



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PLAYBOOK

for Underutilized Higher
Education Institutions

July 2024

CONTRACT NUMBER: GSI0F0I24Y/7200AAI9M00027

CONTRACT PERIOD: September 30, 2019–September 30, 2024

Prepared by: Kristin Ekkens, Eugene Spiro, Sam Weisman

Report Design and Layout: TM Design, Inc.

This report was produced for review and approval by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and was made possible by the support of the American people through USAID. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of Kaizen, A Tetra Tech Company, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. government.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	5
2. COMPARING GOOD PRACTICES	7
3. PLAYBOOK WORK PLAN	8
APPENDIX I. METHODOLOGY	11
Data Collection	11
Data Analysis	11
APPENDIX 2. KEY FINDINGS	12
Focus Group Discussions	12
Surveys	14
APPENDIX 3. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL MSI COPS	16
APPENDIX 4. ONLINE TOOLS AND RESOURCES	17
APPENDIX 5. ANCILLARY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS	19
APPENDIX 6. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	20

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Community of Practice (CoP) Playbook for Underutilized Higher Education Institutions* outlines a framework to foster a thriving ecosystem of colleges and universities interested in partnering with USAID. The playbook includes guidelines and structured approaches for establishing and maintaining effective governance, robust communication strategies, dynamic leadership roles, and active member engagement. It also outlines tools and resources—such as vision and goals, convening and communication, collaboration and cooperation, community management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E)—that support CoP pillars.

Through two rounds of technical assistance, the USAID Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (USAID/DEIA) convened a vibrant and highly engaged community of ten Minority-Serving Institutions¹ (MSIs), including:

- California State University San Marcos
- Florida International University
- Kean University
- Langston University
- Morehouse School of Medicine
- Northern Marianas Technical Institute
- University of Guam
- University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
- University of Texas at San Antonio
- University of the Virgin Islands

Sustaining the engagement of these institutions could spark a wider MSI CoP. This playbook introduces good practices, an illustrative work plan, and additional resources to meet this goal.

The Partnerships Incubator conducted a research activity summarized in [Appendix 1. Methodology](#) and [Appendix 2. Key Findings](#). Through its outreach to key stakeholders, the playbook seeks to address the following questions.

1. Is there a need or desire for a CoP among MSIs interested in USAID partnership?
2. If so, what modalities will enhance the sustainability of a CoP?

This playbook's findings suggest there is a high level of interest among these MSIs in establishing a CoP focused on partnership with USAID. As determined through a survey, all participants were either "interested" or "very interested" in being engaged in such a CoP. Most (more than 75 percent) are not already engaged in a CoP specifically for MSIs.

The Partnerships Incubator's research also suggests the optimal structure for an MSI CoP includes members meeting virtually every other month plus quarterly virtual sessions involving USAID speakers. Some MSIs may also be interested in "themed pods" that meet every other month around a topic of interest. The CoP should be action-oriented (i.e., not focused only on learning). The CoP should have both asynchronous and synchronous opportunities to connect and would benefit from Agency support

¹ MSIs designated by the U.S. Department of Education include Alaska Native-Serving Institutions (ANSIs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs), Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (NHSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs).

in capacity strengthening and through emailed updates on future and upcoming opportunities for funding and collaboration. Most MSIs would highly value an in-person annual conference or a virtual conference—similar to the Opportunities Fair held by Partnerships Incubator in April 2024—using an online event platform such as AirMeet.

In summary, the MSIs are enthusiastic about the opportunity to collaborate and connect with other MSIs and the Agency on an ongoing basis and seek USAID/DEIA initiative in establishing the CoP infrastructure, which could then be sustained by its members.

2. COMPARING GOOD PRACTICES

The Partnerships Incubator identified several leading practices as contributing significantly to CoPs' success and delivery of value.² These practices not only enhance the functionality and effectiveness of CoPs but also sustain engagement among members, driving continuous improvement, innovation, and sustainability. These practices serve as the basis for the [Playbook Work Plan in Section 3](#).

PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT
Regular Communication and Meetings	Establish regular schedules for meetings and communications to keep members engaged and informed. This includes formal meetings and informal check-ins that facilitate continuous dialogue and support.	Regular communications ensure members are consistently connected, allowing for timely updates on projects, sharing of resources, and collaborative problem-solving.
Shared Digital Platforms for Collaboration	Utilize technology to create shared digital spaces where members can collaborate, share documents, and access resources asynchronously. Platforms such as LinkedIn Groups, Slack, Microsoft Teams, or specialized educational forums could be relevant.	Shared platforms enhance accessibility and ongoing engagement among geographically dispersed members. They also support the archiving of discussions and resources for future reference.
Professional Development Workshops and Webinars	Organize workshops, sessions, and webinars that address current trends, challenges, and opportunities within and between MSIs. These sessions often focus on capacity strengthening, grant writing, pedagogical strategies, and leadership development.	Such sessions strengthen the capacity of MSI personnel and provide continuous learning opportunities, helping institutions adapt to changes in educational environments and policy landscapes.
Peer Mentoring and Support Systems	Establish mentoring programs within the CoP where more experienced members guide newer ones. This can include peer-to-peer mentoring or pairing new members with institutions experienced in specific fields.	Support systems facilitate knowledge transfer, enhance professional growth, and strengthen community bonds. This practice also fosters leadership skills among MSI staff and faculty.
Collaborative Research and Grant-Writing Initiatives	Form groups within the CoP to collaborate on research projects or joint grant proposals. These initiatives leverage institutions' diverse strengths and specialties.	Collaboration increases research output and funding opportunities for MSIs, enhancing their reputation and academic contributions. It also builds a culture of engagement rather than competition among institutions.
Shared Resource Libraries	Develop comprehensive digital libraries that include research papers, teaching materials, policy documents, and best practices relevant to MSIs.	Sharing resources provides a repository that can help all members improve practices, stay informed about developments, and enhance their curriculum and administrative processes.
Inclusive Decision-Making	Ensure CoP governance includes representatives from a diverse range of MSIs, reflecting different types and sizes of institutions. Decision-making processes should be transparent and participatory.	Participation promotes a sense of ownership and commitment across the CoP, ensuring decisions reflect the collective interests and diverse needs of all members.
Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms	Implement regular evaluations of CoP activities and solicit feedback from members to gauge the effectiveness of initiatives and identify areas for improvement.	Feedback helps the CoP remain dynamic and responsive to the needs of its members, ensuring it continues to provide value and adapt to changing circumstances.

² Good practices based on review of effective MSI CoPs, summarized in [Appendix 3: Examples of Successful MSI CoPs](#).

3. PLAYBOOK WORK PLAN

The practices described above form the basis for activities and actions—as well as anticipated outcomes and implementation steps—summarized in the following CoP Playbook Work Plan. These are supported by the research methodology ([Appendix I](#)) underlying this playbook and additional resources ([Appendix 6](#)).

COP PLAYBOOK WORK PLAN		
ACTIONS	OUTCOMES	IMPLEMENTATION
1. SHARED GOALS AND VISION		
<p>Stakeholder Workshops: Involve representatives from MSIs, USAID, and other relevant stakeholders to collaboratively define a clear and concise mission statement for the CoP. This ensures the purpose resonates across perspectives and aligns with broader educational and development goals.</p> <p>Goal-Setting Sessions: Organize sessions to establish CoP goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). These sessions should involve key stakeholders to capture diverse inputs and ensure the goals address the pressing needs of MSIs and align with the Agency's strategic priorities.</p> <p>Documentation and Approval: Document goals in a formal plan that is reviewed and approved annually (for example) by all major stakeholders. This document should be accessible to all CoP members to maintain transparency and accountability.</p>	<p>Mission and Vision Statements: Prepare, with contribution from all key stakeholders, well-defined and widely understood mission and vision statements that guide the CoP's activities and strategic direction.</p> <p>Shared Goals: Set clearly defined goals that focus on key areas such as improving student opportunities in international programming and strengthening capacity for grant writing and research.</p>	<p>Regular Reviews and Updates: Schedule regular meetings to assess the progress toward these goals, making adjustments as necessary based on stakeholder feedback and evolving needs.</p> <p>Communication Strategy: Develop a strategy that regularly informs all stakeholders about the progress of the CoP, upcoming events, and results of implemented activities. This keeps the community engaged and aware of contributions to the shared goals.</p>
2. GOVERNANCE³		
<p>Stakeholder Mapping: Determine who should be involved in CoP governance, including representatives from MSIs, USAID, educational experts, and possibly students to ensure the structure is comprehensive and represents diverse perspectives.</p> <p>Steering Committee Formation: Create a committee of members from different MSIs, USAID representatives, and other key stakeholders. This group will oversee the strategic direction of the CoP.</p> <p>Leadership Roles: Clearly define the roles and responsibilities for positions, including sponsor, champion, and community manager:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsor: A senior leader who provides strategic oversight and secures resources • Champion: A promoter of the CoP who drives recruitment and visibility within and outside the community • Community Manager: Responsible for the daily management of the CoP, ensuring activities align with the CoP's goals and facilitating member interaction <p>Develop Policies: Establish policies outlining how decisions are made, conflicts are resolved, and tasks are delegated and managed within the CoP. Develop a charter that details these policies, decision-making processes, and the operational framework for the CoP. Ensure the charter reflects the values of the MSI CoP and supports inclusivity and transparency.</p>	<p>Framework: Develop a comprehensive and clearly articulated governance framework available to all CoP members, ensuring transparency and accountability.</p> <p>Roles and Responsibilities: Clearly define roles and responsibilities to ensure effective strategic leadership and oversight of CoP management.</p>	<p>Training Sessions: Provide training for all members of the governance team to ensure they understand roles, expectations, and tools at their disposal.</p> <p>Regular Meetings: Schedule meetings to review governance effectiveness, discuss issues, and adopt or adapt policies as the CoP evolves.</p> <p>Annual Review: Assess the effectiveness of the governance structure and make adjustments as necessary based on feedback from CoP members and changes in the broader educational and developmental landscapes.</p>

³ This playbook focuses on the core governance infrastructure to launch a successful CoP. An ancillary table ([Appendix 5](#)) provides optional actions to orient the CoP toward leadership development objectives.

COP PLAYBOOK WORK PLAN

ACTIONS	OUTCOMES	IMPLEMENTATION
3. CONVENING AND COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK		
<p>Regular Meetings and Workshops: Schedule regular meetings and workshops that address the interests and needs of members. These could be thematic, focusing on shared areas of interest or challenges.</p> <p>Annual Conferences: Organize events to bring together all members to network, share best practices, and showcase achievements.</p> <p>Internal Communication Plan: Establish a routine for regular updates and news sharing within the CoP using newsletters, email blasts, and an internal communication platform such as Slack or Microsoft Teams.</p> <p>External Communication Plan: Develop strategies for engaging with external audiences, including social media updates, public newsletters, and press releases to highlight the CoP's activities and successes.</p> <p>Digital Platforms: Implement digital tools and platforms that facilitate both synchronous (real-time online discussions, webinars) and asynchronous (forums, message boards) communication to accommodate members' schedules and locations.</p> <p>Collaborative Tools: Use tools such as Google Drive or SharePoint for document sharing and cooperative work, ensuring that all members have access to the latest resources and contributions.</p>	<p>Enhanced Engagement: Convene regularly to keep members engaged and informed.</p> <p>Effective Information Dissemination: Develop a communication approach that ensures all members, whether local or remote, are up to date with CoP activities and opportunities.</p> <p>Stronger Community Bonds: Foster stronger relationships and a sense of community among members through frequent and varied interactions.</p>	<p>Calendar of Events: Maintain a calendar of all CoP events—including meetings, workshops, and conferences—accessible to all members.</p> <p>Feedback Loops: Implement mechanisms to collect feedback on the effectiveness of communication and convening efforts to continuously improve these processes.</p> <p>Technology Training: Provide training for all members on how to use the communication and collaboration tools effectively, ensuring no member is left behind due to technological barriers.</p>
4. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES		
<p>Regular Meetings and Workshops: Schedule meetings and workshops to address the interests and needs of CoP members. These could be thematic, focusing on shared areas of interest or challenges.</p> <p>Annual Conferences: Organize events to bring together all members to network, share best practices, and showcase achievements.</p> <p>Joint Initiatives: Encourage collaborative research projects, community outreach programs, and educational initiatives that require efforts across multiple MSIs and stakeholders.</p> <p>Working Groups: Establish specialized groups focused on challenges or opportunities within the MSIs' context, allowing members to dive deeply into issues and collaborate on innovative solutions.</p> <p>Idea-Sharing Platforms: Implement sites where members can propose ideas, get feedback, and collectively refine ideas.</p> <p>Design-Thinking Workshops: Organize sessions using design-thinking principles to foster creative problem solving and innovation in a collaborative setting.</p> <p>Shared Repositories: Create centralized digital sites where members can share, access, and use educational materials, research papers, grant proposals, and best practices.</p> <p>Expertise Exchange: Develop programs for sharing knowledge, such as guest lectures, peer mentoring, and consortium building among MSIs.</p>	<p>Enhanced Collaborative Outputs: Produce tangible outcomes that reflect the collective expertise and efforts of its members through structured collaborative projects and co-creation methods.</p> <p>Efficient Use of Resources: Share resources and expertise to leverage the strengths of members, leading to more efficient results.</p> <p>Stronger Inter-institutional Networks: Build strong relationships and trust among members—and enhance the CoP's cohesion and resilience—with regular collaboration and shared projects.</p>	<p>Regular Reviews: Schedule periodic reviews to assess the effectiveness of collaborative projects and adjust strategies as necessary.</p> <p>Recognition Programs: Establish acknowledgment and reward programs to honor outstanding collaborative efforts and successes within the CoP.</p> <p>Continuous Learning and Improvement: Facilitate ongoing opportunities to improve collaborative skills among members, including training on new tools and techniques.</p>

COP PLAYBOOK WORK PLAN

ACTIONS	OUTCOMES	IMPLEMENTATION
5. COP MANAGEMENT		
<p>Member Onboarding: Develop a comprehensive process that introduces new members to the CoP's culture, tools, and resources, helping them integrate smoothly.</p> <p>Resource Allocation: Ensure equitable access to community resources—including funding, tools, and information—to support member activities and initiatives.</p> <p>Content Curation: Collect high-quality resources that are relevant and beneficial to the community's focus, enhancing member learning and engagement.</p> <p>Regular Meetings and Workshops: Organize regular meetings, workshops, and social events to maintain engagement and foster personal connections among members.</p> <p>Special Interest Groups: Support the formation of groups within the CoP for members to delve deeper into shared areas of interest.</p>	<p>Sustained Engagement: Use effective management support to encourage members to remain engaged, contributing to and benefiting from the community.</p> <p>Enhanced Cohesion: Form strong community bonds through regular interactions and shared activities, leading to a supportive and collaborative environment.</p> <p>Effective Resource Utilization: Manage and allocate community resources to maximize the benefits to all members and support the CoP's growth and sustainability.</p>	<p>Health Checks: Conduct regular assessments of community engagement and satisfaction to identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>Feedback Mechanisms: Establish ways for members to assess community operations and suggest improvements.</p> <p>Continuous Improvement: Adapt and refine management practices based on feedback and changing needs to ensure the CoP remains relevant and effective.</p>
6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)		
<p>Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Define KPIs related to engagement, project outcomes, knowledge sharing, and member satisfaction. Examples might include participation rates at events, number of collaborative projects completed, and member survey feedback scores.</p> <p>Benchmarking: Set benchmarks for each KPI to provide clear targets for the CoP's performance and progress.</p> <p>Surveys and Feedback Forms: Regularly gather qualitative and quantitative data on member experiences, the value they derive from the CoP, and areas for improvement.</p> <p>Activity Logs: Maintain logs of all CoP activities—including meetings, workshops, and other events—to track participation and topics covered.</p> <p>Performance Reports: Compile and review reports at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly, biannually) to assess the CoP's progress against KPIs.</p> <p>Annual Reviews: Conduct comprehensive reviews to evaluate the CoP's overall effectiveness, impact on the MSIs, and alignment with USAID's strategic goals.</p>	<p>Informed Decision-Making: CoP leaders use effective M&E to make informed decisions about strategic directions and resource allocation.</p> <p>Enhanced Accountability: Use regular and transparent reporting to keep all stakeholders informed about the CoP's performance, enhancing accountability.</p> <p>Continuous Improvement: Identify strengths and weaknesses through evaluation to target improvements, enhancing the CoP's value to its members.</p>	<p>Feedback Integration: Establish a process to incorporate feedback from evaluations into CoP strategies and operations.</p> <p>Evaluation Committee: Form a committee to oversee M&E processes and ensure they are carried out systematically and impartially.</p> <p>Training: Provide training for members on M&E principles and tools, enabling them to effectively contribute to the CoP's evaluation efforts.</p>

APPENDIX I. METHODOLOGY

To create the MSI CoP playbook, the Incubator explored the needs, challenges, and opportunities of developing an MSI CoP—while considering USAID’s strategic objectives and prospective involvement. This included determining whether MSIs would benefit from a new CoP to enhance efforts to partner with the Agency, and if so, identifying modalities to ensure its sustainability. The Incubator collected quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive view of the MSI ecosystem and the potential for fostering partnerships with USAID.

Data Collection

- Time Period: May 21 to May 23, 2024
- Surveys: To gather quantitative insights into practices, perceptions, and needs among MSI stakeholders, including questions about their interest in partnership with USAID
- Focus Groups: To delve into survey findings, including how USAID’s initiatives are perceived and their relevance to MSIs’ evolving strategies and development plans
- Stakeholder Interviews: To obtain detailed insights from key stakeholders within the MSIs, USAID, and the Partnerships Incubator focusing on MSI interest in and prospects for MSI-USAID collaboration
- Traditional Research: To contextualize findings from primary research regarding CoPs within the broader landscape of educational development and international cooperation

Data Analysis

The Partnerships Incubator analyzed this data to identify trends, divergences, and actionable insights. Statistical tools were used for quantitative analysis, while thematic analysis of qualitative data identified patterns and themes relevant to MSI partnership with USAID.

Contributors

- Nine of the ten MSIs participated, including California State University San Marcos, Florida International University, Kean University, Langston University, Morehouse School of Medicine, Northern Marianas Technical Institute, University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, University of Texas at San Antonio, and University of the Virgin Islands.
- The Incubator team held four focus groups via video calls with 12 individuals participating from seven MSIs.
- Surveys included responses from 16 respondents from eight MSIs.

The Incubator conducted additional interviews with Adam Slater, USAID/DEIA Program Specialist; Eugene Spiro, Incubator Acceleration Director; Sam Weisman, Incubator Acceleration Liaison; Suzanne Kelly-Lyall, Incubator Acceleration Advisor and Jessica Barzilay, Kean University.

APPENDIX 2. KEY FINDINGS

The Partnerships Incubator identified the following key research findings from qualitative (focus group and interview) and quantitative (survey) methods, which informed the CoP playbook design described in the body of this report.

Focus Group Discussions

1. What problems do we solve by creating a CoP for MSIs and USAID? What is the value proposition?

- Avoid missed opportunities
- Learn and share best practices
- Increase chances of obtaining funding and partnerships
- Mitigate challenges through shared experiences
- Collaborate more effectively as a consortium, leveraging diverse strengths
- Improved opportunities for collaboration leading to joint applications based on shared strengths, needs, and goals
- A stronger collective voice
- Greater impact on global challenges, such as student engagement in programs like the Fulbright U.S. Student Program

2. What are current constraints and challenges in creating a CoP?

- Team Size: Small teams with limited capacity
- Travel: Frequent travel limits participation; preference for virtual engagements
- Opportunity Limitations: Faculty availability and competition for grants
- Time Commitments: Need for upfront clarity on time commitments
- Technology Restrictions: Restrictions on using certain platforms such as Google and Slack
- Geographical Barriers: Distance and time zones affect participation
- Engagement: Need for action-oriented learning and practical exercises (e.g., submitting Requests for Information and concept notes, developing back-office capacities)

3. What are key components of a successful CoP?

- Passionate Leadership: Champions who drive the CoP through challenges.
- Structured Support: USAID's involvement to provide structure and resources
- Collaborative Tools: Platforms for sharing resources, funding opportunities, and best practices
- Regular Engagement: Regularly scheduled meetings and opportunities for real-time interaction
- Inclusivity: Involving diverse stakeholders from different geographical locations and backgrounds
- Unified Vision: A clear, actionable vision essential for aligning efforts and driving engagement

- **Inclusive Governance:** Transparent and inclusive governance structures that foster trust and accountability
- **Dynamic Leadership:** Rotational leadership that ensures fresh perspectives, engagement across membership, and sustained momentum
- **Regular Convening:** A mix of virtual and in-person meetings to maintain engagement and action
- **Facilitated Collaboration:** Critical to include mechanisms for easy cooperation and trust building
- **Proactive Community Management:** Outreach and responsive management practices keep the community engaged
- **Comprehensive Measurement:** Both qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess the extent partnerships are formed as a result of CoP engagement and to drive continuous improvements

4. What is the ideal structure?

- **Leadership and Coordination:**
- Bimonthly virtual meetings with an annual in-person conference
- Rotating physical meetings
- Centralized leadership from USAID for clarity and alignment
- Structured communications and best practices seminars
- **Meeting Format:**
- Combination of large group meetings and smaller focused groups
- Real opportunities discussed with tangible outcomes
- Periodic updates and facilitated discussions
- **Support and Facilitation:**
- USAID-provided facilitator or third-party coordination
- Structured support for capacity strengthening
- Collaboration and matchmaking efforts to enhance collective impact

5. What concerns or risks are involved in engaging in a CoP?

- **Sustainability:** Ensuring ongoing engagement and practical outcomes
- **Implementation:** The need for structured support and clear leadership roles
- **Feasibility:** Balancing participation with the constraints of university and USAID bureaucracy

6. What are ideal design elements to consider?

- **Focus Areas:** Subject-specific discussions, grant writing, project management, and impact assessment
- **Tools:** Shared digital platforms for Q&A, resource sharing, and announcements
- **Engagement Strategies:** Interactive sessions, real-life exercises, and continuous follow-up

Surveys

The Partnerships Incubator received 15 responses, summarized below, from individual participants across the MSI cohorts. See [Results Dashboard](#) for the complete dataset.

Interest and Goals

- High Level of Interest: All respondents rated their interest in engaging in a CoP with other MSIs as 4 or 5 out of 5.
- Primary Goals: Enhancing collaboration on international programs and expanding peer-to-peer learning were the most common goals.

Preferred Features and Formats

- Important Features: They ranked highly regular thematic discussion groups, a clearinghouse for MSI opportunities, and partnership matchmaking sessions.
- Meeting Formats: Respondents expressed a preference for virtual meetings or a combination of virtual and in-person meetings.
- Respondent Suggestions:
 - » “We are happy to reserve space for a meeting on the UVI campus!”
 - » “Online or in-person joint application development retreats as needed.”
 - » “Regularly scheduled meeting dates, possibly quarterly. Engagements in the form of resources shared via email, topics raised for discussion, etc., could take place monthly.”

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
▼ Regular thematic discussion groups	20.00% 3	13.33% 2	40.00% 6	20.00% 3	6.67% 1	0.00% 0	15	4.20
▼ A clearinghouse for MSI opportunities	33.33% 5	26.67% 4	6.67% 1	20.00% 3	13.33% 2	0.00% 0	15	4.47
▼ Partnership matchmaking sessions	26.67% 4	26.67% 4	26.67% 4	20.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	15	4.60
▼ Unified advocacy efforts	0.00% 0	33.33% 5	20.00% 3	0.00% 0	46.67% 7	0.00% 0	15	3.40
▼ Guest speaker sessions	20.00% 3	0.00% 0	6.67% 1	40.00% 6	33.33% 5	0.00% 0	15	3.33
▼ Other	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 15	15	1.00

Operational Strategies

- Engagement Strategies: MSIs emphasized concise sessions with real value, regular scheduling, and targeted segmentation based on areas of interest.
- Suggested Metrics: Important metrics include number of community engagement activities initiated, increase in capacity-strengthening activities, and participant satisfaction.

- Respondent Suggestions:
 - » “Identify priority areas to develop projects”
 - » “Provide financial resources”
 - » “Collaborating with stakeholders; sharing funding opportunities”
 - » “Variety of meeting times given time differences among participants”
 - » “Scheduling sessions to be short and concise with real value and clear takeaways”

Areas of Collaboration

- High Interest Areas: Proposal writing for USAID projects and registration and mission outreach were the top areas of interest.
- Other Areas: Education and youth programming and procurement reform advocacy.
- Respondent Suggestion: Segment the institutions by area of interest, for example “economic development” to group organizations with common areas of interest.

Platform Preferences and Desired Features

- Preferred Platforms: MSIs favored LinkedIn Groups, Google Sites, and a combination of platforms for hosting the CoP.
- Desired Features: Respondents highlighted resources, capacity-strengthening tools, shared drives, and easy access to interaction and information.
- Respondent Suggestions: MSIs recommend email communication, virtual Zoom meetings, and in-person meetings, plus side get-togethers during regularly attended scientific conferences.

Additional Comments and Suggestions

- Additional Insights: MSIs highlighted the importance of regular communication, inclusion of financial resources for engagement, and leveraging AI for partner matching.

Further Exploration, Key Considerations, and Future Decisions

The survey, focus groups, and interviews provided an initial exploration of interest and preferred structure of an MSI CoP. For such a CoP to become a reality, clarity is needed in the following areas.

- Who will take ownership of coordination?
- Who will provide the initial setup of the infrastructure (e.g., annual subscription to an online platform, initial outreach efforts to launch the community)?
- Might USAID provide funding and resources for an annual conference? If not, what other higher education conferences could the MSIs leverage as an annual in-person convening event?
- Is a paid membership model needed to support the infrastructure, especially if the CoP grows beyond the original 10 MSIs interested in partnering with USAID?

Answers to these questions will determine how high or low touch the MSI CoP will be moving forward.

APPENDIX 3. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL MSI COPS

COP (WITH LINK)	DESCRIPTION	PURPOSE
<u>The Alliance of Hispanic Serving Institution Educators (AHSIE)</u>	AHSIE provides a forum for practitioners from HSIs to share best practices, gather information, and collaborate to enhance educational opportunities for Latino students. AHSIE charges annual membership fees (\$100 for students; \$225 for professionals).	The alliance holds an annual conference and year-round discussions to support and disseminate practices that improve retention, graduation rates, and academic success among Hispanic students at HSIs.
<u>Minority Serving - Cyberinfrastructure Consortium (MS-CC)</u>	MS-CC aims to enhance cyberinfrastructure capabilities within MSIs, improving research competitiveness and educational outcomes. MS-CC collaborates with HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs to organize workshops, webinars, and events for students.	The consortium supports a sustainable CoP that increases access to technology and cyberinfrastructure resources. It focuses on fostering collaboration between MSIs and research-intensive institutions.
<u>The Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI)</u>	Based at the University of Pennsylvania, CMSI supports research, policy development, and programs that enhance the educational experiences and outcomes at MSIs.	CMSI serves as a hub for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the study and improvement of MSIs across the United States. It facilitates collaboration, discussion, and resource sharing among these stakeholders.
<u>Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) Community of Practice</u>	This CoP includes educators and administrators from colleges and universities designated as AANAPISIs. It is often supported through federal grants and focuses on improving the academic achievement of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students.	This CoP shares resources, successful teaching strategies, and data that support AAPI students and collaborates on grant writing and other funding opportunities to enhance institutional support for these students.
<u>University of Colorado Boulder's Online Pedagogy CoP</u>	This CoP aims to create a collaborative space for dialogue among educators, focusing on effective online teaching strategies and practices. It emphasizes building trusted relationships, sharing challenges with empathy, and facing changes collectively.	The community's mission is to support professional development and improve online pedagogy through shared experiences and best practices.

APPENDIX 4. ONLINE TOOLS AND RESOURCES

RESOURCE	PURPOSE	BENEFITS
COMMUNICATION COLLABORATION		
LinkedIn Group	Creates a space for professionals to connect, share insights, and engage in discussions within specific industries or interests	Serves as a networking and collaboration tool, allowing members to post content, ask questions, and interact with peers
Microsoft Teams	Offers chat, video conferencing, file storage, and integration with Microsoft Office apps	Facilitates collaboration on documents directly within the platform and hosts virtual meetings and collaborative sessions seamlessly
Discord	Originally for gamers, it supports large communities with voice, video, and text communication	Useful for real-time discussions and maintaining engagement in a more informal setting
Google Chat	Google's messaging service, which supports direct messages and team chat rooms	Integrates with Google Workspace for a unified communication experience, supporting ongoing project discussions and updates
Slack	A messaging app that makes collaboration within teams easier by organizing conversations into channels	Enhances daily communication among CoP members, allows for the creation of topic-specific channels, and integrates with many productivity tools
PROJECT MANAGEMENT		
Trello	A visual tool using boards, lists, and cards to organize tasks and projects	Helps track progress on specific projects or initiatives within the CoP, facilitating task management and accountability
Asana	Task management tool that helps teams organize, track, and manage their work	Offers detailed task assignments and progress tracking, which is ideal for managing multiple ongoing CoP activities
Google Tasks	A simple task manager integrated with Gmail and Google Calendar	Allows members to manage their tasks directly within their email and calendar setups, ensuring tasks are aligned with other scheduled
DOCUMENT SHARING AND COLLABORATION		
Google Drive	Cloud storage platform that comes with tools for document creation, storage, and collaboration	Centralizes document storage, making it accessible to all CoP members and facilitating collaborative editing and sharing
Dropbox Basic	File hosting service offering cloud storage, file synchronization, and personal cloud	Provides a simple way for members to share and store large files that are accessible from anywhere
Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides	Office suite that allows for real-time collaboration on documents, spreadsheets, and presentations	Enables collaborative document editing and sharing, supporting the CoP's collaborative writing, data analysis, and presentation needs
WEB CONFERENCING		
Zoom	Video conferencing tool that supports online meetings, webinars, and collaboration	Useful for hosting virtual workshops, meetings, or lectures that can include large numbers of participants
Google Meet	A video-communication service developed by Google	Integrates with Google Calendar and Gmail for seamless meeting scheduling and accessibility.
Jitsi Meet	Open-source platform that allows users to easily build and deploy secure video conferencing solutions	Provides a free and flexible option for video meetings without the need for software installation or accounts

RESOURCE	PURPOSE	BENEFITS
VIRTUAL EVENTS AND CONFERENCES		
Eventbrite	An event management and ticketing website	Assists in organizing virtual or in-person CoP events, managing registrations, and tracking attendance
AirMeet	A virtual event hosting platform designed to facilitate online conferences, webinars, and meetups	Provides tools for real-time engagement, networking, and interactive sessions, making it suitable for various event formats
Hopin	An online events platform where you can create engaging virtual events that connect people around the globe	Offers features for networking, breakout sessions, and exhibitions; ideal for larger CoP conferences or symposiums
YouTube Live	Allows you to reach your community in real-time through live streaming	Can be used to broadcast live lectures, workshops, and discussions to a wider audience; including recording for later viewing

APPENDIX 5. ANCILLARY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

COP PLAYBOOK WORK PLAN		
ACTIONS	OUTCOMES	IMPLEMENTATION
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT		
<p>Diverse Team: Form a leadership team that includes representatives from various MSIs, USAID, and potentially other key stakeholders such as industry partners or community leaders.</p> <p>Training Programs: Implement training programs to develop leadership skills tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities within the MSI CoP.</p> <p>Mentorship Scheme: Establish a mentorship program linking new leaders with experienced mentors from within or outside the CoP to provide guidance and support.</p> <p>Regular Assessments: Conduct regular performance evaluations of leadership activities to ensure alignment with CoP objectives and member needs.</p> <p>Feedback Mechanism: Implement a structured feedback mechanism that allows CoP members to provide anonymous feedback on leadership performance, fostering transparency and accountability.</p>	<p>Effective Framework: Develop a well-defined and functioning leadership structure that drives the CoP toward its strategic goals.</p> <p>Engaged and Motivated Leaders: Promote administration that is well prepared, supported, and empowered to foster a vibrant and productive community environment.</p>	<p>Succession Planning: Develop a clear plan for leadership succession to ensure the continuity and stability of the CoP leadership through time.</p> <p>Annual Retreats: Organize annual gatherings to review past performances, strategize for future activities, and strengthen team cohesion among the leadership group.</p> <p>Ongoing Monitoring: Maintain an ongoing evaluation and adjustment process to respond to new challenges and opportunities, ensuring leadership remains effective and responsive to the CoP's evolving needs.</p>

APPENDIX 6. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Incubator team referenced the following resources in the creation of this playbook. Some contain helpful templates—including meeting agendas, a workshop planning guide, and an index of project management tools to efficiently manage collaborative projects—to guide implementation.

The [Communities of Practice Playbook](#) by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre offers step-by-step guidance on developing and running CoPs (2021).

The [Network Toolkit](#) is a collection of open-source resources co-created by members of the Converge Network (2023).

[Communities of Practice Within and Across Organizations: A Guidebook](#) is a collection of insights and principles gathered by authors Etienne Wenger-Trayner, Beverly Wenger-Trayner, Phil Reid, and Claude Bruderlein through decades launching and supporting CoPs (2023).

The Harvard Business Review (HBR) [Guide to Collaborative Teams Toolkit](#) includes worksheets, checklists, and discussion plans to help build effective teams(2021).