**Concept note – Governance of Communities of Practice**

**Definition/Mandate:**

The Communities of Practice (CoPs) are voluntary bodies consisting of individuals with expertise and interest in a thematic area related to humanitarian shelter response, shelter practices, or shelter coordination. They provide a forum as a point of entry to a repository of knowledge on key thematic issues related to the Shelter sector. This can be accessed as desk support to field responses or as policies, guidelines and other tools in support of the sector. Finally, CoPs are also a capacity building tool to resource expertise from a global pool of talent, complement existing rosters of personnel and serve as a platform to recruit capacity for surge, remote or otherwise deployed support for responses. The CoPs do not have a time-bound mandate as they typically support core ongoing cluster functions.

**Structure:**

As a formal structure of the Global Shelter Cluster (sanctioned through the Strategic Advisory Group - SAG) it is to be led by an individual as its formal moderator and supported by a co-moderator, affiliated with or sponsored by cluster agencies. They are accountable to the SAG and may request for advice from the SAG on any issues related with the management of the CoP. Individuals not affiliated with an agency are encouraged to participate in the CoPs but may not be moderators or co-moderators, unless otherwise agreed by the SAG.

**Global Shelter Cluster Strategic Advisory Group**

**Community of Practice Z**

**Community of Practice Y**

**Community of Practice X**

**Moderators and co-moderators**

**CoP Plenary (individuals)**

**Management of the CoP:**

The CoPs are to be managed by their moderator and co-moderator. Management activities of the CoP will include:

* Outlining the overall objectives for that thematic group, any particular sub-groups that may need to be created and target profiles for inclusion/engagement.
* Initiating and moderating CoP discussions and ensuring its content is relevant to the CoP’s thematic area.
* Encouraging discourse with the entirety of the community, including independents.
* Managing a CoP e-mail account to handle requests/questions.
* Filtering content and eliminating inappropriate content if necessary, consequently excluding responsible registered members from a CoP in cases of repeated spamming.
* Redirecting content if it is more relevant to a thematic area of a different CoP.
* Providing a minimum quality check for answers being provided in open forum discussions of the CoP to ensure the information provided is up to date and accurate.

**Functions:**

The functions of the CoP include:

* Remote desk support to country-level clusters – providing meaningful responses to questions within a predictable timeframe (24 h).
* Capacity building – complementing existing rosters of personnel and serving as a platform to recruit capacity for surge, remote or otherwise deployed support for responses.
* Identify issues that should be addressed by other GSC bodies: WGs, the SAG, the Support Team.
* Harmonize practices and enhance a common approach.

**Membership/Participation:**

* Active participation is encouraged from both individuals that represent agencies and independents. Independents are encouraged to engage with the CoP to exchange ideas for practice, be informed of on-going events, contribute to the development of tools, and engage with various responses even when not formally employed.
* Users will need to register with the CoP (and agree to a CoP Code of Conduct) in order to contribute. This is to ensure that the legitimacy of the contributors is transparent and wilful contribution of spam/inappropriate material/unnecessary traffic is reduced. However, any individual with interest in the theme may engage or disengage/unsubscribe as they wish.
* Conversation threads can be initiated by any registered member pending approval by a moderator(s). Those conversations may be dealt with in several ways:
  + May be viewed only by the moderator to deal with directly, and then be published to the public forum.
  + Some instances may require consultation with the co-moderator or SAG to determine an appropriate method to proceed, after which, the leads or moderators will determine if/how to publish.
  + Many conversations will be made immediately open to the entire community forum based upon the judgement of the moderator.
  + Moderators will have the ability to delete content that is found to be poor in quality, made redundant by other threads, or creates unnecessary noise in the community.

**Requirements for Platform:**

* The platform / virtual environment should act as a knowledge repository of the key thematic issues, and be in a searchable format.
* CoPs should have a document library of key reference materials associated with it on the website. As practice evolves, that library should evolve to reflect it.
* Primary tool for collaboration is via email. As different communication tools become viable, the CoPs may adopt other mechanisms as appropriate (i.e. webinars, chat groups, microblogging, interactive documents, etc.) as long as the content is still moderated and is in a searchable format.
* The platform should enable bilateral conversations rather than only open discussions.

**Disclaimer:**

Although composed of individuals, the legitimacy of the CoP, and any agreed outcomes, derives from endorsement by members representing their agencies. The answers provided by CoPs are in good faith but neither the Global Shelter Cluster nor its leads or partner agencies can be liable for any damage caused by the information provided.

**Further actions:**

* Operational instruction will need to be introduced to the moderators/steering groups.
* More detailed moderation rules and a community “code of conduct” need to be developed and published.
* E-mail accounts for each CoP need to be created.
* The Global Shelter Cluster to advertise and promote the various CoPs through existing communication methods.