



my connected community

# Project Partner's Guide

to

**my connected community  
(mc<sup>2</sup>)**

**[mc2.vicnet.net.au](http://mc2.vicnet.net.au)**



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## **Introduction**

Welcome to this guide for groups embarking on a role as funded Project Partners in the implementation of My Connected Community (mc<sup>2</sup>).

The chapters in this guide are drawn from a variety of sources but in particular from the Project Partner's Luncheon Meetings held at the commencement of each funding round.

This guide is designed to assist Project Partners in focussing their projects towards success and sustainability and based upon experiences with online communities at this point in time.

We are keen to hear from you and add your thoughts and experiences to the resources available in this manual.

Please enjoy developing your project!

# The Four P's of Project Partnering

## ***Planning, Preparation, Purpose and Promotion***

Developed by My Connect Community Project Officer

To varying degrees, all of the Project Partners have had some involvement in the first two 'P's – **Planning** and **Preparation**. Although I mention four 'P's, there will be more focus on the third 'P' – **Purpose**. Through working with the mc<sup>2</sup> team at VICNET, as well as developing my own online community, I have come to realise just how important this third P is for the viability, success and sustainability of a group at My Connected Community.

### **Planning**

As with any project, there is a need to plan. By now all of you have developed an Implementation Plan, giving the two-year project its structure and a framework to operate within. As with any project the planning process is always challenging, as trying to account for or pre-empt the unexpected is virtually impossible; however, it is possible to plan to be responsive. As your communities develop and membership expands, the needs, skills and expectations of the members will change.

Therefore building some flexibility into the planning process is vital. This may mean having options and alternatives available for members and users if certain groups do not take off or become redundant. This may mean being creative with group creation (encourage imagination) or addressing the issue of sustainability at the time of a group's inception.

The main point here is whatever plans you have already developed and the ideas you are beginning to put in place, expect that they may need revisiting over time, and remember that the staff at VICNET are more than happy to help you when the need arises.

### **Preparation**

This point is more about the nuts and bolts of your project, such as where and how will the people you plan to bring online find and access hardware? Where, when and more importantly, *how* will training be conducted?

Will the computers being used have updated browsers installed? What about accessibility? Will participants require any type of adaptive technologies to use the site? Will the training materials that you will distribute require information or guidelines specific to your organisation or modification to suit the needs of mc<sup>2</sup> users?

Lots of questions, but not *all* are necessarily relevant to *all* your members.

This is the preparation needed to recruit and retain members. Community membership is not an event but rather a process that relies upon regularity. To encourage regular participation requires *promotion*, as well as the preparation of supportive and easy-to-understand instructions.

If the preparation is done and there are processes in place that will encourage people to participate regularly, groups become more self-sustaining and hopefully your roles will become more support than anything else.

## Purpose

This is the more conceptual part of the implementation process. Giving the groups you plan to establish a purpose, a reason for being created and maintained. Goals, directions, guidelines and strategies all form an overall *purpose* for having an online community and also precedes the fourth 'P', which is promotion.

I remember when I first started my group at mc<sup>2</sup>, it was just about that- starting a group rather than 'we need to achieve X or Y and this program can help us do that'. As it turned out, multiple purposes have grown out of having the group, and the purpose has developed and grown over time. We now use this group to have monthly chat sessions either around a specific topic or just a general conversation. We rely quite heavily upon the links section, which is now turning out to be a mini-library of websites and online resources. The Shared and Group files are where we store notes and works in progress. The Forum is used for all sorts of things such as brainstorming ideas, developing topics for collaborative work, sharing tips on writing and producing work, reviewing things we have read and gauging other members' opinions.

So for this group a purpose has grown, but it has taken quite a while and required a lot of two other 'P's' – *perseverance* and *patience*. This might occur with some of the groups that you as Project Partners create, and is even more likely to happen via the members of your established communities. Groups will spurn new groups that may have been nothing but an idea in someone's head, however this is leaving a lot to chance.

There are many things that are worth thinking about to avoid leaving everything to chance. This in turn helps address the issue of creating *sustainable* online communities. When it comes to recruiting members to join a group, some guiding principles can be advantageous. Developing a purpose for the online group helps give it some structure and definition – for example, what tools can and will be used and how do the users apply them? This helps guide what support resources may be needed. It helps identify the boundaries and scope of the online community. It may also help sustain the interaction and foster communications that were not initially expected. Whether it is more a common focus around a general topic or a specific group created with a goal to be achieved, one must give serious consideration to *purpose* and *intent*.

Here are some guiding questions to establish the *intent* of an online community:

- What do you want to accomplish with your online interaction?
- Is it motivating or important enough so that people will overcome time and technical barriers to participate?
- How will participation benefit people?
- How can you measure its success?

Some more specific questions would be:

- Does the group have a mission or a vision that you can help communicate to potential members?

- Are the benefits measurable and visible to members?
- Are the goals and intentions determined by the group owner/moderator or the members, or both?

If the online community is part of a larger organisation, is it consistent with the organisation's goals/culture? This is quite an important, yet sometimes overlooked issue. If, as a Project Partner, your intention is to train and support existing community groups to use mc<sup>2</sup>, have you taken into account existing group structures and hierarchies? Are there specific people that have been, or will be, identified as group owners and moderators? Developing online communities with existing community groups relies upon ongoing cooperation, giving all members a sense of ownership and involvement.

There are all manner of different types of interactions that can develop amongst members of an online community, bearing in mind that these people may not meet in person at all, which adds another dimension to the way people may communicate. So it may be worth exploring what types of interaction may occur within the group.

This raises such questions as:

- Will the discussions in the Forum be ongoing or more question and answer?
- Are they focused or wide ranging?
- Do the moderators or the members start the discussions?
- Are there specific timelines or projects to be accomplished by the group, and if so will this mean that members should be encouraged to use certain tools?

When it comes to guidelines and code of conduct, each registered user must agree to the standard conditions of use (see the mc<sup>2</sup> code of conduct at <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/code>). However, will the groups that you intend on establishing require *specific* guidelines or rules of governance? And if so, who will develop them? Will this be done in conjunction with an existing group or by you, as the Project Partner? Once guidelines are established, who will make sure they are understood and adhered to?

Which brings me to the final point I want to make about the importance of giving thought to the purpose of a group – the *people*, the ones you will depend upon to sustain a group, encourage and support its members, and maintain its integrity. These are the moderators. I cannot stress enough how valuable a good moderator, or moderators, are to an mc<sup>2</sup> community.

The moderator role depends on the type of community as some communities need more active moderators than others. Some may need clear and rapid responses or explicit leadership. Others may need a moderator to help them build their own facilitation skills.

There are many different terms that have been coined to describe different moderators. Here are just a few:

The *Social Host*: this person helps create an environment where people feel comfortable participating, makes sure people are heard, stimulates debate and takes part in the conversations.

The *Project Manager*: this person is usually in communities with a strong task or work focus; the project manager keeps an eye on timelines and task lists. This person usually has a strong organisational or leadership role.

The *Cybrarian*: this person is a 'virtual librarian'. Someone who offers, and helps people find knowledge and information. They can stimulate participation by introducing new information.

The *Referee*: this person enforces community norms, rules and codes of conduct. They endeavour to protect members, resolve issues and deal with problems if they arise.

As you may gather there are many functions a moderator may perform, and in some groups, particularly larger ones, multiple moderators are recommended to share the workload and avoid any chance of 'moderator burnout'.

## Promotion

Recruiting members and explaining to people how and what mc<sup>2</sup> actually is, can be easier said than done. I remember when I first started working on the mc<sup>2</sup> project I spent a lot of time on the phone explaining to people what My Connected Community actually was and for quite a while this proved challenging. The fact that I do not have an IT background and had never been exposed to 'virtual communities' before meant that not only did I have to educate myself but also develop a basic understanding of the workings of the Internet.

The difficulty was finding the right language to talk about the technology in a way that was easy to understand and made real sense, particularly to people who were not familiar or comfortable using computers. The benefit of hindsight is wonderful. Looking back now I actually think that my lack of knowledge was useful insofar as I had to convey information about the program as simply and clearly as possible. I understood that this stuff could be difficult to comprehend or tricky to use especially if you had never done so before.

Therefore, when doing any promotion of the project, whether it be in person, over the phone or in a community itself, always remember to use language that your users and members will understand. If people have a good experience with their initial exposure to an online community and are not daunted by technological jargon, chances are they will want to come back and continue to use the program.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the other two 'P's' – *patience* and *perseverance*. Be patient with both the technology and the people using it and persevere even when it may seem that progress is slow. Approaching members and explaining the benefits of mc<sup>2</sup>, and even training them in the use of it is still only a part of the process. This is why ongoing support is such an important factor in the success of a group. People must feel it is worth their while, that they are gaining something from participating on a regular basis. One thing to remember is that you are competing for people's time and attention with all the other things that they do in their lives. An online community should not be just more work. It should be an enriching and fulfilling experience for all participants.

For referencing and further information on the points above consult the mc<sup>2</sup> links section and look at the sites listed under community development.

# Evaluation

## *mc<sup>2</sup> evaluation for Project Partners*

By Gary Hardy - Centre for Community Networking Research, Monash University.

### Introduction

mc<sup>2</sup> is a highly innovative and genuinely ground breaking project. As far as we know, there are no similar projects anywhere, and certainly none of the scale of mc<sup>2</sup>. This program is unique in its attempt to assist groups which are currently under-represented in online activity to use Information Communication Technologies.

The developmental and pioneering nature of the mc<sup>2</sup> project has some special implications for evaluation. On one hand, the newness of the program means that there is a lack of collected knowledge about the program. There is still much to be known about, for example, the barriers for different groups, the ways in which different groups will take up the technology, and the impacts that this will have upon those groups. The program aims to impact in areas that are difficult to quantify, and there is a real challenge to gather meaningful information that gives a real sense of how the program is working.

Evaluation is important for any program – and it is doubly important for mc<sup>2</sup>. There are six main reasons why programs are evaluated:

1. **Learning** – given that this is such new territory, it is important that we collect and share experiences of what works well and what doesn't. The program is still evolving, and to have the optimum outcomes, possible future iterations need to draw upon the lessons of experience. Is the program replicable and transferable?
2. **Knowledge about impacts and outcomes** – it is important to understand how the program is working with the different groups, and to be alert for either unexpected benefits or unintended negative consequences
3. **Decision making** – the reality is that the mc<sup>2</sup> program is funded for 3 years, and that future funding will depend upon gathering and presenting adequate evidence that the program is meeting its stated goals
4. **Accountability** – mc<sup>2</sup> is funded by taxpayer dollars and needs to be able to show that those dollars are being well spent. Project Partners and individual community organisations will need to have ways of demonstrating that the time they have spent on the program has been worth the effort and the resources devoted to it.
5. **Management** – if there are barriers or problems or unrealistic expectations, it is better to be aware of them and modify activities to resolve them sooner rather than later
6. **Comparison** – are there any ways that mc<sup>2</sup> might be compared with other community ICT projects?

### Program Logic

The Centre for Community Networking Research at Monash University has been closely involved with the project over its development. As part of our work with the project we have analysed all of the available documentation to identify, as sharply as

possible, the “Program Logic” – the fundamental goals of the project. Based on our reading of this material, we suggest that the mc<sup>2</sup> project is intended to make an impact in four broad areas:

1. **Take up** by target groups – what has been the take up by target groups of training and technology (primarily, use of the web site and associated resources)?
2. **Skills development** by members of target groups – will members develop their skills and the range of technology that they are using?
3. **Community organisation effectiveness** – is it possible to identify changes in organisational effectiveness of groups and organisations as a result of their engagement with the program?
4. **Community Capacity and Social Capital** – have there been changes in broader community and social capital that could be attributed to the program?

Ideally, we should be collecting evidence that will enable us to better answer those questions.

Below are some suggested tools and approaches to gather data that might assist in answering both the broader evaluative questions and in assessing progress against the specific program logic.

### **Start Early**

There is always a danger that evaluation of programs is something that happens retrospectively – the program runs, then evaluators are appointed who try to make sense of what has happened in the program. While this approach can give a good objective sense of how a particular program went, there are numerous disadvantages and weaknesses inherent in such an approach. For example, this approach is dependent upon the calibre and understanding of the external evaluators, it can make different participants defensive, it can fail to involve all of the participants who might have information to provide, and by the time the retrospective evaluation is conducted, much of the relevant evidence has been lost.

Often, the easiest and most effective time to gather information such as demographic data is when people first engage with the program. Again, people quickly forget what things were like before they became involved with the program. For example, it can be hard to remember that you didn’t know something, and even harder to attribute the fact that you now know something to your involvement with the program. Thinking about gathering data right from the start of groups’ and individuals’ involvement with the program can be very useful.

### **Longitudinal Surveys**

The aspiration of the mc<sup>2</sup> program is that it will change people and organisations. One possible way of demonstrating that the program has had an impact is to take a snapshot of characteristics at both the beginning of involvement and at some subsequent point. The next two tools offer one way to do this.

The first – the **Members Skills Assessment** – aims to measure the ICT skill and to gather some demographic data from the community group members on the day that they receive their first training as part of your mc<sup>2</sup> project. At a later point in time, the same individuals should complete the same form a second time. Comparison of the two forms gives some indication of the level of development of individual ICT skills.

The second – **Community Organisation ICT involvement** – aims to measure the level of involvement by the community group with ICT. This survey should be conducted with the individual or individuals identified as moderators or owners of group. Once again, this survey should be conducted a second time at some later point in the program, ideally with the same individuals.

### **Anecdotes and quotes**

A very useful method of getting a qualitative sense of how things are going with the groups is to encourage the capture of good stories – of things like organisations or individuals who have made some sort of breakthrough, who achieved something thanks to the program that they would never have done otherwise, or who have become aware of a new skill or capacity. Quotable quotes and good anecdotes can be very powerful and illuminating.

### **Focus groups**

Running a structured get together of people involved in the program at various points of time within the program, and capturing the major themes and points of the discussion, is probably one of the richest ways of getting a sense of how things are going with your groups.

### **Case Studies**

Picking a specific group and describing its involvement with the program, drawing upon as many data sources as possible and aiming to describe the impacts on that particular group in as much detail as possible. The case study need be no more than a couple of pages, but it can be an extremely rich method of communicating and understanding the program's impact.

### **Forum Analysis**

Analysis of the postings to a group's Forum can be an efficient way to gain some sense of how the group is progressing, and what sort of impacts the program involvement is making across all of the major impact areas identified in the program logic. A detailed description of this method is in the section *Evaluating your online Forum*.

## Summary

The table below summarizes the tools and how they address the specific targets of the program.

*Table 1 – Evaluation tools and skills addressed summary*

<p><b>1. Take up by Target Group members</b></p> <p><i>What has been the take up by target groups of training and technology (primarily, use of the web site and its associated tools?)</i></p> <p><i>Suggested Methods:</i></p> <p><b>Member Skill Assessment</b> before and after survey</p> <p><b>Quotes, anecdotal stories</b></p> <p><b>Case Study</b></p> <p><b>Focus Group</b></p>	<p><b>2. Skills within Target Groups</b></p> <p><i>What has been the degree of skills development within target groups?</i></p> <p><i>Suggested Methods:</i></p> <p><b>Member Skill Assessment</b> before and after surveys</p> <p><b>Quotes, anecdotal stories</b></p> <p><b>Case Study</b></p> <p><b>Focus Group</b></p>
<p><b>3. Community Organisation Effectiveness</b></p> <p><i>What have been the changes in community organisation effectiveness? What organisational benefits can be identified?</i></p> <p><i>Suggested Methods:</i></p> <p><b>Community Organisation ICT involvement</b> before and after surveys,</p> <p><b>Focus groups</b> with moderators, owners and members from organisations,</p> <p><b>Forum analysis</b> of online interactions,</p> <p><b>Case studies.</b></p>	<p><b>4. Community Capacity and Social Capital</b></p> <p><i>What have been the changes in community and social capital?</i></p> <p><i>Suggested Methods:</i></p> <p><b>Focus groups</b> with moderators, owners and members from organisations,</p> <p><b>Forum analysis</b> of online interactions,</p> <p><b>Case studies.</b></p>

## Share

Even the best evaluative data is of limited use unless it is shared. As you collect, share as much as you can without breaching the confidence and privacy of the groups and individuals, either by including material in your reports to VICNET, or by posting to the mc<sup>2</sup> Project Partners Forum.

## ***Evaluating your online Forum...***

One of the nice things about online communities is that they leave a good textual record behind themselves as they develop. Entirely justifiable privacy concerns and legal prescriptions preclude examination of a group's online activities by external

parties – quite rightly, individual members and organisations do not want their deliberations and interactions watched or tracked.

In coming to an understanding of the nature of online communities, and in gaining an understanding of how these relatively new entities operate, grow, flourish or perish, this is a large body of potentially very useful data. Arrangements could be made between researchers or evaluators and individual groups, but this is potentially a very time consuming exercise.

I have been a founding member of a number of mc<sup>2</sup> organisations, and as such I have taken the liberty, as a participant eavesdropper, to develop and apply a simple methodology which if deployed by individual groups could yield some useful descriptive data without violating the privacy of the group.

Essentially the method requires the group to analyse the posting to the group in a structured way, to get a measure of some of the following:

- Number of members posting divided by total number of members
- Number of posts – excluding administrative posts – to which there was no response
- Number of posts within categories – these can be determined by the moderator
- How is the list working for the organisation – a brief account of why the list is working as it is working
- Some judicious quotes

*Table 2 – Structured Analysis of Group Forum*

Completed by _____			
Date <u>  </u> / <u>  </u> / <u>  </u>			
	Group n	Group n	Group n
		Threads	Posts
Founded			
Members			
Sample dates			
Number of posts			
Number of members posting			
Time elapsed since last post at time of sample			
Posts from Moderator(s )			
Posts with no replies (orphan posts)			
Social messages (“here is a photo of the wedding...”)			18

Introductions/welcomes (New member introductions and responses...)			20
Personal updates and provision of support			90
Organising events and activities for the group			31
Organising online activities and forum administration			20
Information requests/provision/sharing			32
Other – eg. request for information from external body			6
Thread to post ratio			

## The Method

Who should do it? Ideally the list owner or moderator. The method works best where the group is compared with another group or groups.

Firstly, take a reasonable sample of postings to the group. The size is constrained by the amount of time that the collector is prepared to spend. For low volume groups it might be all posts, for high volume groups it might be a couple of months. Even a small number can give a good idea of how the group is going.

Print off as many of the mc<sup>2</sup> Forum posts pages - the summary page that lists messages posted to the forum - as required to get your sample.

**Count:** I find it is helpful to use a pencil to mark off things as they are counted. The count (number of unique posters) divided by the total number of members of the online group arguably gives some idea of how engaged the group is as a whole. Just who is posting and how often is interesting and from your detailed knowledge of the context you might be able to make some comment on this – why is it as it is?

Number of posts from moderators/owners – gives an idea of how active the moderators are in the proceedings.

Number of posts for which there is no reply (you might want to exclude admin or announcement only posts) as a percentage of total number of posts.

If this has not exhausted you too much, a further stage is to think about what are the main categories of postings to the list. I'd suggest no more than five. Count how many threads (ie. new discussion) and response there are for each thread.

Select some judicious quotes that give the flavour of the online interactions

Write a brief description of the group's online activities, including an account of your sense of why the group is functioning as it is.

## **Worked Example**

Below is an example based on an analysis of two groups of which I am a participant member.

### **Context**

The two groups are in roughly the same sort of area – both are support groups aimed at people caring for children who may have some health issue or disability. Group A, which has the larger online membership, has in fact a much smaller potential membership group than Group B. Group A, as an organisation, did not exist prior to its online manifestation on mc<sup>2</sup>. Group B has a strong off line existence and a substantial organisational structure. Neither group had received funding or support from the mc<sup>2</sup> program at the time that the samples were taken.

### **Discussion of results**

Analysis of the following table (Table 3) indicates that Group A is successful in terms of volume of members, activity of members, and volume and currency of traffic. Group B shows all the signs of a group that has not successfully adopted the medium. The length of time since the last post tells a story. In group A, there are very few posts which have not stimulated a response from the group. The thread to post ratio for Group A is low – 0.2 – which indicates that on average each post has been responded to by a number of the members of the group. The thread to post ratio for Group B is high, indicating fewer responses by the group to any given post, and a relatively high number of posts have not been responded to.

The nature of the posts to Group A are good indicators of both social capital and community and organisational capacity building. There are social posts, and instances of support and information being sought and given. And there is clear evidence of the group as a community organisation making use of the medium to organise its activities. The text of Group A messages indicates that the posters value the online group highly: **“this is truly a unique and wonderful place to belong to”** and that it is demonstrably helping social capital **“knowing that I had all of you to turn to made it that little bit easier”**

By comparison, the posts to Group B indicate an aspiration to engage in the sorts of social capital and community and organisational capacity building – there are introductions, requests for information and some online administration messages – but no real evidence of these things happening.

While Group A has evolved as a space where people visiting expect and receive attention, Group B, unfortunately, seems to have become a deserted and abandoned space, which is not supported by the organisation, the moderator(s) or its members.

### **Why is it so?**

My sense is that Group A is lucky in its moderators and owners, who are skilled in using online media and who are committed to the group. They have been able to build a strong online culture which is perpetuated by the other members. The moderators make a point of welcoming all new members and responding to all new threads. Because the group is geographically dispersed, they have no other way of organising or communicating than online, so the mc<sup>2</sup> environment has become incorporated into the activity of the group.

Group B does not seem to have attracted the long term and ongoing commitment of its moderator/owners. After a brief flurry of activity, the organisation seems to have lost interest and apart from a few unanswered posts from new members, people have stopped visiting.

*Table 3 – Worked example of Structured Analysis of Group Forum*

Completed by Gary Hardy; Date:21/10/02						
	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group B	Group B	Group B
		Threads	Posts		Threads	Posts
Founded	June 2000			August 2000		
Members	159			55		
Sample dates	02/09/02 – 21/10/02			28/08/02 – 21/10/02		
Number of posts	261			17		
Number of members posting	43 or 27%			13 or 24%		
Time elapsed since last post at time of sample	0 days			18 days		
Posts from Moderator/(s)	39 or 14%			3 or 17%		
Posts with no replies (orphan posts)	2 or .007%			5 or .09%		
Social messages (“here is a photo of the wedding...”)		2	18			
Introductions/welcomes (New member introductions and responses...)		2	20		4	6
Personal updates and provision of support		32	90			
Organising events and activities for the group		4	31			
Organising online activities and forum administration		8	20		3	5

Information requests/provision/sharing		8	32		5	6
Other – eg. request for information from external body		3	6			
Thread to post ratio	.2			.7		

### **Conclusion**

The method above can give a reasonable description of the status of an online group, without breaching the privacy of the group concerned. I believe that it is worthwhile analysing postings to your mc<sup>2</sup> groups to see what sort of picture might emerge.

## Project Partner Reports

The general format of the reporting documents will remain the same for most reports. However, we are requesting more information that relates to a broadened definition of 'activity', taking into account all aspects of mc<sup>2</sup> functionality. This includes consideration of the following:

Activity and usage of the mc<sup>2</sup> application can be multi-faceted or quite task specific. We have found that whilst training may not lead to immediate group creation, it has given new users the opportunity to do the following:

- a) Navigate through the site and join already existing communities of interest, also helping the participant to grasp the use and development of an online community before proceeding with their own.
- b) Plan & give consideration to the aims and objectives of their online community, thereby spending the necessary time defining the group & given its purpose. This has been indicated by training participants intending on creating communities, but not immediately post-training (uptake slower than anticipated). This 'greyer' area of online community development and the skills needed to sustain an mc<sup>2</sup> group cannot be underestimated and add value to groups once they are created.
- c) Create and update multiple web pages. This has proven to be a valuable function for Users who are new to the Web. By spending time working towards publishing on the web, both Project staff and group participants have indicated that this previously deemed 'static' function actually enables people to become familiar, more at ease and confident enough with online technology to then continue to the more advanced point of online group creation. Similarly, when a training participant goes on to create a group, the group web page function is also proving to be popular, prior to the interactive features being fully employed.
- d) Not reflected in PP Statistical activity is the use of the file server. Uploading and downloading files has proven to be a challenging, yet valuable function for people. Therefore, many community members may rely heavily upon the web space and are using it regularly to access, share and store documents.

Taking into account additional activities that users of mc<sup>2</sup> have undertaken and/or experienced, as well as documenting other forms of participation that are occurring with mc<sup>2</sup> training participants post training, will provide the funding body a more 'wholistic' picture of your mc<sup>2</sup> project.

# Empowerment through Training

Empowerment through training is about people taking control of the learning process and coming away saying, “YES, now I can do this myself!”

## Setting the Scene (before you train)

*Here's the planning part...*

Ask questions like:

- Why are people coming to this training?
- What do people want to get out of this training?

In other words - What are the benefits of this training to the participants? The participants will want to know, “What’s in it for me?” and as a trainer you need to know their reasons for participating.

- What does the Project Partner need to achieve through this training process?

In fact, the training may well be a process rather than just a single event.

As a Trainer:

- Know your product/subject (particularly its ‘features’ and be able to relate these to ‘benefits’ for each of the participants).
- Know what people’s needs are by actively listening, ask them [maybe even ask at the time of enrolment (i.e. a brief questionnaire)].

## Delivering the Message (put it into action!)

*Let's work with and for those participants...*

“Train as though you are doing yourself out of a job!”

Use your experience(s) as a trainer to tell appropriate stories that relate the skills being learnt to the world of your participants, put yourself in the participant’s ‘shoes’.

Don’t be afraid to ‘push their hot buttons’.

Ensure that you meet the participants’ expressed needs and make the whole of the training experience enjoyable and valuable. This in turn will motivate and empower them to achieve their goals. The main aim of the training is to develop skills.

Make a mental note of the ‘encouragement/empowerment balance-sheet’ for each participant as this focuses on positive learning. Have faith in the participants going on to achieve what they have set out to do...

## Feedback and Follow-up (ask and check)

*Find out what people thought...*

Everyone needs to learn from the training experience. Ask what people thought of the training and give them the opportunity to do this anonymously. Ask for their thoughts on improving things and if there are other things that they would like to be trained in. Give opportunities for people to express their understanding and to contribute/share

their knowledge with the rest of the participants. Incorporate people's thoughts and feedback into your planning for the next session or follow-up.

Wrap-up and summarise the training so that any 'loose ends' are pulled together. Congratulate people on their achievements!!

### **Success (well done!)**

Project success involves:

- Technical Skills
- Attitude/Motivation
- Socialisation/People Behaviours

And training largely focuses on the development of technical skill and the confidence to use them.

For any further advice on training delivery please do not hesitate to contact our mc<sup>2</sup> trainer.

## Success and Sustainability

There have been great changes in what we mean by **community**, particularly since the development of Online Communities: those that exist in a virtual sense. Technology has had an impact on the way we live our lives, and also affects the ways we interact with other people. It could be argued that just as technology affects us, we also affect it. How we use it and what we do with it gives it meaning. Without people, computers would mean nothing. The tools that can be used to create an online community group are only of value if people know how to, and want to use them.

What follows are four key points used to describe an online community:

- It is interactive and built on the concept of many-to-many communications
- It is designed to attract and retain community members who become directly involved in community events
- It has a defining focus that gives people a reason to return
- It provides services and/or information to community members that meet their needs

Either getting an existing community group online, or forming a new virtual group can be a challenging endeavour. Not only do you need to make sure the basics are covered, such as access to an Internet-enabled PC and that your (potential) members know how to use email and a web browser, but you have to provide your members with the knowledge of how to register, subscribe and interact online.

Selling the idea of an online community may not be easy, and there are a variety of reasons as to why you may find it difficult to get people to join, or if they do subscribe to a group you've created, why they may not be considered 'active'. If people feel as though an online community would be nothing more than additional work, then they are less likely to become involved on a regular basis, and regularity is one of the keys to having, and maintaining an active and successful group.

An online community can be used in a variety of ways:

- To increase visibility about an issue of concern
- To mobilise people to advocate an issue of concern
- To facilitate shared learning
- To support events within a community
- To announce information and disseminate it quickly
- To recruit new members and broaden involvement

Here are four important factors to consider in creating a 'successful' online community:

1. **Cooperation** (taking into consideration issues of hierarchy, organisational power and membership needs)
2. **Principles** (the development of guidelines, codes of conduct, privacy)

3. **Sustainability** (human interface/moderator role, maintaining momentum and relevance)
4. **Purpose** (goals, directions, outcomes)

One particularly critical factor in getting people to mc<sup>2</sup> is that there is a **purpose**. If it is an existing group that has decided that it would benefit by being online then, to a large extent, a purpose already exists. The reason for why this group is already operational (whether it be a cause, a service, a commonality or a special interest) may simply be transposed onto mc<sup>2</sup>, and rather than spending money on postage for newsletters, or phone calls to arrange meetings, all this can be done online. However questions must also be posed, such as: what is it the group hopes to *accomplish* by being online? What are the goals and expectations? Are they relatively specific? Clear enough to be promoted to new members?

The importance of developing **principles** and **guidelines** very early on cannot be underestimated; in fact, some people have suggested that it is important to at least draft such documents prior to even creating the community. Such a process is very much tied to the group's *purpose*. It gives the online community a starting point, a framework for how it may operate, and guidelines for things such as behaviour in a chat room and plans for the use of the various web tools available.

Most community groups also have existing structures in place with regards to the dissemination of information and the organisation of activities, and it is important to take this into consideration when working with a group. For example, does the group you propose to train and bring online have people who are responsible for certain tasks, and if so, will they also be responsible for the online tasks? Developing online communities with existing community groups relies upon ongoing **cooperation**, giving all members a sense of ownership and involvement.

Another very important point is identifying and training **moderators**. It is becoming increasingly clear that the role of the moderator is a critical factor in the success of a group. Unless someone is willing to take the responsibility to do things such as approve membership when requested, update information shared, answer questions, approve links/events, then the momentum of the group may suffer. When identifying and training owners and moderators of groups it is important to emphasise how crucial their role is. Not only must they have the technology skills, but also good people skills. These people are particularly crucial in the early stages of developing an online community, as once a critical mass of participants has joined, then to a certain degree momentum will be generated. And others may be recruited along the way to share the moderating tasks and alleviate the responsibility being placed on only one or two people. Moderators may also be required to, at times, remind participants of their purposes and responsibilities. They must be supported in many ways, if the group is to be **sustainable**.

It must also be noted that it is even more crucial to consider these points if the intended participants are coming to a group created and started at mc<sup>2</sup>, as opposed to being involved in a group that considers themselves an already defined community. Whether online or not online, community does, and should, mean different things to different people.

## Tips for Owners and Moderators of Online Communities

We have identified three key areas where online groups/communities may have difficulty either gaining membership, or where existing membership remains inactive. What follows is some measures that can be taken to increase online activities and enhance your online community.

### Access

It is foreseeable that some of your community members may not have access to the appropriate equipment. If someone cannot get to an Internet-enabled computer they are not going to be able to participate in your group's online activities. So, prior to training or any sort of regular involvement in your group, the member must be able to get to a computer, and also be able to revisit it with some regularity.

One place to look for public access to training and computer facilities is via the Skills.net programs. The site [www.skills.net.au](http://www.skills.net.au) allows you to look for projects within your area by searching via location. You can contact the project directly to get information about Introductory Internet training classes and to find out how many public access hours they provide.

Your community members can also access listings of public computer facilities via the site [www.librariesvictoria.net](http://www.librariesvictoria.net). This also allows you to search via location to find the nearest public library to you or your group members. All public libraries have Internet access, however hours of computer availability may vary so it is advised that you contact the library to check times.

### Skills

It may be the case that you know of people who would want to, and could benefit from, joining your group but require some basic computer training in the use of the Internet and Email. You could make your potential community members aware of the availability of free introductory courses and suggest that they may want to take advantage of the opportunity to learn some new skills as well as participate in your online activities.

Both Skills.net centres and the Skills.net Roadshow offer free training courses for people who have had little or no experience with the Internet and email before. There are regular courses scheduled in the offices of VICNET in Melbourne, Skills.net centres and programs operating across Victoria. The Roadshow is available to travel to metropolitan Melbourne, and rural and regional areas across the state, allowing everyone to access My Connected Community training- <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/training/> as well as courses entitled "Welcome to the Net", "Find it on the Net" and "Introduction to web-based Email" [www.vicnet.net.au/training/courses.html](http://www.vicnet.net.au/training/courses.html)

If your members are familiar with the use of email and a browser, they will find navigating their way around, and participating in, your online community group a lot easier.

## Content

Once you have given your members information about your group, such as finding the web site and registration, a good way to instigate activity is by creating some material, such as your group's web page, posting a couple of forum threads of discussion, placing a welcome message in the guest book, importing a banner to your group's opening page or creating categories for others to post links.

See <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/tips> for more ideas. To make your group a dynamic one it is important to encourage *participation* amongst your group's members, after all, an online community should be just that – a *community!*

My Connected Community Website: <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au>

For HELP call VICNET Help Desk on 8664 7001 or 1800 629 835

or email: [mc2@vicnet.net.au](mailto:mc2@vicnet.net.au)



## Resources

Resource	URL or Address
My Connected Community website	<a href="http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/">http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/</a>
<p data-bbox="236 483 699 555"><a href="http://www.ccnr.net/">Centre for Community Networking Research</a></p> <p data-bbox="236 555 738 741">School of Information Management Systems, Monash University. Includes info on Community Networking Conference: "Electronic Networks - Building Community"</p>	<a href="http://www.ccnr.net/">http://www.ccnr.net/</a>
<p data-bbox="236 810 485 846"><a href="http://www.australiansonline.net.au/">Australians Online</a></p> <p data-bbox="236 846 766 1211">Australians Online is a growing network of commercial free websites where Australians can build online communities by story telling and information sharing. An initiative of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australians Online offers anybody with access to the internet the opportunity to browse the network and access the stories and information on any site.</p>	<a href="http://www.australiansonline.net.au/">http://www.australiansonline.net.au/</a>
<p data-bbox="236 1281 592 1317"><a href="http://communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/">Community Builders NSW</a></p> <p data-bbox="236 1317 766 1794">communitybuilders.nsw is an interactive electronic clearing house for everyone involved in community level social, economic and environmental renewal including community leaders, community &amp; government workers, volunteers, program managers, academics, policy makers, youth and seniors. NSW-based, it has links and case studies, including information on how to use technology and the Internet as a community building tool. See <a href="#">Link with Others</a>.</p>	<a href="http://communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/">http://communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/</a>
<p data-bbox="236 1868 453 1904"><a href="http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/">Our Community</a></p> <p data-bbox="236 1904 772 2009">Australian organisation creating a way to have access to get funding, give money &amp; time or receive help. There are five</p>	<a href="http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/">http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/</a>

key windows on the site with many pages of information and data resources. Covers: Grants and Fundraising, Giving Time & Money, Advice and Learning, Purchasing, Technology.

[EdNA Online Forum](http://forum.edna.edu.au/)

The EdNA Online Forum is a tool for ordinary educators to join in and create online discussion about teaching and learning. Currently there are 1470 registered participants. Discussion is at the heart of learning. Online discussion allows people to share and learn across distances and across time.

<http://forum.edna.edu.au/>

[Nine MSN Web Communities](http://groups.msn.com/)

Australian Web Community features: Access from anywhere. Choose your privacy options. Up to 3 MB free storage. Customise pages without HTML. You control who joins. Commercial site, so features banner ads.

<http://groups.msn.com/>

[ez board](http://www.ezboard.com/)

Large, international, online community service, consisting of over 700,000 communities and over 5 million registered users.

<http://www.ezboard.com/>

[Community Zero](http://www.communityzero.com/)

CommunityZero is an interactive website that allows a group of people to communicate and exchange information over the Internet in their own private and secure area. Within each area, called an online community, participants are provided access to a suite of tools that enable a group to effectively get organised, share knowledge and communicate.

<http://www.communityzero.com/>

[Neighborhood Link](http://www.neighborhoodlink.com/)

Providing Free Interactive Neighborhood Web Sites. Based in Colorado, USA.

<http://www.neighborhoodlink.com/>

<p><a href="http://www.poorrichard.com/communities/"><u>Poor Richard's Building Online Communities</u></a>  This book has an associated web page of great links to <a href="#"><u>Resources for Online Communities</u></a>. This includes: <a href="#"><u>What is a Virtual Community</u></a>, <a href="#"><u>IRChelp.org</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Internet Relay Chat (IRC) help archive</u></a> and more.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.poorrichard.com/communities/"><u>http://www.poorrichard.com/communities/</u></a></p>
<p><a href="http://virtualcommunities.start4all.com/"><u>Start-4-All: Virtual Communities.com</u></a>  List of links to Virtual Communities</p>	<p><a href="http://virtualcommunities.start4all.com/"><u>http://virtualcommunities.start4all.com/</u></a></p>
<p><a href="http://sen-dev.socialchange.net.au/"><u>Social Entrepreneurs Network</u></a>  The Social Entrepreneurs Network is a mutual learning, support and promotional network. It is a network created by social entrepreneurs for social entrepreneurs. The Network was formed to enable social entrepreneurs in Australia and New Zealand to be more effective, more successful, and more prominent in public life.</p>	<p><a href="http://sen-dev.socialchange.net.au/"><u>http://sen-dev.socialchange.net.au/</u></a></p>
<p><a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/"><u>Yahoo Groups</u></a>  eGroups merged with Yahoo! in August 2000. It's free, but has banner ads. What is a Group? One email address &amp; website that allows you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share photos &amp; files, plan events, send a newsletter</li> <li>• Stay in touch with friends and family</li> <li>• Discuss sports, health, current events, and more...</li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/"><u>http://groups.yahoo.com/</u></a></p>