

# A Guide to Division for Early Childhood Communities of Practice



August 2020

## **Table of Contents**

A Guide To Dec Communities Of Practice	1
What Are Dec Communities Of Practice (CoPs)?	2
DEC CoPs	2
What Are The Benefits Of Belonging To A Dec Cop?	2
How Are Cops Organized?	3
CoP Facilitators	3
Forming New CoPs	4
The DEC CoP Development Committee	5
DEC Executive Office Support	5
CoP Committee Liaisons	6
Ready To Become A Cop Member?	6
Joining a CoP	7
Getting Involved in a CoP	7
CoP Activities for the DEC Community	7
Appendices	
1. DEC Organizational Structure	
2. DEC Supports and Services	



### **WHAT ARE DEC COMMUNITIES of PRACTICE (CoPs)?**

DEC Communities of Practice (CoPs) are comprised of professionals and families who are DEC members, nonmembers, and partners. Focusing on a specific topic area, CoPs are formed to engage in conversations and activities around a common interest and to share information, ideas, and resources. DEC has a priority that “professionals and families have various opportunities to connect and participate with others in ways that foster a sense of community focused on the full community participation of young children with special needs and their families.” To address this priority, the CoPs are a DEC activity under the umbrella of the DEC Executive Office.

At any given time, there are several communities of practice operating within DEC. To see a current list of CoPs, descriptions of each, and instructions for joining CoPs can be found on the DEC website: <https://www.dec-sped.org/communities-of-practice>.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BELONGING TO A DEC CoP?**

The primary benefit of belonging to a DEC CoP is the opportunity to connect with others who share similar interests and passions about topics in early intervention and early childhood special education. Opportunities to ask questions, network, and share resources may include:

- Listservs and/or My Community as space to share and request information and resources from other CoP members;
- Opportunities to meet and network at the DEC Conference via conference sessions, poster sessions, face-to-face meetings, and/or resource tables;
- Webinars featuring a guest speaker may inform or share resources with the CoP around its shared interest;
- Web conversations for a small group of people to have an interactive, dynamic, and informational conversation about a particular topic;

- Conference calls for all CoP members to discuss topics;
- Collections of web-based resources around a shared topic of interest;
- Topical discussion boards or forums; and/or
- Presentations about the CoPs at other conferences or events.

DEC CoP activities are provided at no cost to its members. Activities are individualized for each CoP based on interests of members. Interests will be determined through multiple methods, including surveys and discussions during CoP meetings. CoP members are invited to share their needs, suggestions, guidance and information to ensure that the CoPs support their interests.

## **HOW ARE CoPs ORGANIZED?**

### **CoP Facilitators**

Each CoP will have at least two (2) co-facilitators to coordinate and organize the functioning of the group. CoP facilitators cultivate and nurture a sense of community and engagement through regular communication, interaction, and collaborative work among members.

An individual who wishes to be a CoP facilitator must meet the following requirements:

- Has more than a year of experience in the field of early intervention or early childhood special education;
- Is a current DEC member and has been a member (for at least one year) of the CoP for which they would like to be a co-facilitator;
- Can dedicate 1–3 hours per month;
- Has the resources, flexibility, and availability to attend the annual DEC Conference;
- Is available to serve as a co-facilitator for a minimum of one year;
- Is an effective collaborator with good communication and organizational skills;
- Has knowledge of the DEC mission, priority areas and Ends Policies as well as DEC Recommended Practices and Position Statements;
- Is not a DEC Executive Board member or the co-facilitator of another CoP; and
- Does not work in the same agency as their CoP co-facilitator.

If you are interested in becoming a facilitator of a CoP, please use the contact information at the end of this document to reach out to the DEC CoP Development Committee or the DEC Executive Office to learn about next steps.

## **Forming New CoPs**

New CoPs may be formed around any topic of interest that is also supported by DEC's mission and values. To form a new CoP, interested members should contact the Executive Office and provide the following information for approval:

- The purpose of the CoP, including an explanation of how the purpose of the CoP is supported by and furthers the mission and values of DEC;
- Identification of two CoP co-facilitators who are interested in organizing the group; and
- Short-term (3 months to 12 months) and long-term (more than a year) ideas to successfully engage DEC members in the CoP.

If approved, the following will be required from the CoP:

- A Yearly Action Plan with quarterly updates, and
- Collaboration with the Community of Practice Development Committee.

## **The DEC CoP Development Committee**

The DEC CoP Development Committee offers overall guidance and support to every DEC CoP, including providing information on evidence-based practices in leading a CoP, group and individual support to facilitators, and organization of CoP activities.

Sample activities may include:

- creating professional development opportunities/products for new and existing CoP facilitators;
- serving as coaches to CoP facilitators individually and as a group;
- organizing and facilitating CoP facilitator meetings/professional development in partnership with the Executive Office;
- communicating regularly with CoP leaders and maintaining informational files on the "CoP Leaders for DEC";
- seeking input from the Executive Office and Executive Board CoP liaison for any activities CoPs are engaged in that may be perceived as speaking on behalf of the DEC organization or activities in which CoPs request EO/EB input;
- determining, along with other CoP leaders, initiatives and programs that CoPs will coordinate at the national DEC Conference; and
- coordinating all activities for CoP initiatives and programs at the DEC Conference.

## **DEC Executive Office Support**

The DEC Executive Office provides logistical support and guidance to ensure the success and sustainability of DEC CoPs in two ways. First, the DEC Executive Office appoints a Board Liaison to the DEC CoP Development Committee to provide a direction connection between the activities of the DEC Board and the Committee. Second, DEC provides guidance in partnership with the DEC CoP Development Committee, which is a Committee of the Executive Office. The DEC Executive Office and the Board Liaison provide logistical support by:

- Providing a home on the website and/or My Community site for each CoP to recruit members, promote activities and provide information;
- Supporting CoPs in determining technology for calls/virtual meetings;
- Promoting CoP activities on DEC NEWS that goes out to membership and in the DEC E-Communicator; and
- Informing the DEC Executive Board regularly about CoP activities and whether any CoPs plan to engage in activities that will require specific Executive Board input or support.

## **CoP Committee Liaisons**

Every CoP is assigned to a DEC Committee and is provided with a liaison from that Committee. Committee liaisons are active CoP participants who share information back and forth from between the DEC Committee and the CoP. The purpose of assigning a liaison is to inform DEC CoP members who are interested in the work of the assigned committee of ongoing official DEC initiatives. The liaison in turn reports back to the Committee about the work of the COP in order to help inform the Committee's work in relation to topics of interest/needs of DEC members. The liaison can also facilitate linking the DEC Committee with the COP for ad hoc activities in which the committee needs external expertise, feedback, etc. The DEC Committees will look to the COP in recruitment/advertisement of DEC Committee openings.

## **READY TO BECOME A CoP MEMBER?**

Members can choose their level of participation and involvement in as many CoPs as they wish. There are no time commitments or requirements to be a CoP member. To join a CoP, email the appropriate CoP co-facilitator(s) indicating interest.

## Joining a CoP

CoPs provide opportunities for members to connect with other professionals and families with a shared interest and enable CoP members to explore practices, issues and solutions with one another. These connections create room for DEC members to:

- develop collaborative relationships and learn from their colleagues;
- explore and discuss topics of interests within the field in a variety of formats (i.e., electronically, by teleconference, through Web conversations, face to face, etc.);
- build community within DEC;
- gain opportunities for professional growth and network with other DEC members in the United States and internationally; and/or
- gain leadership opportunities as desired.

## Getting Involved in a CoP

DEC members and nonmembers are invited to join CoPs based on their personal interests.

## CoP Activities for the DEC Community

Several DEC activities may also be sponsored or led by CoPs. These activities include the following:

- a. **Position statement** – a formal expression of DEC that addresses a specific topic or issue and represents the official position of the organization. DEC members may initiate writing a position statement but must follow the established procedures available in the [DEC Position Statement Guidelines](#).
  - b. DEC members may be part of the position statement workgroup but are not required.
  - c. DEC members will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the position statement before board approval and publication.
2. **A white paper** – an informational paper that may be research-based or opinion-based to help the field understand an issue and generate thought and discussion about an issue.
    - a. Any DEC member may generate a white paper.

- b. If a white paper is to be generated by a CoP, all members are invited to help develop and review the white paper but are not required to participate. An invitation to participate will be sent through email and/or the listserv. The white paper workgroup leader will ensure that there is role diversity represented in the workgroup (i.e., parents or family members of young children with special needs, practitioners, researchers, higher education faculty, administrators, etc.). A list of workgroup participants must be sent to the DEC Executive Office.
- c. Workgroup members can include their names as authors of the white paper if desired.
- d. The executive office will inform the Executive Board about a CoP's intent to develop a white paper.
- e. Once the paper is written, all CoP members are given two weeks to provide comments/feedback. The white paper workgroup reviews comments from the CoP members and carefully considers edits and changes before the final draft is created. While it is not necessary to incorporate all suggested changes, it is important to consider all recommended changes.
- f. A final draft of the paper is submitted for review and comment to the entire DEC membership via the DEC E-Communicator. Response from the DEC membership is collected over a two-week period.
- g. The white paper workgroup reviews comments from the DEC membership and carefully considers edits and changes before the final document is created. While it is not necessary to incorporate all suggested changes, it is important to consider all recommended changes.
- h. The CoP must submit a document with all the suggested changes from CoP members and DEC members to the Executive Office for review. The Executive Office will submit to the Executive Board for final approval.
- i. The Executive Office will assist with technical edits and formatting to prepare the final document for distribution to the DEC membership. The names of workgroup members (who opted to include their names) will be added to the document along with any endorsements. The white paper will be posted on the DEC website, included in the next issue of the DEC E-Communicator, and sent to



the *Journal of Early Intervention* and *Young Exceptional Children* editors for consideration in upcoming issues.

3. **Requests for Public Comment** – a group response to invitations for public comment from the US Department of Education or other organizations.
  - a. CoPs, as a group, may respond to requests for public comment upon informing the Executive Office of the intent to respond. The response must be in alignment with DEC’s mission and values.
  - b. The Executive Office will immediately inform the Policy and Advocacy Committee of a CoP’s intent to respond to a request for public comment and ensure that if another group within DEC is developing a response, the group will be connected with the COP for collaborative work. Any responses for request for public comment should ultimately be a response from the organization as a whole and approved by the Executive Board.
  - c. All CoP members are invited to help develop and respond to the proposed comment but are not required to participate. In addition, DEC members, including DEC Executive Board members, are invited to participate through a member alert or the DEC E-Communicator sent by the DEC Executive Office.
  - d. Once the response is written, all CoP members are given one or two weeks to provide comments/feedback (dependent on timeline and in conversation with PAC/Executive Office). The authors of the response review comments from the DEC members and carefully consider edits and changes before the final draft is created. While it is not necessary to incorporate all suggested changes, it is important to consider all recommended changes.
  - e. CoP members who participated in drafting the response can include their names as a respondent representing the CoP.
  - f. The final draft of the response is reviewed by the DEC Executive Board and DEC’s PAC before it is submitted to ensure the response is aligned with DEC’s mission and values. As stated in DEC Policy Board Process 3.4.2.3 “The President may represent the Board to outside parties in announcing Board stated positions and in stating President decisions and interpretations within the area delegated to that role. This includes approving public positions in accordance with board

policies or organizational position statements and endorsing like positions of others.”

- g. When the response is submitted, the preparer of the response indicates it is submitted by The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children; provides contact information for the preparer; and provides a list of the COP members who participated in writing the response and agreed to list their name. In addition, the entire list of the Executive Board is provided.
4. **Voices from the Field** – a brief article published in the *Young Exceptional Children* (YEC) journal.
- a. Any CoP member can prepare a *Voices from the Field* manuscript and follow the [submission guidelines](#) established by the *Young Exceptional Children* journal.
  - b. CoPs are encouraged to involve at least three CoP members representing diverse roles in the development of the manuscript.
  - c. This manuscript will be reviewed by the editorial board of *YEC* and does *not* need to be reviewed by the Executive Office or Executive Board.
5. **DEC E-Communicator** – an electronic newsletter produced by the DEC Executive Office.
- a. CoP facilitators may submit information to the Executive Office to be included in the DEC E-Communicator and must submit information before the 1st or 15th of the month for which they would like information to be included.
  - b. This information will be edited by a copy editor and reviewed by the Executive Office.
6. **Other DEC CoP Projects**
- a. All CoP projects must support DEC’s mission, which is to promote policies and advance evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children (birth to age 8) who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities.
  - b. Projects completed within a CoP do not represent DEC unless the products are brought to the Executive Office for DEC endorsement. CoP facilitators must inform the Executive Office of ongoing projects to ensure alignment with mission and long-term goals of the organization.

- c. CoPs cannot make public statements or distribute information to the public on behalf of DEC without prior approval from the Executive Office.

### **Questions?**

If you have questions about DEC's Communities of Practice, please contact:

- The DEC Executive Office ([dec@dec-sped.org](mailto:dec@dec-sped.org), 310.428.7209)
- DEC Development Committee Chairs (Nancy Surbrook-Goins at [nsurbrook-goins@ccresa.org](mailto:nsurbrook-goins@ccresa.org) or Kathi Gillaspay at [kgillaspay@anlar.com](mailto:kgillaspay@anlar.com)).