough to reach out to, and whose advice is trusted. This enables a NM to be comfortable sharing a challenge, question or

dream. Survey data indicates the majority of NMs are much more likely to reach out to each other for help, support or resources since the launch of the CoP.

The value of stronger relationships is evidenced by the fact that very busy EDs showed up to CoP meetings to hear what peers are doing. In Purpose Built CEO Carol Naughton’s words, they “vote with their time.” Survey data below indicates NMs find the CoP productive and that it improves morale.



Responses from survey of Network EDs, December 2020

- 2. Increased Learning:** Learning occurs when professionals talk about what they know or listen to others, because “discussion brings out new ways of looking at things.”<sup>xii</sup> Asking for help from someone who has a similar role makes it easier to be understood and use what you learn.

For example, an ED sent an email to the Purpose Built Network requesting a job description for a new staff position and, before day’s end, received several responses from other NMs that could be rapidly adapted. Furthermore, given the COVID-19 context, the ED was also able to ask peers about how interviewing virtually impacts the hiring process.



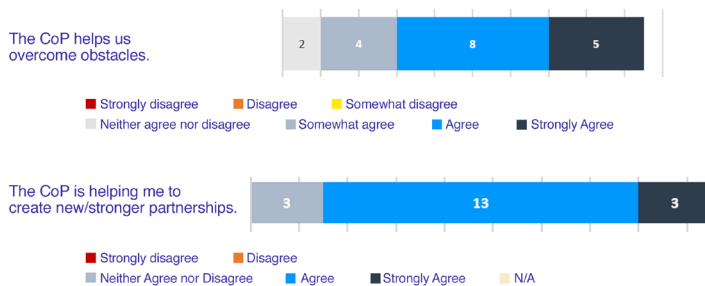
Responses from survey of Network EDs, December 2020

- 3. Excellence in Application:** Application is taking action based on new learning. For example, one Network ED (and sole staff member) needed to draft an agreement between an engaged resident group and community partners. Resident leaders expressed concerns, particularly about whether a signed agreement would shift power from the community residents to the



Community Quarterback. This ED reached out to her four-member Purpose Built buddy quad, along with other EDs to identify effective strategies to navigate this delicate tension. She reported that the information she gathered was a “game changer.” She successfully wrote an agreement and made the case to resident leaders to ensure the agreement represented community interests.

Below is survey data that demonstrates how CoP members found their interactions helpful in overcoming obstacles and create stronger partnerships, such as in the above example.



*Responses from survey of Network EDs, December 2020*

It is important for Purpose Built Communities and Network Members to share back with the CoP their experience of what worked and what did not work, so others can both learn and take pride in the accomplishments of the community.

## CONCLUSION

The Purpose Built Community of Practice stimulates problem recognition, and the creation, exchange and application of innovations to move toward everyone living in a healthy, thriving neighborhood. The CoP’s structure and interactions help Network Members:

- Respond rapidly and flexibly to changes in circumstances
- Accelerate knowledge sharing
- Shorten learning curves to gain skills and expertise that is fundamental to Network Member excellence
- Successfully implement the Purpose Built Communities model
- Access supportive peers and their knowledge resources
- Make informed decisions that create stronger outcomes

For NMs and Purpose Built staff, this paper provides a reflection of the CoP’s impact to date, as well as recommendations for moving forward. Purpose Built staff can consider new practices and more ways to integrate the CoP into their traditional coaching and consulting work. NMs can explore ways to enhance their learning and that of their peers to see what’s next. Purpose Built CoP supporters can see the strength of this initiative and understand why a CoP is well suited for place-based, holistic community development. Other CoP practitioners, external to Purpose Built Communities, can benefit by learning about the success factors of the Purpose Built CoP.

*Community has a unique relationship to order. It creates the minimum that is needed. In systems, the first thing we do is create more order. What helps us to find common ground between system and community life is that we create order without predictability. This is what chaos theory and emergent design are about. You can always create the structure that takes you another step, and then you look around and see what you have. This is emergent order.<sup>xiii</sup>*

The Purpose Built CoP is well positioned to continue to respond to the events in the lives of its members and the communities and organizations that they lead. Purpose Built Communities continues to be open about how time, context and membership continually changes the work of the CoP. Supporting NMs in finding solutions to the professional challenges they face will ultimately serve the organizations and communities that they lead. Given the state of the world today, it is difficult to imagine being a leader without a Community of Practice.

Parker J. Palmer,<sup>xiv</sup> a writer, speaker and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership and social change, says:

**“The shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living.”**

*Author: Naava Frank, Ed.D., is a nationally recognized, published expert, with 20 years of experience in the use of communities of practice and networks for non-profits. Naava consults to foundations and nonprofit organizations to launch and support the growth of communities of practice and networks. Her expertise in designing and implementing network evaluation to measure outcomes allows her to maximize the strategic impact for her clients.*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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With gratitude to Michelle Matthews, senior vice president, and Ashley Bozarth, knowledge manager, whose leadership and partnership at Purpose Built Communities have been a critical factor in the success of the Purpose Built Community of Practice.

Thank you to John Smith, my career-long mentor for all things Community of Practice; Dr. Joan Smoller, my writing coach; and Rabbi Caren Levine and Ziva Mann for your intellectual and editorial support.

## APPENDIX

### TIPS FOR EXECUTIVE LEADERS OF SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

An important role for executives, like Senior Vice President Michelle Matthews, is articulating the value of the CoP and what is being learned:

- Recognize the importance of the CoP's topics and legitimize the investment in the CoP.
- Seek ways to leverage the knowledge held by the community to support Purpose Built's mission.
- Be a translator helping stakeholders and the community understand what each has to contribute.
- Based on mutual understanding, seek to share decision making power with CoP members.

As an actor in both the convening organization and the CoP, the role of an organizational executive includes modeling the values that will support the CoP (and ultimately benefit the organization as well):

- Model a stance of openness to new ways of thinking and of sharing power.
- Champion openness to failure and to not knowing.
- Recognize and support the development of a learning culture on both the CoP and organization sides.

The following are risks that an executive might encounter and how to mitigate them:

- Being in a position of power might tempt the convening organization and its leadership to attribute more knowledge to themselves than is

completely warranted. An executive who holds a stance of inquiry models an attitude that can permeate the organization and signal new behaviors.

- Organizations tend to gravitate toward efficiency and rigidity. Internal structures may not so readily adapt to the fluidity or reality of complex ecosystems like developing neighborhoods. By supporting the fluidity and responsiveness of a CoP, an executive keeps the CoP from being pulled away from its unique contribution.

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### TIPS FOR CoP FACILITATION

#### Establish and Monitor Learning Routines

The Purpose Built Communities CoP facilitation team works with Network Members to establish learning routines to provide a reliable way for NMs to learn from one another. Purpose Built Communities initially added regular video meetings and a listserv/email thread to the already established calendar of two annual convenings. The basic routines for the Purpose Built CoP are in place yet will continue to evolve in response to the changing context of NM needs. After CoP members make inroads on a particular challenge (e.g., initial COVID-19 response), they move onto a new challenge, (e.g., COVID-19 vaccine access). An evolving learning agenda responds to the realities on the ground.

#### Get to Know Network Members

The CoP facilitation team needs to dedicate time and energy to get to know each NM. Purpose Built staff liaisons meet regularly with NMs to stay connected. The Purpose Built staff liaison, functioning as a CoP learning facilitator, guides members to resources or peers that address the questions being asked in the moment. They may help members explore how what works well in one place can be adapted to work in a very different context. One-on-one or small group conversations between facilitators and members, known as "backchannel conversations," are important to complement CoP group activities. Etienne Wenger, founder of the Communities of Practice field, estimates that 80% of the work of a CoP happens behind the scenes.<sup>xv</sup>

#### Build Community Culture

A strong CoP recognizes that every member has useful insights to contribute to solving problems. The perspectives of less experienced members, for example, who may be reluctant to speak up, are important to help senior members see things with fresh eyes. Purpose Built Communities has noted how questions of newer members, for example about

banking or partnering with local government, can have a significant impact, bringing out the depth and breadth of experience of NMs and thereby making visible the expertise of the community. These voices and questions need to be coaxed, supported and celebrated.

Language used to ask questions can make a big difference. For example, instead of always asking members to share ‘successes’ or ‘best practices,’ ask what members are ‘trying out’ or ‘experimenting with.’ This framing can bring out innovations and reinforce the idea that all members have something to offer the group even if they aren’t at the finish line. Sharing perspectives at the beginning or middle of a project can be just as powerful.

A CoP recognizes that members will engage in different ways over time, some will be very active, constituting the ‘core’ of the community, while others will be ‘lurkers’ and gain a lot in their own way. Continuing to find ways to make sure all the voices of the community are heard, at large group meetings or outside of meetings, is an ongoing priority. Purpose Built staff can help NMs find ways to engage over time based on what value they can receive and offer.

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## TIPS FOR CoP SUBGROUPS

Deliberate facilitation efforts are required to maintain the communication flow, bringing insights and questions from the subgroup to the larger group conversation and from the larger conversation back to the subgroup.

Practices to explore further include:

- The Urban Sustainability Directors Network Peer Learning Exchange provides grants to support learning exchanges between two or more member communities to accelerate the spread of innovative practices, [USDN Peer Learning Exchange Report 2019](#).
- Ask each subgroup to write a regular report on their progress to be shared with the rest of the network like in the [Scaling Up Community of Practice Newsletter](#).
- As a condition for starting a new subgroup, require the subgroup to propose how they will keep the rest of the network up to date on the work of the subgroup, for example, [WeObserveCoP](#).

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## TIPS FOR CoP MEETINGS

Some meetings bring outside experts to speak on topics of strategic importance. For example, the Purpose Built Network identified a physician to speak with EDs about the significant historical context and importance of Black and other people of color’s participation in COVID-19 vaccine trials.

Other meetings are focused on lifting up questions and expertise internal to the CoP. Purpose Built Communities uses protocols like [Troika Consulting](#) and [Impromptu Networking](#) that engage Network Members in small group conversations in breakout rooms to provide both structure and intimacy for NMs to build relationships and support each other in problem solving.

Opening and closing rituals provide creative and energizing ways for members to deepen their understanding of each other and share what they are learning. Purpose Built Communities has established a productive opening routine for video meetings of inviting NMs to share news, milestones, successes and wins. Purpose Built staff observed that, during these meetings, NMs are making connections in the online chat function to follow up with one another.

Other strategies for facilitating knowledge exchange that could be experimented with are:

- Start each meeting with a practice check-in: “What did you experiment with since our last meeting? What did you notice? What did you learn?” The Center for Positive Organizations (CPO) [CoP Facilitation Guide](#) contains creative exercises for community meetings.
- Build a regular knowledge sharing routine into meetings. Freya Bradford, Director of Systems Change & Learning at [Rotary Charities](#) of Traverse City, convenes a CoP of grantees focused on systems change across a wide variety of issue areas. Freya uses the following elements in quarterly grantee CoP meetings:
  - » Signs of Change: participants share their stories and observations about indicators of systems change
  - » Challenges of Practice: shared in pairs utilizing coaching stems
  - » Artifacts of Practice: each participant brings a tool they find to be useful
- Facilitate cross-pollination sessions where members have the opportunity to present problems they are working on to the entire community. This weekly practice, learned from an Australian incubator,

makes all members aware of how they can help each other.<sup>xvi</sup>

- Ending a community meeting with an opportunity for members to offer thanks to others in the group for something they learned builds member motivation to share and also builds pride in the accomplishments of the community.

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## TIPS FOR NETWORK WEAVING

### Network Weaving Builds Social Capital

Connecting members with questions to other members who have solved or tried to solve a similar issue can provide practical advice. Speaking with a colleague who may be struggling to manage a similar challenge also reduces the sense of isolation and can provide strength to persevere.

The more Network Members get to know each other, the more the Network is connected, instead of relying on Purpose Built staff as a go-between. Purpose Built Communities is also exploring how network-weaving skills could be useful for CQB to increase social capital within their neighborhoods.

Listed below are tips to help NMs or Purpose Built staff who would like to contribute to the CoP by engaging in network weaving:

- WeWork, a company providing co-working space, hires staff to do network weaving among tenants. WeWork's Director of Workplace Connections shares the following advice: "‘Connecting’ is more than small talk...it is getting to a deeper level; it's telling stories, sharing acts of kindness, laughing, bonding over a common purpose and learning people's backstories."<sup>xvii</sup>
- The following questions can be used in a network weaving conversation to get to know member priorities, accomplishments, successes, challenges and requests.
  1. Exploration/expression of interest (getting the lay of the land): What have you been working on recently? This week? Today? What are your top priorities at the moment?
  2. Probe for successes and challenges (be sure to learn about both): How is it going? Anything really exciting/successful/fulfilling/surprising? Where are you stuck?

3. Offer of support: Is there anything I or other members of the community can do to help you better realize your goal? What do you think would help you get unstuck (skills, resources)?
4. What special talents or passions do you have that you might be willing to share with your peers? [Knowledge Communities Blog post](#)

June Holley's Introduction Pyramid encourages the network weaver to consider what level of introduction will be most successful to help members connect productively.

### The Introduction Pyramid by June Holley\*

Level	Activity
1	Suggesting to A that A should talk to B
2	Suggesting A talk to B; tell B to look for A
3	Introducing A to B in an email
4	Introducing A to B in a joint conference call
5	Introducing A to B in person
6	Introducing A to B in person, following up with A & B to nurture connection
7	Introducing A to B in person and offering transitional collaboration to get A & B off to a successful partnership

\*p. 113 in the *Network Weaver Handbook* — <http://www.networkweaver.com>

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## TIPS FOR MOVING THROUGH PHASES AND INCREASING NM LEADERSHIP

Nancy White of [Full Circle Associates](#), a field leader who guides professionals in building connections for a changing world, summarizes: "Give people a job they can say yes to, and which adds value to them and the group."<sup>xviii</sup> Below are two paradigms that suggest roles community members can take on as the CoP matures:

- June Holley's [Network Weaver Roles Checklist](#) includes four roles that both Purpose Built staff and Network Members can play:



- » Connector: connect members with common interests and those that can help each other
- » Self-Organized Project Coordinator: help NMs take collaborative action and keep projects organized
- » Facilitator: facilitate meetings, set up and maintain communication
- » Guardian: take a big picture view of the network, find resources, ensure systems are working
- Etienne Wenger and Bev Traynor, founders of the field of Communities of Practice, describe [leadership groups for social learning](#) that take on specific roles to support the success of the community.
  - » Agenda activists: driving the learning forward
  - » Community keepers: weaving the social fabric
  - » Critical friends: reflecting on the process
  - » Social reporters: creating a shared memory
  - » External messengers: communicating with external audiences
  - » Value detectives: making value creation visible
  - » Organizational brokers: connecting with organizational stakeholders

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## TIPS FOR MANAGING A BROAD LEARNING AGENDA

### Prioritizing the Learning Agenda

The author of this paper framed a draft of a potential learning agenda. However, the job of the facilitator is to help the community map out and prioritize its own understanding of its learning priorities. The learning agenda is fluid and evolves in response to the lived experience of community members.

Sometimes, learning priorities will be contested. Criteria to utilize in prioritizing a topic may include: “this is not in our power to change,” “we are done with this topic” or “this topic is not central enough.” Once priorities are established, activities (e.g., expert presentations, case studies, online conversations and site visits) will be determined to suit the learning goals.

### Applying Codified/Well-Documented Knowledge

With elements that are known/codified, the work of the facilitator(s) is finding out what the barriers are to members getting the knowledge they need. Vetting good resources

and bringing them into the community via speakers, articles, checklists, etc., may bring attention to existing best practices that are not on the horizon for members.

The Purpose Built Connections online platform (PBCx) provides an easy way to store, share and access knowledge resources, as well as a way to find colleagues with common interests or those who may help resolve a problem or shorten the learning curve.

Conversation is a critically important way to bring out deeper issues and understandings. Providing time and space for members to communicate with others about what they are experimenting with will help them apply the accepted wisdom to their unique context.

### Dealing with the Need for New Knowledge

For the uncoded elements, the challenge is to develop new knowledge. In order to develop new knowledge, there is a need to work at the edge of what is known, collecting experiences, forming hypotheses and refining questions. Because CQBs will each have a different edge to their knowledge, CoP members with significant experience in a new uncoded topic can be a resource for other NMs (e.g., how to leverage Opportunity Zone funding).

Focusing the learning of the CoP on what we do not yet understand and must be learned, including areas of uncertainty, conflicting views, incompletely articulated hypotheses or completely new challenges (e.g., federal administration funding packages) will provide the most value to CoP members.

Structures below help a CoP to hold and share uncoded knowledge, manage relationships, stimulate conversations and deal with the discouragement of not knowing. These include the “human encyclopedia,” “topic leads” and storytelling:

- McKinsey, a consulting organization, is known to have a directory of its consultants that includes a list of the topics in which they have experience so that others may reach out to them for help. Sometimes called a “human encyclopedia,” it captures in a non-codified and live way the knowledge of the humans in the system.
- The U.S. Army uses the term “topic leads” to describe a person who is assigned to take leadership in a given area. The person’s role is to collect information, answer questions and be a resource to others who are interested in this topic.

- Informal oral storytelling is a way for members to share uncoded knowledge. The act of telling a story brings new insights to both the storyteller and the listener. Informal oral stories may become the seed for written case studies. The National Park Service and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collaborated on a [storytelling template](#) that can be a model for turning the oral stories of Purpose Built's Network Members into written case studies.

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## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Parker J. Palmer is a writer, speaker and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. He is founder and Senior Partner Emeritus of the Center for Courage & Renewal, which offers long-term retreat programs for people in the serving professions, including teachers, administrators, physicians, philanthropists, non-profit leaders and clergy.

<sup>ii</sup> Purpose Built Communities. (2021, May 11). The Community Quarterback in the Purpose Built Model [Video]. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/548140555>

<sup>iii</sup> Purpose Built Communities. (2019). *Poverty and Place: A Review of the Science and Research that Have Impacted our Work*. [White Paper] <https://purposebuiltcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Poverty-and-Place-White-Paper-Digital-Edition.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Wenger, E., McDermott, R., and Snyder, W. (2000). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.

<sup>v</sup> Plastrick, P., Taylor, M., and Cleveland, J. (2014). *Connecting to change the world*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, p. 42.

<sup>vi</sup> Principle 5: Focus on value. Wenger, E. McDermott, R.A., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

<sup>vii</sup> Principle 2: Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives. Ibid

<sup>viii</sup> Research indicates, many CoP efforts are missing a number of the elements present in the Purpose Built CoP, and therefore struggle with success. Dube, L., Bourhis, A., &

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<sup>xiv</sup> Parker J. Palmer is a writer, speaker and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. He is founder and Senior Partner Emeritus of the Center for Courage & Renewal, which offers long-term retreat programs for people in the serving professions, including teachers, administrators, physicians, philanthropists, non-profit leaders and clergy.

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