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# Survey of the Greater Chicago Dialogue and Deliberation Community of Practice

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary presents key findings and questions that emerged from the *Survey of the Greater Chicago Dialogue and Deliberation Community of Practice*.

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the Greater Chicago Dialogue and Deliberation Community of Practice's (CoP) participant interests and engagement, the extent to which they are connecting and collaborating, and ways in which the CoP may grow and become more impactful.

## CoP Background

In early 2012, the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) commissioned a study to better understand the landscape of people and organizations using dialogue and deliberative (D&D) processes in the Chicago region. The results of this study unveiled a plentiful but disconnected universe of dialogue and deliberation practitioners who were eager to learn from one another and to collaborate. Following a December 2012 convening of over 75 D&D practitioners, which included many of the people interviewed for that initial study, the CoP emerged as a way to stay connected and begin collaboratively building a "civic infrastructure" in the Chicago region. Connected largely through an online listserv and occasional events, nearly two years later the CoP is led by a small yet committed group of core members working to spark broader individual and organizational engagement.

## Data Collection

Data was collected via online questionnaires and through individual interviews. The online questionnaire opened on April 14th and closed on May 9th of 2014 and contained both closed and open response questions. Of the 140 CoP listerv members invited to respond, 25 partially or fully completed the online questionnaire. Interviewees were selected to include a broad variation of opinions based on their participation on the listserv, occupation, and other demographic information. Ten individual, semi-structured phone interviews were conducted from May 5th to May 9th of 2014. Additional data sources include CoP meeting minutes, listserv emails, and documents published online by CoP participants.

## Key Findings

- **Unclear purpose and scope of work:** Only 16.7% of respondents feel they know the CoP purpose "very well." *Is it professional development or collaboratively building a*

*civic infrastructure?* It's still difficult to explain D&D and the CoP.

- **Online community:** Most contact happens online via a listserv, with 65.2% of respondents connecting weekly or monthly, versus 17.4% in-person.

- **Listserv a strength:** Between Feb. 2013 and Sep. 2014 183 threads were posted, mostly about events. Respondents value the listserv for alerts and ideas, and sense progress through it.

- **A forum than connects**: Respondents feel the CoP uniquely brings together a diverse group of like-minded and talented professionals, provides space, and raises awareness of common issues.

- **Meaningful but too small:** 59.1% of respondents have made 1 to 5 meaningful relationships via the CoP, and 33.3% of them are satisfied with that number. Just 5 people posted 69.4% of listserv threads.

- **Who is a member?** The smallest estimated size of CoP membership was 25, the maximum was 300, and the average was 71.

- **Limited engagement:** 60% of respondents are peripheral members. Key participation limitations are time and distance.

- **How to connect a region?** An online forum that effectively connects the widespread community remains elusive, and while most prefer email (82.6%), only 21.7% "always" read CoP emails. Regularly scheduled events and a shared online calendar would help, and members need ways to participate from anywhere at any time.

- **Non-profit resonance:** 52.2% of respondents work in the nonprofit sector, 30.4% are consultants, and 0% are from the private sector. *Why no private sector?*

- **Move beyond the usual suspects:** Respondents want dialogues on the ground and in the neighborhoods and suburbs, more online events, and collaboration with other CoPs. *Who will do this work? Is staff needed?*

- **Common action projects:** Respondents overwhelmingly seek collaboration on joint projects (56.5%) above other potential CoP functions, and a plurality is most interested in building personal capacity in the 'collaborative action' engagement stream.

- **Few collaborations:** 83.3% of respondents have initiated 0 partnerships or collaborations through the CoP. *What barriers limit the desired collaboration?*

- **More core group:** 0% of respondents feel the core group is doing "too much."

- **Must clarify and solidify leadership:** *Which institutions in Chicago believe in this, and will provide the resources needed to build a stronger and more effective CoP? Who will step up and help build the CoP?*

# INTRODUCTION

This study is sponsored by the Kettering Foundation and part of IPCE's commitment as a "Center for Public Life." Centers for Public Life are selected by Kettering, and act as experiential and experimental community hubs for action and research that build the capacity for citizens to democratically shape their communities. The Kettering Foundation is based in Ohio and dedicated to addressing the question: "What does it take to make democracy work as it should?"

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the Greater Chicago Dialogue and Deliberation Community of Practice's (CoP) participant interests and engagement, the extent to which participants are connecting and collaborating, and ways in which the CoP may grow and become more impactful. The central questions that this study responds to are: 1) who is participating in the CoP, why, and how are they connecting? 2) to what extent has the CoP fostered new relationships and collaborations? and 3) what must be done to build the capacity and sustainability of the CoP?

## CoP Background

In early 2012, the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) commissioned a study to better understand the landscape of people and organizations using dialogue and deliberation[1] (D&D) processes in the Chicago region. The results of this study unveiled a plentiful but disconnected universe of dialogue and deliberation practitioners who were eager to learn from one another and to collaborate. Following a December 2012 convening of over 75 D&D practitioners, which included many of the people interviewed for that initial study, the CoP emerged as a way to stay connected and begin collaboratively building a "civic infrastructure" in the Chicago region. Connected largely though an online listserv and occasional events, nearly two years later the CoP is led by a small yet committed group of core members (the core group) working to spark

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[1] The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation defines **dialogue** as "a process that allows people, usually in small groups, to share their perspectives and experiences with one another about difficult issues we tend to just debate about or avoid entirely," and **deliberation** as "a closely related process" that " emphasizes the importance of examining options and trade-offs to make better decisions." See: ncdd.org/about

broader individual and organizational engagement and "laying the groundwork for a culture of dialogue and deliberation in our communities and local government…to transform the way we connect, interact, and make decisions together around a range of issues facing the [Chicago] region."[2]

## Data Collection

Data was collected through online questionnaires and individual interviews.  The online questionnaire was designed by IPCE staff and drawn from other CoP surveys,[3,4,5] and 4 pre-tests were conducted with members of the CoP core group. It was administered using surveymonkey.com, contained both closed and open response questions, and remained opened from April 14th to May 9th of 2014.[6] Of the 140 CoP listerv members invited to respond, 25 (the **respondents**) partially or fully completed the online questionnaire.

Interviews were conducted to gather more detail and description on priority questions.[7] Interviewees were selected to include a broad variation of opinions based on their participation on the listserv, occupation, and other demographic information. Ten individual, semi-structured phone interviews were conducted from May 5 to May 9, 2014, generally lasting between 20 and 30 minutes.  Interviews were audio recorded or recorded using typed notes, and each recording was reviewed for accuracy. Additional data sources include CoP meeting minutes, listserv emails, and documents published online by CoP participants.

The open response data collected during interviews and through the questionnaire were sorted into categories and sub-categories that were identified emergently after the careful reading and re-reading of the text.  Frequency distributions of closed-response survey questions are presented in aggregate via summary statistics. The "n" presented in each graph refers to the total number of participant responses

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[2] This quote is part of the current CoP vision statement.
[3] Verburg, R. M. and  Andriessen 2006  "The Assessment of Communities of Practice", *Knowledge and Process Management*, vol 13, no.1, 13-25.
[4] Serrat, O. 2010. *Surveying communities of practice*. Washington, DC: Asian Development Bank.
[5] Chindgren-Wagner, T M 2009, "Examining the Relationship between Communities of Practice and Climate of Innovation in the U.S. Federal Government Environment", PhD Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Falls Church.
[6] See appendix I for the full questionnaire.
[7] See appendix II for the interview template.

for the corresponding survey question. Changes to the "n" are due to varying response rates for each question.

Due to the voluntary and self-selecting nature of survey respondents, results cannot be scientifically generalized to the entire population of CoP participants. Nonetheless, these findings represent the perspective of 35 engaged CoP participants and provide rich and varied perspectives on the current state and future of the CoP.

## SECTION I: PURPOSE AND PARTICIPATION

This section summarizes data on who participates in the CoP, why they participate, to what extent they participate, and to what extent they are connecting with other CoP participants.
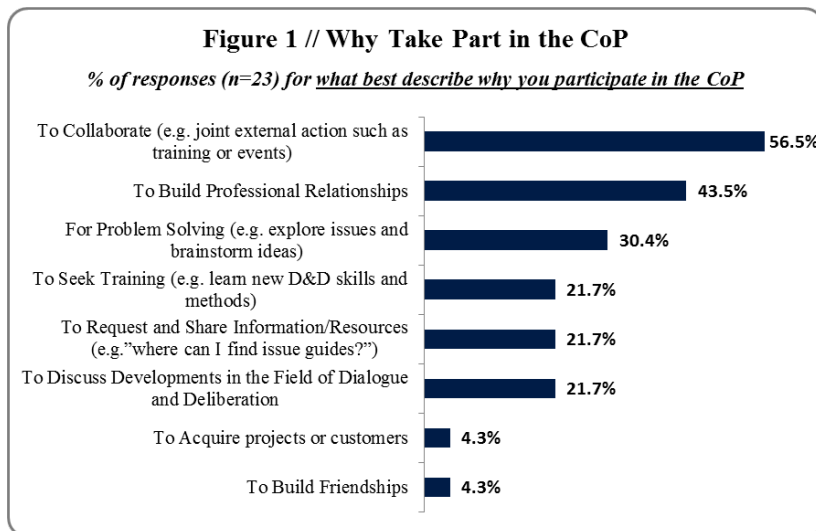
## Interests and Activities

Why does the CoP exist? In the words of the CoP core group, the purpose of the CoP is to

> [connect] individuals in the Chicago metropolitan region who are interested in building a broad community that supports dialogue and deliberation efforts in Chicago. By laying the groundwork for a culture of dialogue and deliberation in our communities and local government, the CoP strives to transform the way we connect, interact, and make decisions together around a range of issues facing the region.

That stated, it appears that what the CoP is and does is still not clear to most: only 16.7% of survey respondents feel that they understand the purpose of the CoP "very well," and interviewee responses reveal a breadth of potential CoP functions.

Fundamentally, interviewees do see the CoP as a platform that brings together professionals who are using or looking to use D&D methods in their work. Beyond this core convening function, interviewee perspectives on the CoP purpose vary, ranging from providing a space for individual skill building and dialogue opportunities, to pooling organizational resources and identifying solutions to common problems, all the way up to building a "civic infrastructure"[8] and transforming the political culture of Chicago.



**Figure 1 // Why Take Part in the CoP**

*% of responses (n=23) for what best describe why you participate in the CoP*

| | |
|---|---|
| To Collaborate (e.g. joint external action such as training or events) | 56.5% |
| To Build Professional Relationships | 43.5% |
| For Problem Solving (e.g. explore issues and brainstorm ideas) | 30.4% |
| To Seek Training (e.g. learn new D&D skills and methods) | 21.7% |
| To Request and Share Information/Resources (e.g."where can I find issue guides?") | 21.7% |
| To Discuss Developments in the Field of Dialogue and Deliberation | 21.7% |
| To Acquire projects or customers | 4.3% |
| To Build Friendships | 4.3% |

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[8] According to Matt Leighninger of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, civic infrastructure refers to "the opportunities, activities, and arenas that allow people to connect with each other, solve problems, make decisions, and celebrate community." See: www.communitymatters.org/blog/building-civic-infrastructure-join-us-for-nex

**Figure 2 // Likelihood of Participation in CoP Activities**

*% of responses (n=25) for how likely you are to participate in the following activities*

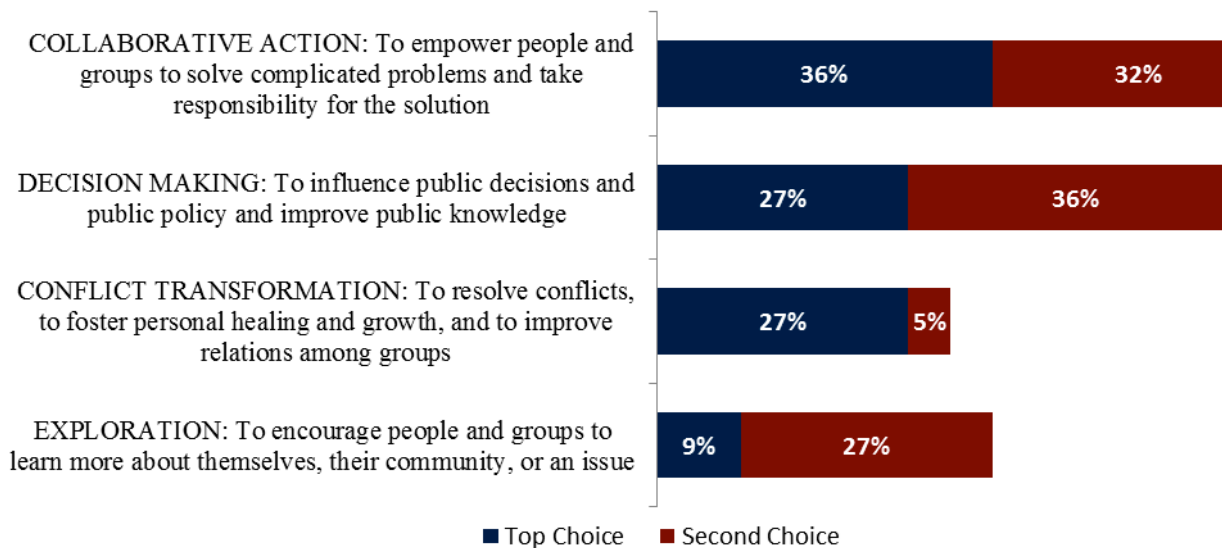| Activity | Very likely | Likely |
|---|---|---|
| Collaborating on a dialogue or project | 40% | 24% |
| Exchanging e-mails (e.g. to find solutions to problems) | 32% | 32% |
| Methods showcases | 28% | 32% |
| Networking events | 24% | 16% |
| Workshops | 24% | 36% |
| Presentations by non-members | 20% | 36% |
| Presentations by members | 20% | 40% |
| Public dialogues | 20% | 44% |
| Team building activities (such as informal outings) | 16% | 16% |
| Members writing publications together | 8% | 28% |
| Writing project proposals | 8% | 24% |

■ Very likely  ■ Likely

When asked why they participate in the CoP, figure 1 shows that respondents overwhelmingly see the CoP as a place to collaborate (56.5%) and to build professional relationships (43.5%), and figure 2 shows that respondents are most likely to take part in CoP activities that bring people together to collaborate on a dialogue or project. Furthermore, figure 3 shows that respondents are most interested in building capacity in engagement methods focused on "collaborative action," all of which suggests that CoP participants are generally most interested in using the CoP as a space to build action-oriented partnerships that empower the people and communities they serve.

**Figure 3 // Interest for Personal Capacity Building by Engagement Stream**

*% of responses (n=22) for stream in which you are most interested in building your own capacity*

| Stream | Top Choice | Second Choice |
|---|---|---|
| COLLABORATIVE ACTION: To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution | 36% | 32% |
| DECISION MAKING: To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge | 27% | 36% |
| CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups | 27% | 5% |
| EXPLORATION: To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue | 9% | 27% |

■ Top Choice  ■ Second Choice

## Who Participates

The majority of respondents work in the non-profit sector (52.2%), with 30.4% working as consultants, 13.0% working in the public sector, and **zero** respondents working in the private sector. Respondents are working from the neighborhood up to the national level, with over half (58%) defining their geographic scope as the Chicago area or suburbs and only 16% focused solely in Chicago.

**Figure 4 // D&D Practices by Engagement Stream**

*% of responses (n=23) for <u>stream of engagement that you most commonly practice</u>*

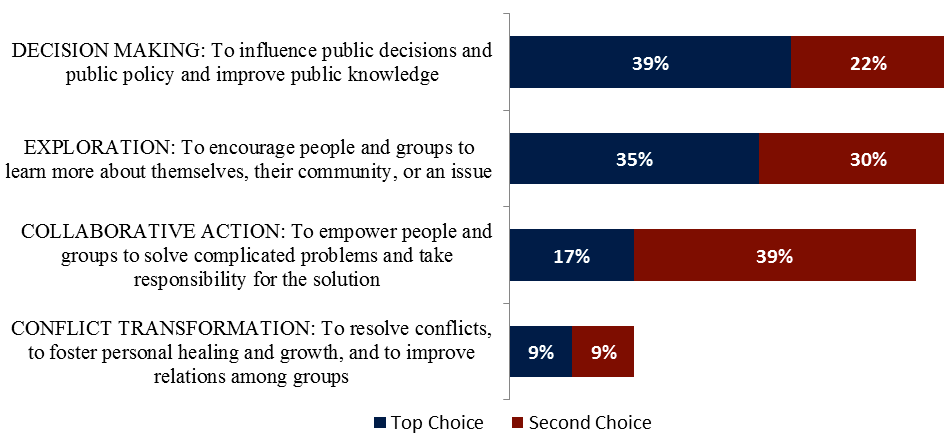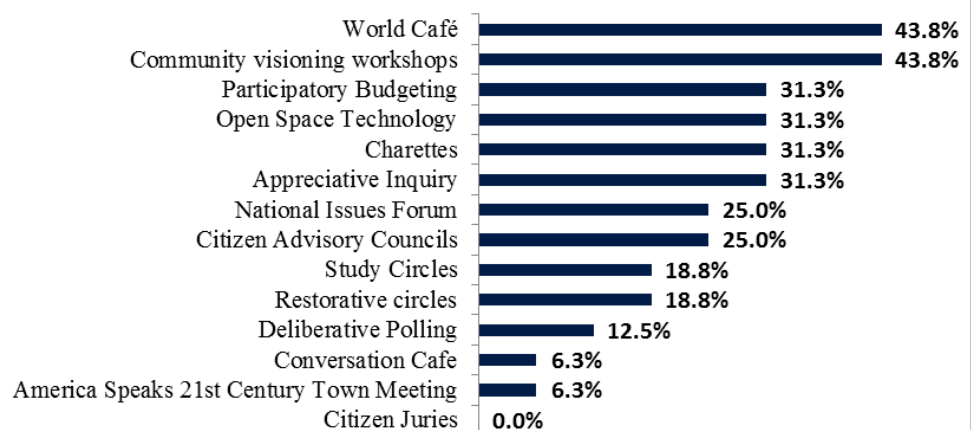| Stream | Top Choice | Second Choice |
|---|---|---|
| DECISION MAKING: To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge | 39% | 22% |
| EXPLORATION: To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue | 35% | 30% |
| COLLABORATIVE ACTION: To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution | 17% | 39% |
| CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups | 9% | 9% |

■ Top Choice  ■ Second Choice

Figure 4 suggests that respondents are most commonly using D&D methods that fall into the "exploration" and "decision making" categories. More specifically, of the prominent D&D methods being used, figure 5 shows that respondents are mostly using community visioning workshops, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, Charettes, and Participatory Budgeting (which is currently underway in three Chicago wards.) Interestingly, three of the least frequently used methods all fall into the decision making category: only 12.5% of respondents have used the Deliberative Polling method, 6.3% for America Speaks 21st Century Town Hall Meeting, and 0% for Citizen Juries.

**Figure 5 // D&D Practices by Method**

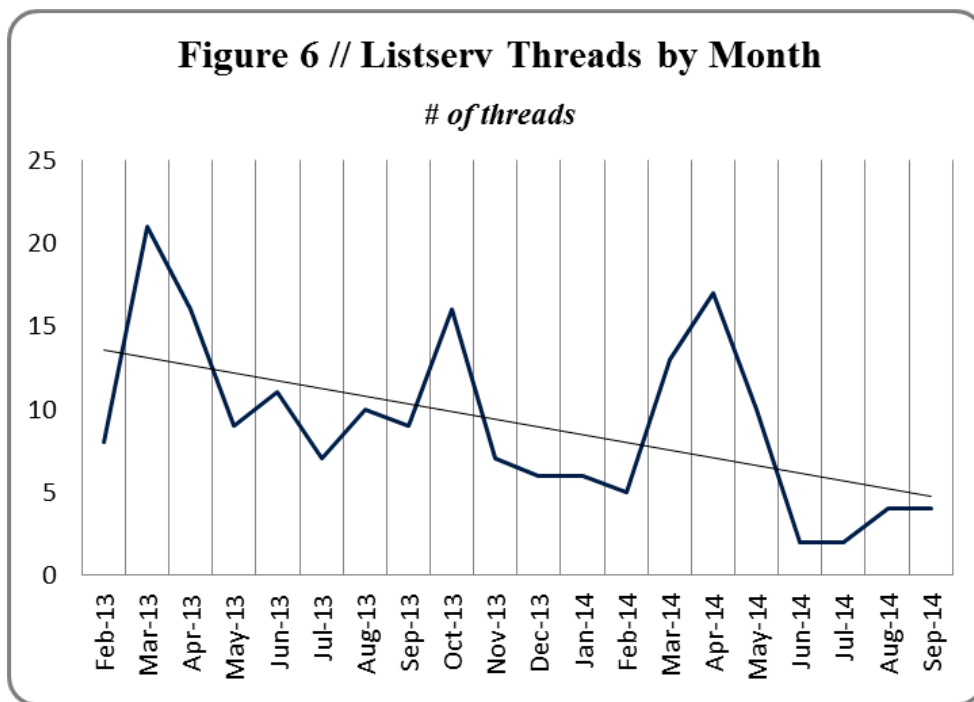*% of responses (n=16) for specific <u>D&D methods you practice</u>*

| Method | % |
|---|---|
| World Café | 43.8% |
| Community visioning workshops | 43.8% |
| Participatory Budgeting | 31.3% |
| Open Space Technology | 31.3% |
| Charettes | 31.3% |
| Appreciative Inquiry | 31.3% |
| National Issues Forum | 25.0% |
| Citizen Advisory Councils | 25.0% |
| Study Circles | 18.8% |
| Restorative circles | 18.8% |
| Deliberative Polling | 12.5% |
| Conversation Cafe | 6.3% |
| America Speaks 21st Century Town Meeting | 6.3% |
| Citizen Juries | 0.0% |

To date, people have primarily participated in the CoP by following and posting on the listserv, attending events, and serving on the core group. The majority (60%) of participants identify as "peripheral" members who have an interest in the CoP but rarely participate. One-fifth (20%) identify as "active" members who periodically participate in events or the listserv and 16% consider themselves "core" members. Of those respondents who have participated in the CoP, 83% have continued to participate.

Since its inception in February of 2013, an average of nine threads have been posted to the listserv every month, totaling 183.[9] Twenty-nine CoP participants have started at least one thread, with most people (41.3%) posting just once. More than two-thirds (69.4%) of listserv threads have been posted by five people, with the top poster accounting for nearly one-third of all threads (28.5%), and three of the top five posters belonging to IPCE staff.

Figure 6 shows the monthly distribution of those threads. The trendline shows a slight decline in activity over the CoP listserv's first 20 months, and that on average listserv use has dropped by nearly 0.5 threads each month. When excluding the top poster to the listserv, the decline is an average of only 0.2 less threads per month.



Figure 6 // Listserv Threads by Month

[9] As of September 11, 2014.

**Figure 7 // Listserv Threads by Category**

*% of of total threads*

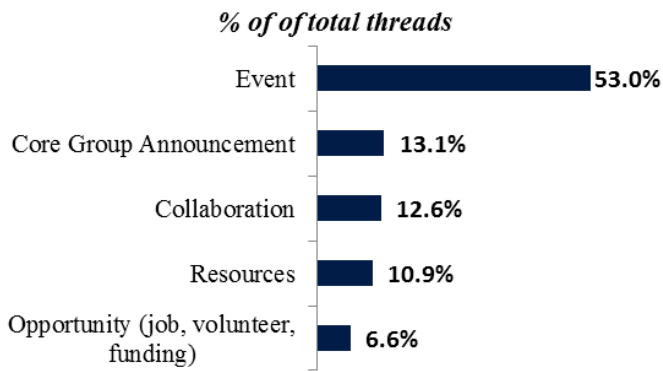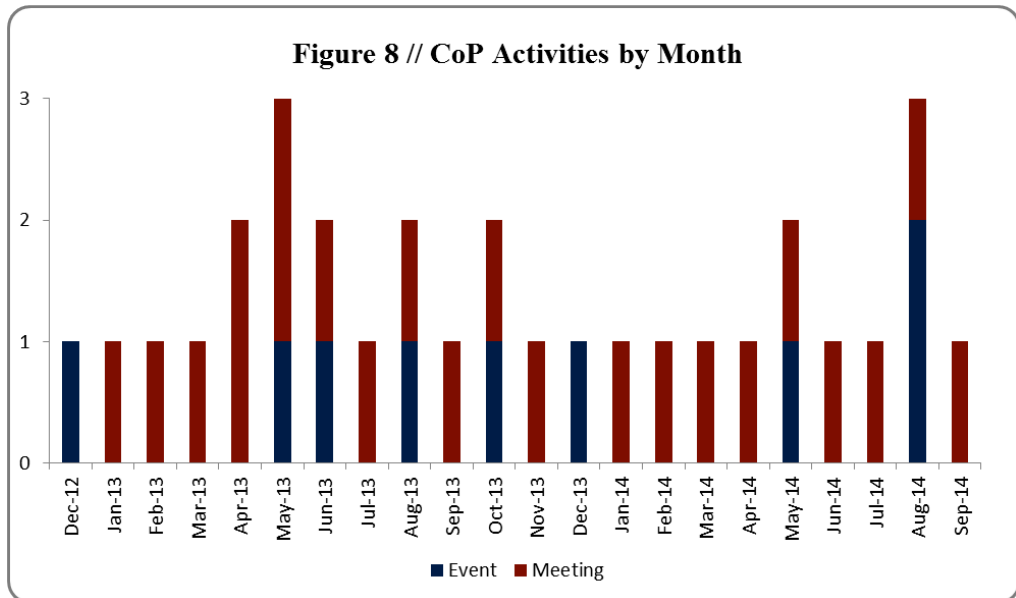| Category | % |
|---|---|
| Event | 53.0% |
| Core Group Announcement | 13.1% |
| Collaboration | 12.6% |
| Resources | 10.9% |
| Opportunity (job, volunteer, funding) | 6.6% |

Figure 7[10] shows that the majority of threads are about D&D-related events, followed by CoP core group meeting announcements and minutes attachments, threads connecting participants around a common project or seeking support, and threads sharing resources such as links to event videos or reports. According to survey results, most respondents are actively following the listserv: 21.7% of respondents "always" read CoP emails, 47.8% read them "often," and 26.1% read them "sometimes."

Figure 8 provides a timeline of CoP activity since the initial convening in December 2012.[11] There have been a total of 31 CoP activities – at least one per month since the CoP launched – with meetings (primarily core group meetings)

**Figure 8 // CoP Activities by Month**

■ Event  ■ Meeting

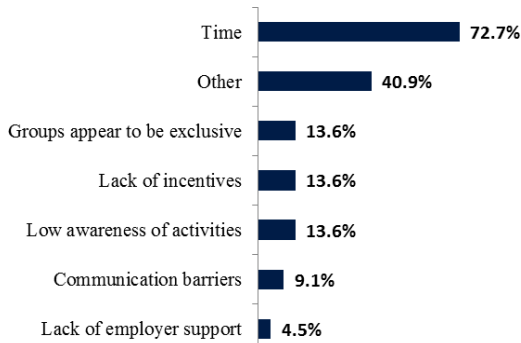making up nearly three-quarters (71.0%) of all activities.

Figure 9 shows that time is the biggest barrier to participation in the CoP, with nearly three-quarters (72.7%) of respondents claiming that time most strongly limits their participation. Given that many participants appear to serve and operate in the Chicago area, distance to events emerged as another important barrier to CoP involvement. Awareness of how to participate in the CoP may be another

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[10] Threads categories were identified emergently, based on the thread title.
[11] See appendix III for a more detailed timeline of CoP activities.

**Figure 9 // Barriers to Participation**

*% of responses (n=22) for*
*what strongly limits participation in the CoP*

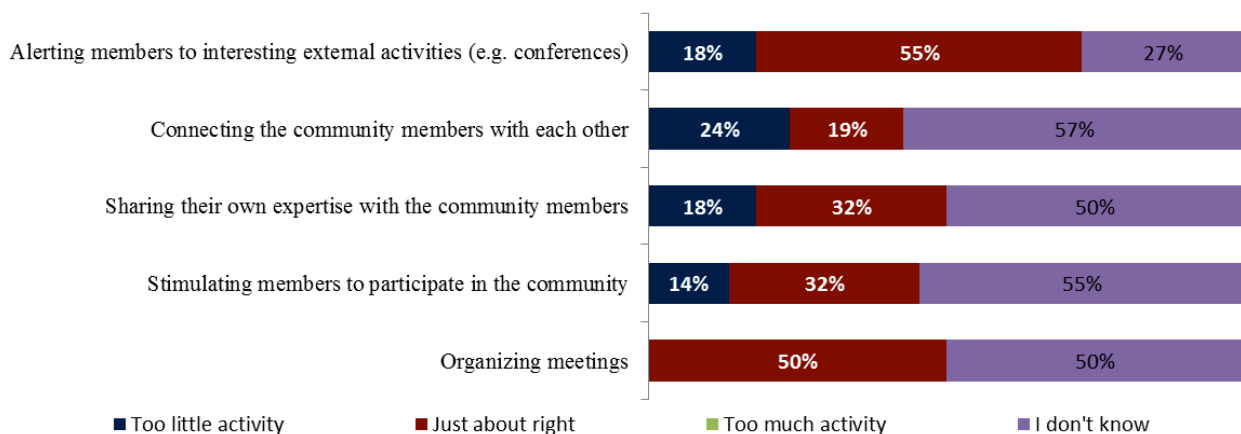| | |
|---|---|
| Time | 72.7% |
| Other | 40.9% |
| Groups appear to be exclusive | 13.6% |
| Lack of incentives | 13.6% |
| Low awareness of activities | 13.6% |
| Communication barriers | 9.1% |
| Lack of employer support | 4.5% |

important barrier. Although only 13.6% of respondents see 'low awareness' as a barrier to participation, just 24% of respondents feel that *other* CoP participants are more than "somewhat aware" of ways to participate in the CoP, and when asked how they feel about the number of CoP activities, more than a quarter (27.1%) responded "I don't know" – the second highest response behind "about the right amount" (54.5%).

## CoP Structure

The "core group" is a small group of committed CoP participants who meet monthly to discuss and support the development of the CoP. During 2013 the core group focused on clarifying the CoP's vision, structure, and scope of work, and in 2014 efforts have focused on supporting events that provide opportunities to interact with other CoP participants while experiencing a diverse mix of D&D methods. When asked about core group activity, figure 10 shows that, outside of communication around external activities (presumably via the listserv), most respondents are not aware of the core group's efforts, and no respondent thinks that the core group is doing too much. Respondents are eager to connect and collaborate, and in addition to more prominently communicating their efforts, these results suggest that the core group should prioritize "connecting the community members with each other."
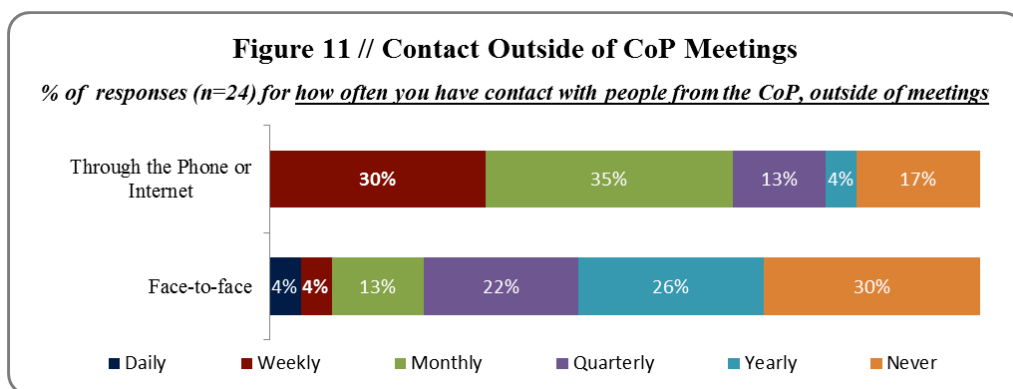
**Figure 10 // Core Group Activity**

*% of responses (n=22) for how active the CoP core group is in the following activities*

| | Too little activity | Just about right | Too much activity | I don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alerting members to interesting external activities (e.g. conferences) | 18% | 55% | | 27% |
| Connecting the community members with each other | 24% | 19% | | 57% |
| Sharing their own expertise with the community members | 18% | 32% | | 50% |
| Stimulating members to participate in the community | 14% | 32% | | 55% |
| Organizing meetings | | 50% | | 50% |

## Participant Connectivity

Respondents are primarily connecting with other CoP participants over the phone or internet. Figure 11 shows that 65.2% are connecting either weekly or monthly over the phone and online, compared to only 17.4% who are connecting face-to-face either weekly or monthly. Perhaps due to this dynamic of limited face-to-face interaction, the majority of respondents (59.1%) have made between 1 to 5 meaningful relationships through the CoP, and 22.7% have made none. Only one-third of all respondents (33.3%) are "satisfied" to "very satisfied" with this number. When asked how many people currently make up the CoP, responses varied from 25 up to 300 people, which may highlight the lack of clarity around who is part of the CoP as well as the effect of a community that is primarily connected through a listserv. Still, the CoP has certainly introduced participants to others in the D&D field, with 100% of respondents feeling at least "somewhat" more aware of new people and

organizations involved in dialogue and deliberation work in the Greater Chicago region, and 32% of respondents feeling a "great deal more aware."



**Figure 11 // Contact Outside of CoP Meetings**
*% of responses (n=24) for how often you have contact with people from the CoP, outside of meetings*

Through the Phone or Internet: Weekly 30%, Monthly 35%, Quarterly 13%, Yearly 4%, Never 17%

Face-to-face: Daily 4%, Weekly 4%, Monthly 13%, Quarterly 22%, Yearly 26%, Never 30%

Legend: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Yearly, Never

## Participant Collaboration

The results shared in figures 1 through 3 suggest that respondents are eager to collaborate and build partnerships through the CoP, and although almost half feel that other CoP participants would be more than "somewhat" willing to share their knowledge (48%), at the same time only 30% feel that CoP participants would be more than "somewhat" willing to work together on a project. Of the 24 survey responses collected for this question, only four respondents have initiated at least one collaboration or partnership through the CoP.

It's worth noting that addressing the lack of face-to-face communication and collaboration has been at the heart of the core group's agenda in 2014, based on the belief that, in the words of one respondent: "*when folks get to know each other, and have the opportunity to evaluate what can be "brought to the table" by potential colleagues in terms of talent, skill, and interpersonal chemistry, then opportunities for collaboration are much more likely to be identified and discussed in a meaningful way.*"

# SECTION II: TAKING STOCK AND MOVING FORWARD

When asked about satisfaction with the CoP, most respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (54.2%), with one-third (33.3%) either satisfied or very satisfied, and 13% unsatisfied. Based primarily on open response data from respondents and interviews, this section offers insight on what the CoP is doing well, where it most needs improvement, and how to build a better CoP.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

### Strengths

The four key CoP strengths that emerged are **1)** the quality and diversity of participants, **2)** its ability to connect this mix of people under one umbrella, **3)** the listserv, and **4)** the access to new resources.

The most important asset of the CoP is its participants, and both respondents and interviewees mentioned the "good mix" of "committed" and "interesting people," filled with "enthusiasm" and "talent," who are "familiar with a variety of public process and facilitation methodologies and techniques." Through events, meetings, and the listserv, another key strength of the CoP is its ability to provide forums that connect people and ideas, "to unite dialogue and deliberation efforts happening in Chicago so that practitioners and even non-practicing community members have new opportunities for collaboration with groups and initiatives they may not have otherwise known existed," as well as acting as a "magnifier of common issues across networks." In addition to serving as the CoP's core avenue for connection, the listserv has also provided a space for "idea generation" and provides a "sense that there is progress" and "that a lot is happening" in the CoP. The final key strength is the sharing of and access to resources fostered by the CoP, which has helped some with the recruitment of facilitators and volunteers as well as the procurement of space and funding. Other strengths mentioned include the CoP's vision, which inspires higher level thinking; the emergence of a more formalized structure led by the core group; and the association with local groups such as IPCE and national groups such as the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation.
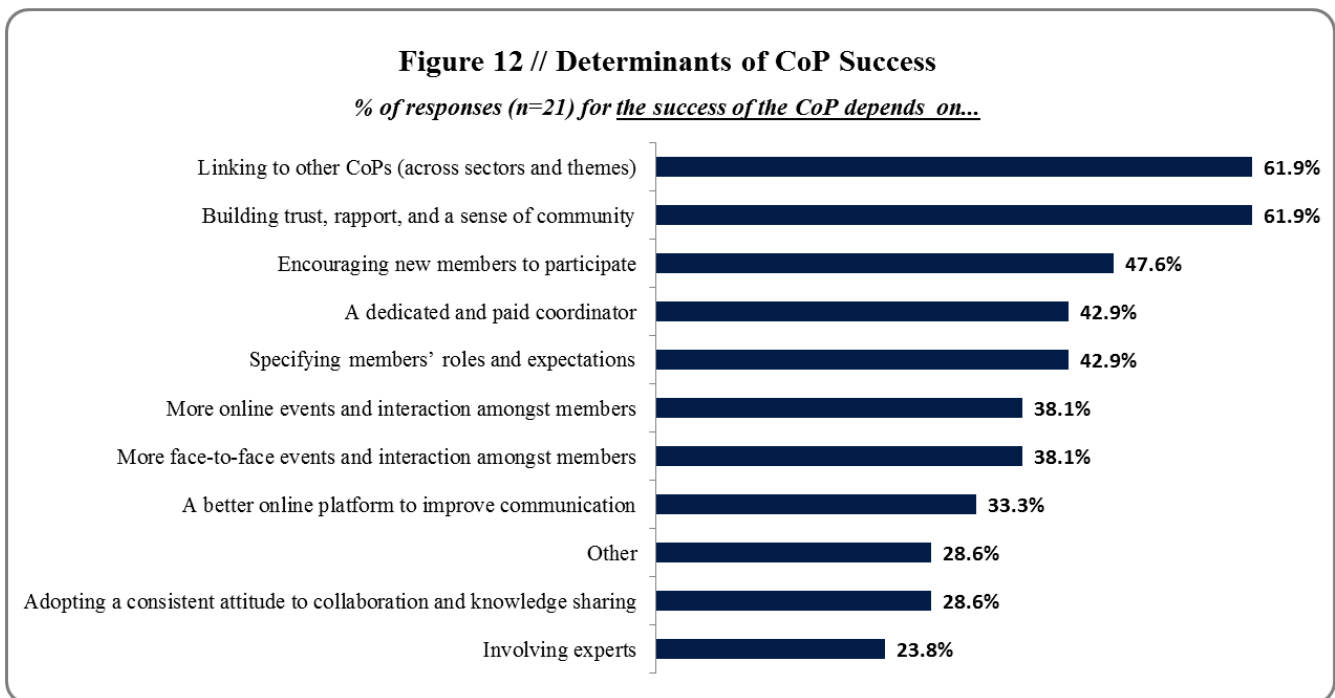
### Weaknesses

The key weaknesses or challenges facing the CoP that emerged are **1)** communication, **2)** participation, and **3)** confusion around purpose.

Communication within the CoP is the most prominent weakness mentioned by respondents, with some feeling that it is difficult to keep track of CoP news and activities and that "communication out of the entire community needs to be strengthened," a claim supported by the fact that over two-thirds of all listserv threads are posted by just 5 people. Others feel that the listserv should not be moderated or that the listserv may be difficult to use for some, while others feel disconnected and "too distant to know" CoP weaknesses. Another important challenge that is consistent with findings presented on page 12 is the ability for the CoP to "bring everyone together" by finding meeting times and locations that are broadly convenient for a network of working professionals that extends beyond the City. The final key weakness of the CoP identified by respondents relates to purpose: some feel that the vision is too big, while others find the vision unclear or confusing. Other weaknesses mentioned include the structure of the CoP, a lack of commitment by participants, that there is not enough action, a focus on discussing D&D rather than issues using D&D methods, and that there is no sense of achievement or impact.

## Building a Better CoP

### Participant Recommendations

When given a list of options of what most influences the success of the CoP, figure 12 shows that respondents feel "linking to other CoPs" and "building trust, rapport, and a sense of community" are most important. Furthermore, respondents feel that only 20% of other CoP participants feel a sense of ownership or belonging to the CoP.

**Figure 12 // Determinants of CoP Success**

*% of responses (n=21) for the success of the CoP depends on...*

| Determinant | % |
| --- | --- |
| Linking to other CoPs (across sectors and themes) | 61.9% |
| Building trust, rapport, and a sense of community | 61.9% |
| Encouraging new members to participate | 47.6% |
| A dedicated and paid coordinator | 42.9% |
| Specifying members' roles and expectations | 42.9% |
| More online events and interaction amongst members | 38.1% |
| More face-to-face events and interaction amongst members | 38.1% |
| A better online platform to improve communication | 33.3% |
| Other | 28.6% |
| Adopting a consistent attitude to collaboration and knowledge sharing | 28.6% |
| Involving experts | 23.8% |

Open ended questions posed to both respondents and interviewees asking how to improve the CoP yielded 5 key recommendations, many of which address weaknesses already mentioned: **1)** clarify purpose and practices, **2)** clarify and build partnerships, **3)** increase mobility and reach, **4)** improve communication, and **5)** focus on action.

Perhaps the most fundamental recommendation is to more clearly answer the questions "what is the CoP, and what does it do?" Currently, the scope of the CoP's vision and activities is not clear to all participants, with some wondering whether it's for professional development around D&D practices or to bring people together to collaboratively build "civic infrastructure" in our communities and beyond. One suggestion to add clarity is to make CoP activities, both past and present, available to participants, and nearly half (42.9%) of respondents think that "specifying members' roles and expectations" is important to the CoP's success.

Another important recommendation is to clarify current organizational partnerships with the CoP, as well as to build more partnerships that may bring in participants, projects, and resources. Currently, many participants associate the CoP with IPCE, yet seem unclear about the relationship that IPCE has with the CoP. IPCE's role as a primary supporter but not owner of the CoP must be clarified, and the independent core group's leadership role must be more clearly established. Raising awareness around organizations already involved in the CoP, identifying others 'who believe in this,' and bringing in the institutional leadership and resources needed to execute collaborative projects is also seen as essential for bolstering participation
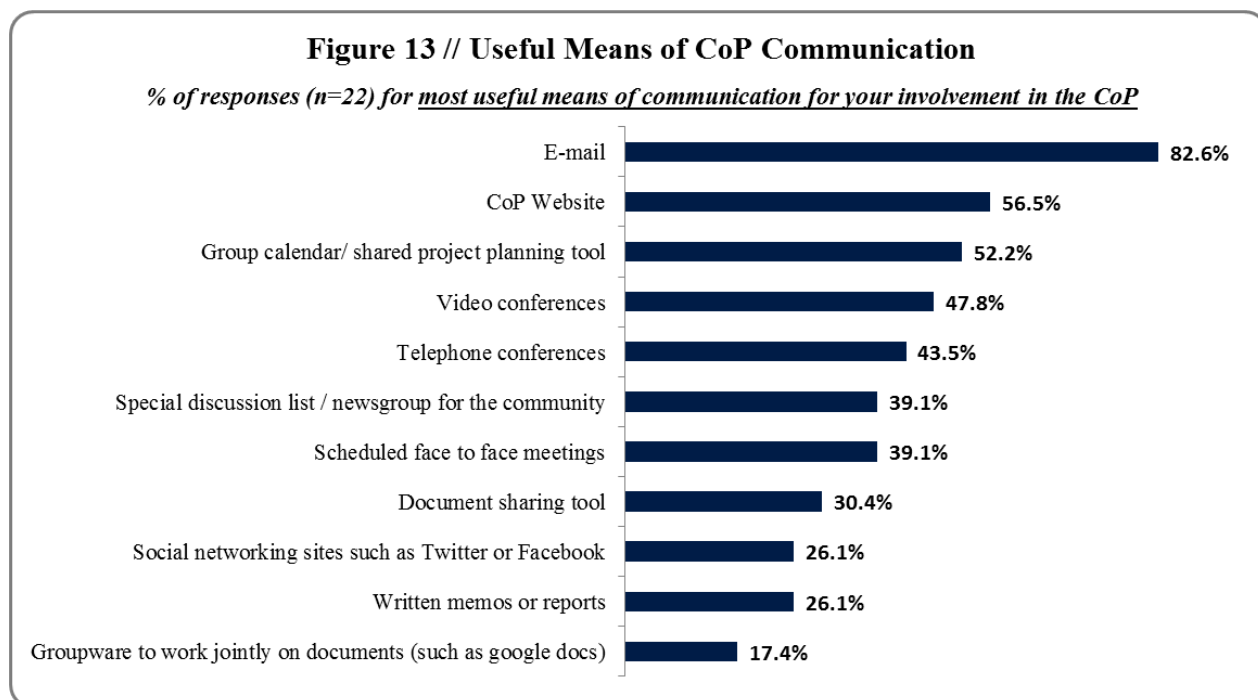
Participants also recommend increasing the mobility and reach of the CoP by getting into communities as well as outside of Chicago in order to "break down silos" and create a community that is more inclusive and less perceived as being "Chicago-centric." The final two core recommendations are improving "avenues of communication"– for example, internally through a shared calendar or better listserv and externally by getting onto other networks or media – and focusing on action, starting with "small, strategic victories" that demonstrate the impact and value of the CoP and that transition the CoP "from a community talking about practice to a community engaged in practice."

Other recommendations that respondents and interviewees provided include: bringing new faces to the CoP (figure 12 shows that 47.6% of survey respondents agree with this); in addition to events, convene participants around common projects; invite a consultant to help develop the group (although, only 23.8% of respondents feel that CoP success requires "involving experts"); the creation of an "issue-based list" of CoP participants; and dues-based membership.

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Many of the core CoP issues – for example, around the clarity of purpose, participation, building partnerships, and recruiting new participants – are connected to communication, and while it has been highlighted as the key weakness of the CoP, it is accordingly perceived as a key determinant of its future success.

Figure 13 shows that e-mail is clearly how respondents prefer to communicate with other CoP participants, and over half of respondents feel that the creation of a CoP website (56.5%) and the use of a group calendar (52.2%) would also be useful. When asked how to make CoP networks more visible and connected, two themes emerged from interviews: the CoP must enhance both its offline and online reach, and convenings must become more regular and practical. When talking about improving the CoP's reach, participants are eager to uncover and harness the diverse networks already in the CoP and "cross-pollinate;" to expand our presence into local spaces and communities; to build a public presence by getting on websites like DNA.info or tabling neighborhood festivals; and to offer online activities that might address limitations of time and distance. Events are a fundamental way to increase participant connection, and interviewees feel that participation will increase if events occur on a regular basis and if they are centered around an issue or professional development, which would make them relevant to personal and work-related interests. Other suggestions include creating a brochure that clarifies the "fuzzy notion of D&D" and the mission and vision of the CoP, and the need for a dedicated, energetic coordinator to reach out and keep the community connected.

**Figure 13 // Useful Means of CoP Communication**

*% of responses (n=22) for <u>most useful means of communication for your involvement in the CoP</u>*

| Means | % |
|---|---|
| E-mail | 82.6% |
| CoP Website | 56.5% |
| Group calendar/ shared project planning tool | 52.2% |
| Video conferences | 47.8% |
| Telephone conferences | 43.5% |
| Special discussion list / newsgroup for the community | 39.1% |
| Scheduled face to face meetings | 39.1% |
| Document sharing tool | 30.4% |
| Social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook | 26.1% |
| Written memos or reports | 26.1% |
| Groupware to work jointly on documents (such as google docs) | 17.4% |

# CONCLUSION

The D&D convening organized by IPCE in December of 2012 generated substantial interest in creating a sustained community to connect Chicago area D&D practitioners. Almost two years after that meeting, the CoP has emerged as a loosely associated network connected via listserv and led by a small core group that primarily supports the planning and delivery of events proposed by CoP participants. This is a good start, and the results of this study suggest that the CoP can become much more. A common question raised by interviewees was "what's next?" This section summarizes key takeaways and questions to help guide the continued development of the CoP.

**Unclear purpose a key challenge**
- *What is the fundamental goal of the CoP? What is at the heart of the CoP's work? How is it different from related communities of practice?*
- *Is the CoP for professional development around D&D practices, or to bring people together to collaboratively build "civic infrastructure?"*
- Only 16.7% of respondents feel they know the CoP purpose "very well." Some feel the vision is too big, while others find the vision unclear or confusing. It remains difficult to explain the CoP and the "fuzzy notion of D&D."
- Findings suggest a focus on action-oriented "common projects" around issues, and other insights below address this key challenge.

**The CoP is currently an online, listserv community**
- Most contact happens online, with 65.2% of respondents connecting weekly or monthly versus 17.4% in person.
- The listserv is a strength and is the CoP's primary forum. Through it, nearly 200 threads have been posted since February 2013, a majority about events. Respondents value the listserv for alerts and ideas and sense progress through it.

**Valuable and meaningful, but limited engagement**
- Respondents feel the CoP uniquely brings together a diverse group of related and talented professionals, provides space, and raises awareness of common issues.
- 59.1% of respondents have made 1 to 5 meaningful relationships via the CoP, but only 33.3% of them are satisfied with that number. Currently, 69.4% of all listserv threads were posted by just 5 people.

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- Many participants feel distant from the CoP, with 60% of respondents identifying themselves as peripheral members and most operating in the broader Chicago area.
- The smallest estimated size of CoP membership was 25, the maximum was 300, and the average was 71. *What defines membership, and how can members become more aware of one another?*
- Time and distance are the main barriers to participation.
- "Building trust, rapport, and a sense of community" is seen as essential to the CoP's success.

**Start to build awareness and connection in two ways**
- *Given the broad geographic scope of the CoP, what can be done to connect people on a more regular basis? In what other ways can people "plug in" and participate?*
- Event regularity: Meetings are happening every month, but less than a third of activities bring together participants outside of the core group, and awareness of activities is low. Scheduling regular events or "meet-ups" (not just core group meetings) should be a priority.
- Improved online forum: addressing barriers to participation such as time, distance, and awareness is a key challenge, yet finding a forum that works for the community remains elusive. Creating a shared calendar and/or CoP website are recommendations that might help participants keep better track of CoP activity, but the CoP would greatly benefit from an online forum that allows for participation (and collaboration) from anywhere and at any time.

**Extend reach and move beyond the usual suspects**
- The CoP resonates mostly with nonprofit professionals – 52% of respondents work in the nonprofit sector, 30.4% are consultants, and 0% from the private sector. *Where are the private sector folks?* Collaborating on joint activities with other networks such as the International Association of Facilitators is broadly seen as important to the CoP's success, and may bring more private sector professionals into contact with the CoP.
- Respondents want dialogues on the ground, and in the neighborhoods and suburbs.

**Collaborate around issues**
- CoP participants are generally most interested in using the CoP as a space to build action-oriented partnerships that empower the people and communities they serve. Events should provide the space for participants to build ideas and partnerships around common projects and issues of concern.

- Collaboration amongst CoP participants must improve – 83.3% of respondents have initiated 0 partnerships or collaborations through the CoP. *What barriers limit the desired collaboration?*

**Leadership or bust**
- Zero respondents feel the core group is doing "too much," and moving forward their focus should be on connecting CoP participants with one another to foster collaboration.
- Although a small group of volunteers meeting monthly may support occasional events, more manpower and resources are needed to consistently connect silos, foster collaborative projects, and build Chicago's civic infrastructure. *Who will do all of this work? Is staff needed?*
- Partner institutions must be clear about their role in the CoP. For example, what is IPCE's role? It was the organizer of the convening that catalyzed the CoP's development and continues to sponsor CoP events, but it is not the owner of the CoP.
- *What institutions in Chicago believe in this and will provide the resources needed to build a stronger and more effective CoP? Who will step up and help build the CoP?*

# Community of Practice Survey Questions

**Q1.** How did you hear about the Community of Practice (CoP)?  (Select all that apply)
   a. Professional contact
   b. UIC Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE)
   c. WBEZ
   d. The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)
   e. Friend
   f. A professional network
   g. A listserv
   h. Other (please specify):

**Q2.** What amount or level of participation in the CoP best describes your involvement? (Select one)
   a. Core member – your participation is at the "heart of the CoP"
   b. Active member – you periodically participate in CoP forums, such as events or the listserv
   c. Peripheral member – you have an interest in the CoP but rarely participate
   d. None of the above

**Q3.** Please describe the frequency of your contact with the CoP: (Select one)
   a. Frequent – Since my initial contact with the CoP, I have consistently participated via the listserv and/or face-to-face
   b. Intermittent – Since my initial contact with the CoP, I have occasionally participated via the listserv and/or face-to-face
   c. One time contact – Since initial contact with the CoP, I have not participated at all either via the listserv or face-to-face
   d. No contact – I have had no contact with the CoP either via the listserv or face-to-face
   e. Comments:

**Q4.** How well do you understand the purpose of the CoP? *(1=Very well to 5=Not at all)*

**Q5.** Which answer(s) best describes why you take part in the CoP? (Rate from MOST important to LEAST important)
   a. To Build Friendships
   b. To Build Professional Relationships
   c. To Acquire Projects or Customers
   d. For Problem Solving (e.g. explore issues and brainstorm ideas)
   e. To Discuss Developments in the Field of Dialogue and Deliberation.
   f. To Request and Share Information/Resources (e.g. "where can I find issue guides?")
   g. To Seek Training (e.g. learn new dialogue and deliberation skills and methods)
   h. To Collaborate (e.g. joint external action such as training or events)

       i.   Other (please specify):

**Q6.** How likely are you to take part in the following CoP activities? *(Very likely, likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, not likely at all)*
  a) Public dialogues
  b) Presentations by members
  c) Presentations by non-members
  d) Workshops
  e) Methods showcases
  f) Team building activities (such as informal outings)
  g) Networking events
  h) Collaborating on a dialogue or project
  i) Writing project proposals
  j) Members writing publications together
  k) Exchanging e-mails (for example to find solutions to problems)
  l) Other (please specify):

**Q7.** Approximately how many new people have you met through the CoP? *(0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21+)*

**Q8.** Approximately how many new, meaningful relationships have you made through the CoP? *(0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21+)*

**Q9.** How satisfied are you with the number of new, meaningful relationships that you have made through the CoP? (*Very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, unsatisfied, very unsatisfied*)

**Q10.** Approximately how many people do you think currently make up the CoP? (numeric open response)

**Q11.** To what extent do you think the members of the CoP…*(1=A great deal to 5=not at all, I don't know)*
  a) Are aware of ways to participate in the CoP
  b) Are enthusiastic and motivated to participate
  c) Feel a shared sense of ownership of the CoP
  d) Feel a sense of belonging to the CoP
  e) Would be willing to work together on a project
  f) Would be willing to share their knowledge with other members

**Q12.** How many new collaborations or partnerships have you initiated through the CoP network: *(Numeric fill in the blank)*
  a. Please provide brief examples:

**Q13.** How often do you have the following types of contact with people from the CoP, OUTSIDE of community meetings? (*daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly, never*)
  a) Face-to-face
  b) Phone or Internet-based (for example via text, call, e-mail or video conference)

**Q14.** How much has the CoP increased your awareness of people and organizations involved in dialogue and deliberation work in the Greater Chicago region? (*1=A great deal to 5=not at all*)

**Q15.** Please rate your overall satisfaction with the CoP: (*very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, unsatisfied, very unsatisfied*)

**Q16.** In your opinion, what are the overall strengths of the CoP? *(Open response)*

**Q17.** In your opinion, what are the overall weaknesses of the CoP? *(Open response)*

**Q18.** How do you feel about the number of face-to-face CoP activities scheduled? (*too many, about the right amount, too few,  I don't know*)

**Q19.** How active is the CoP Core Group in the following activities?  *(too much activity, just about right, too little activity, I don't know)*
  a. Organizing meetings
  b. Stimulating members to participate in the community
  c. Sharing their own expertise with the community members
  d. Connecting the community members with each other
  e. Alerting members to interesting external activities (e.g. conferences)

**Q20.** How often do you read emails sent from the CoP? (a*lways, often, sometimes, rarely, never*)

**Q21.** Which of the following means of communication are (or might be) especially useful for your involvement in the CoP? (Select all that apply)
  a) Scheduled face to face meetings
  b) E-mail
  c) Telephone conferences
  d) Video conferences
  e) CoP website
  f) Special discussion list / newsgroup for the community
  g) Written memos or reports
  h) Group calendar/ shared project planning tool
  i) Document sharing tool
  j) Groupware to work jointly on documents (such as google docs)
  k) Social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook

**Q22.** What STRONGLY limits your ability to participate in the CoP ? (Select all that apply)
  a. Time

b. Lack of employer support
c. Low awareness of activities
d. Lack of incentives
e. Communication barriers
f. Groups appear to be exclusive
g. Other (please specify):

**Q23.** The success of the CoP depends on…(Select all that apply)
    a. Involving experts
    b. Specifying members' roles and expectations
    c. A dedicated and paid coordinator.
    d. Adopting a consistent attitude to collaboration and knowledge sharing.
    e. More face-to-face events and interaction amongst members
    f. More online events and interaction amongst members
    g. A better online platform to improve communication
    h. Encouraging new members to participate.
    i. Building trust, rapport, and a sense of community.
    j. Linking to other CoPs (across sectors and themes)
    k. Other (please specify):

**Q24.** What other recommendations do you have to strengthen the CoPs' effectiveness? *(Open response)*

NOTE:  We are interested in what types of professionals are involved in the CoP, and how we are connecting and collaborating throughout the Greater Chicago region.  The following demographic questions are needed to describe the basic characteristics of respondents, as a group. Only aggregate data and no individual responses will be reported.

**Q25.** What is your occupation? (*Fill in the blank*)

**Q26.** By who are you employed? That is, where does your paycheck come from? (Select all that apply)
    a) Public Sector
    b) Private Sector
    c) Non-profit Sector
    d) Self-employed / Consultant
    e) I am retired
    f) I am not currently employed
    g) Other: _____

**Q27.** Which area(s) of the greater Chicago region does you serve? *(Open response)*

**Q28.** What specific dialogue and deliberation methods do you practice? (Select all that apply)
    a) America Speaks 21st Century Town Meeting
    b) Appreciative Inquiry
    c) Charettes

d) Citizen Advisory Councils
e) Citizen Juries
f) Community visioning workshops
g) Conversation Cafe
h) Deliberative Polling
i) National Issues Forum
j) Open Space Technology
k) Participatory Budgeting
l) Restorative circles
m) Study Circles
n) World Café
o) Other (please specify):

**Q29.** Using the following framework, please rank the following streams of practice according to what you most commonly practice: (Rank from MOST frequent (1) to LEAST frequent)
   a. EXPLORATION: To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue
   b. CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups
   c. DECISION MAKING: To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge
   d. COLLABORATIVE ACTION: To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution

**Q30.** In which stream are you most interested in building your own capacity: (Rank from MOST frequent (1) to LEAST frequent)
   a. EXPLORATION: To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue
   b. CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups
   c. DECISION MAKING: To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge
   d. COLLABORATIVE ACTION: To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution

**Q31.** Please use the comment box below for any additional comments, questions, or feedback regarding the CoP: *(Open response)*

## Community of Practice Interview Questions

**IQ1.** How did you become involved in the CoP?

**IQ2.** What, to you, is the purpose of the CoP?

**IQ3.** Thinking about impact, please tell me what you believe the CoP should achieve?

**IQ4.** How many new collaborations, or partnerships have you initiated through the CoP network: (Numeric fill in the blank) Please provide brief examples:

**IQ5.** How can the CoP make networks more visible and connected?

**IQ6.** What's working?

**IQ7.** What's better than that?

**IQ8.** What is *the question* you have about the CoP?

## APPENDIX III

## CoP Timeline of Events

| Date | Event | Details |
|---|---|---|
| 12/5/2012 | Event | 1st Annual D&D Convening (IPCE) |
| 1/25/2013 | Meeting | Convening follow-up gathering |
| 2/28/2013 | Meeting | Many Conversations, One Chicago Meeting |
| 3/19/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 4/3/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 4/16/2013 | Meeting | Many Conversations, One Chicago Meeting |
| 5/6/2013 | Event | The Legal Infrastructure for Civic Engagement |
| 5/9/2013 | Meeting | Many Conversations, One Chicago Meeting |
| 5/17/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 6/7/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 6/26/2013 | Event | Networking Event |
| 7/12/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 8/12/2013 | Event | Collective Story Harvest with AoH and IAF |
| 8/16/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 9/19/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 10/11/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 10/23/2013 | Event | Networking Event |
| 11/15/2013 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 12/4/2013 | Event | 2nd Annual D&D Convening with IPCE |
| 1/23/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 2/24/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 3/17/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 4/21/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 5/19/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 5/20/2014 | Event | Networking Event |
| 6/23/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 7/25/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 8/18/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |
| 8/20/2014 | Event | Proaction Café Event with Lina Cramer |
| 8/21/2014 | Event | Sustainability Event with ICA |
| 9/15/2014 | Meeting | Core Group Meeting |