

Project Management System Table of Contents

Establishing Successful Professional Learning Communities.....	p. 2
Defining the Problem and Setting SMART Goals.....	p. 4
SMART Goals.....	p. 6
Designing Action Plan Strategies.....	p. 7
Implementing the Action Plan Strategies Using a Project Management Plan.....	p. 9
Project Management Plan.....	p. 10
Evaluating the Implementations Impact on Student Outcomes.....	p. 12
Change Management.....	p. 13
Resource Needs.....	p. 16
Additional Tools for Managing the Project.....	p. 17
Meeting Notes Template.....	p. 18
Matters of Concern.....	p. 19
Budget.....	p. 20



Establishing Successful Professional Learning Communities

The Center on Education and Work strives to support the successful implementation of innovative practice and reform efforts within schools and other educational organizations. Our method involves working directly with a team of educators to support the professional development and technical assistance needs to conduct a time-limited set of activities designed to improve student outcomes. The approach combines the best-practice strategies associated with professional learning team development with a project management system designed to help manage the challenges associated with implementing innovative practice.

According to Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008), the “most recent model of professional development ultimately requires a fundamental change in the institutional structures that have governed schooling, as it has traditionally existed” (p. 80). Establishing Professional Learning Communities has become the method of choice for school reform.

A professional learning community begins with a team of professionals within a school or organization who share a common vision for change and innovative practice. The purpose of the professional learning community is to encourage the implementation of innovative educational strategies that promote improved student outcomes. Characteristics of an effective professional learning community (DuFour, 2004; Newman, et. al., 1996) include:

1. Establishing a shared definition of the issues and challenges that need to be addressed and a collective understanding of how all educators are responsible for addressing those issues and challenges,
2. Maintaining focus on improving student learning outcomes,
3. Creating opportunities for reflective dialogue,
4. Establishing a collaborative enterprise of activity between and among educators.

Generally, the professional learning community begins with a leadership team. The leadership team includes individuals who share a common belief or definition of an issue and believe that change is possible and are in position of authority within the school or organization to facilitate change. The key challenge of any professional learning community is changing the norms and traditional beliefs in ways that improve student learning outcomes. While the leaders who initiate the professional learning community may have excellent ideas and may generate innovative strategies, the strategies are likely to stall or fail in improving student learning outcomes unless the leaders gain buy-in from the others and involve others in generating the action plans to be implemented.

To support the success of the professional learning community, The Center on Education and Work has designed a project management system. The project management system is a strategy designed to help the professional learning community define a career development problem to address, establish a plan for gaining buy-in among other educators or organization members, develop innovative action plan strategies, implement the strategies, and evaluate the results.



The System involves four phases:

- Defining the Problem
- Designing Action Plan Strategies
- Implementing the Action Plan Strategies
- Evaluating the Implementation Impact on Student Outcomes

In addition, change management associated with communication plans and resource needs are considered for each phase. Change management refers to two essential elements of the project: communication plans and resource needs. Communication planning is necessary to initially gain buy-in by other key members of the school or organization. Communication is vital for keeping all members aware of activities, successes, and changes to the project. Resource needs refer to the technical resources, time allocations, and financial needs of the project. Technical resources refer to the professional development needs, software, computing, analysis, and/or report writing aspects of the project.

The methods being used to provide technical assistance and support to the professional learning community was created in response to teacher feedback to a national survey conducted by the American Psychological Association's Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education (2006; http://www.apa.org/ed/cpse/tns_execsummary.pdf). In a survey of over 2000 educators from across the country, teachers indicated a clear preference for development activities that are delivered to a team of educators using workshop and online formats.

The Center on Education and Work's Professional Development plan combines all three of the recommended best practice strategies. At least five educators from a given school or organization were requested to participate in the workshop portion of the professional development activities. Webinar technology is being used to provide online technical assistance during the project period in order to receive project updates and provide on-going support.

The Center on Education and Work's Project Management System offers professional learning communities the opportunity to successfully design, manage and execute innovative activities within schools and organizations. The System is a customized version that is based on the University of Wisconsin Department of Information Technology (DOIT) project management system resources (Source: <http://pma.doit.wisc.edu/>).



Defining the Problem and Setting SMART Goals

Professional learning communities are generated in order to resolve or address a problem. The definition of the problem is important because it frames the range of innovative strategies that are likely to be generated. And, while educators may each have a perspective about a problem, gathering and analyzing data and information can help separate beliefs from facts.

Example: For career development, the overriding theme can be framed as youth remaining disengaged unless he or she is able to establish future work goals and become aware of how current academic opportunities prepare him or her for achieving these goals. The same issue can be framed according to the 21st Century skills framework as helping youth become ready to enter today's world of work by developing the soft skills as a complement the current focus on reading, writing, and math skills. A third way of framing the issue is from a need to help students develop individual learning plans that helps them focus on aligning academic coursework in ways that lead to self-determined career goals.

It is always helpful to support the definition of the problem with data, reliable events or observations.



S/N	Problem	Data Indicators	Source
1.	Helping students become more self-directed, engaged learners begins with helping them perceive the relevance of his or her coursework and establishing strong connections between students, teachers and peers.	% of students from xx school indicated they do not see school as relevant to future goals Students reporting clear career goals reported significantly higher school engagement and recorded higher grades and attendance	School pilot survey to 12 th grade students in Spring 2008 XX School Engagement Report (Center on Education and Work, 2009)
2.	Students are not aware of how academic coursework prepares them to achieve self-defined career goals.	% of students from xx school indicated they do not see school as relevant to future goals	School pilot survey to 12 th grade students in Spring 2008
3.	Students are less motivated to learn unless they perceive the relevance of coursework as helping them to achieve post-secondary goals	Students reporting higher ratings for school work as relevant to his or her career goals were significantly more likely to report being motivated to attend school because it is enjoyable or meaningful	XX School Engagement Report (Center on Education and Work, 2009)
4.	Students without clear post-secondary goals and plans for meeting those goals will perform below their true potential.	% of students from xx school complete AP courses and % of students apply to colleges and universities.	School pilot survey to 12 th grade students in Spring 2008
5.	Too many students feel lost with regard to future goals and aspirations.	% of students from xx school indicated they are not sure of what they want to do after high school	% of students from xx school indicated they do not see school as relevant to future goals
6.	Unless students feel connected to teachers and peers, they will be more likely to be absent and not be retained	Students reporting stronger relational connections with teachers and peers have better academic outcomes (including attendance) and are more likely to be retained.	Close and Solberg (2008). Article in Journal of Vocational Behavior.
7.	Preparing students for the world of work involves helping them develop the resilience skills needed to navigate an ever changing world or work.		
8.	Without career exploration skills, students will not possess the skills needed to make effective post-secondary transitions.		



SMART Goals

Using SMART goal planning strategies helps to keep the focus on performance-based student outcomes.

From the definition of the problem, the solution strategy can be framed in terms of one or more S.M.A.R.T. goals –

- S = Specific,
- M = Measurable,
- A = Achievable, Attainable
- R = Relevant, Realistic and
- T = Time period.

Below are some examples of goals designed around the SMART guidelines:

S/N	SMART Goal
1.	Goal 1 A total of xx% of the aa students at xyz school/organization will demonstrate significant career development as measured by the completion of individual learning plans during the 2008/09 school year.
2.	Goal 2 A total of 80% of the students at Midwest High School will demonstrate significant improvements in perceiving the relevance of education as measured by the completion of an attitude survey administered at the beginning and end of the school year.
3.	Goal 3 A total of 80% of the students with disabilities at Midwest High School who participate in the high school transition program will demonstrate improved attendance and reduced behavior incident reports during the 2008 academic year as compared to the 2007 academic year.



Designing Action Plan Strategies

Action plan strategies are the activities to be used to improve student outcomes. The activities should be research based either because they have been found to improve student outcomes, or because the activities include research based strategies that have been found to increase outcomes in related activities.

S/N	Action Plan Strategies	
1	Goal 1	A total of xx% of the aa students at xyz school/organization will demonstrate significant career development as measured by the completion of individual learning plans during the 2008/09 school year.
2	Action Plan 1.1	Each student will develop and/or update an individualized learning plan during the first month of the academic year.
3	Action Plan 1.2	All ninth grade students will complete 10 hours of career exploration using the online career information system.
4	Action Plan 1.3	All 11 th grade students will complete 10 hours of career exploration using the online career information system.
5	Action Plan 1.4	All 12 th grade students will complete 10 hours of job search skills development.
6	Detail Rationale	<p>By reviewing his or her ILP, students are able to identify the learning opportunities available to him or her during the upcoming academic year. In addition, students may change post-secondary plans and review of the ILP will help to align the learning opportunities and academic coursework accordingly.</p> <p>For 9th and 10th grade students, a sequenced set of activities will include assessment, occupational search, and educational search. Each student will write a five page summary paper that outlines the results of the assessment and plans for post-secondary experiences. The paper will be stored in his or her electronic ILP.</p> <p>For 11th grade students, a sequenced set of activities will focus on occupation search and identification of post-secondary education and training opportunities. The results will be stored in his or her electronic ILP.</p> <p>For 12th grade students, a sequenced set of activities will focus on writing resumes, cover letters, and budget planning. The results will be stored in his or her electronic ILP.</p>



S/N	Action Plan Strategies	
7	Goal 2	A total of 80% of the students at Midwest High School will demonstrate significant improvements in perceiving the relevance of education as measured by the completion of an attitude survey administered at the beginning and end of the school year.
8	Action Plan 2.1	
9	Action Plan 2.2	
10	Goal 3	A total of 80% of the students with disabilities at Midwest High School who participate in the high school transition program will demonstrate improved attendance and reduced behavior incident reports during the 2008 academic year as compared to the 2007 academic year.
11	Action Plan 3.1	
12	Action Plan 3.2	



Implementing the Action Plan Strategies Using a Project Management Plan

Implementing the activities must also be carefully planned and orchestrated. While ideas are often exciting on paper and in conversation, the implementation tests the level of buy-in and commitment of the individuals conducting the implementation. If individuals conducting the activities do not feel confident in conducting the activities, it is likely that the efficacy of the implementation will not maximize its impact on student outcomes. Also, success of the implementation will be negatively impacted if resources are not available with regard to time and space, professional development opportunities, or financial remuneration

The purpose of the project management plan is articulate the tasks that need to be completed for each activity and set a tentative timeline for completion of the activities and tasks. By indicating who is responsible for each task, the division of labor needed to complete the project can be easily assessed. Knowing who is responsible for the task also helps manage communication on the project.

The S/N refers to the subject number – by using the numbering system it is easy to locate and discuss specific points.

Planned Start and End Dates provide a basic idea of when different activities and tasks need to be completed in the successful execution of the project is to occur. These dates can vary but should be within the overall activity start and end date.

Responsibility refers to the group or individuals within the school or organization that manages the activity and/or task.

Project Management Plan					
S/N	Goal/ Activity	Description	Planned Start Date	Planned End Date	Responsibility
1	Goal 1				
1.1	Action Plan 1				
1.1.1	Task 1.1				
1.1.2	Task 1.2				
1.1.3	Task 1.3				
1.1.4	Task 1.4				
1.1.5	Task 1.4				



Evaluating the Implementations Impact on Student Outcomes

It is not enough that we can design exciting activities that educators and students “enjoy” doing. We need to demonstrate that the activities improve student outcomes. These outcomes can be specific to the activity and can be measured as changes in attitudes and behavior. For at-risk students we want our activities to improve grades, credits earned, and attendance. For students on grade level and deemed not at-risk, changes can be measured in terms of effort expended in coursework and the rigor levels of selected coursework. High-performing students drop out of college at alarming rates and the generation has been labeled as “motivated but directionless” (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

S/N Evaluation Plan		
1	Goal 1	A total of xx% of the aa students at xyz school/ organization will demonstrate significant career development as measured by the completion of individual learning plans during the 2008/09 school year.
2	Action Plan 1.1	Each student will develop and/or update an individualized learning plan during the first month of the academic year.
3	Evaluation 1.1	A rubric will be used to assess the degree to which student ILP’s incorporated “Guidepost” learning indicators and nine key curriculum development indicators.



Change Management

Too often innovative ideas with great potential for improving student outcomes fail to work because attention has not been adequately paid to managing the impact of the change on the school or organization. For professional learning communities to be effective, they must gain buy-in from others with regard to the problem being addressed, the goals established, and the action plan strategies being implemented.

The two change management processes that together are necessary to ensure successful project implementation include the communication plan and the resource needs.

Communication Plan

The purpose of the communication plan is to ensure the professional learning community provides relevant, accurate, and consistent project information to project stakeholders and other appropriate audiences. By effectively communicating the project can accomplish its work with the support and cooperation of each stakeholder group.

The communication plan provides a framework to manage and coordinate the wide variety of communications that take place during the project. The communication plan addresses the phase of the project, objective of the communication, audience, and delivery method.



S/N	Communication Phase	Objective	Audience	Delivery Method	Timeline
1.	Defining the Problem	Develop consensus regarding the problem that is being addressed. Gain input and ideas regarding the goals being established.	School Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-five page overview 	August 25, 2008
			School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerpoint presentation Two-five page overview 	September Meeting
			Department Chairs/Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerpoint presentation Two-five page overview 	September Meeting
			Teachers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ½ day forum discussion; Show and process "Shift Happens" Powerpoint presentation Two-five page overview 	August 27, 2008
			Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent meeting Powerpoint 2-page summary Add to Newsletter 	Back to School Night
			Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom discussion Powerpoint 2-page summary 	September TBD
			School administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary report 	September TBD
			School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerpoint presentation Summary report 	September Board Meeting
2.	Designing Action Plan Strategies	Brainstorm ideas for different action plans and gain consensus regarding the strategies to be employed. Identify the resources and professional development needs for the school and organization.	Department Chairs/Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerpoint presentation Two-five page overview 	September TBD
			Teachers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ½ day forum discussion Powerpoint presentation Two-five page overview 	August 27, 2008
			Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent meeting Powerpoint 2-page summary 	Back to School Night
			Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom discussion Powerpoint 2-page summary 	September TBD
			School administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-five page overview posted on school intranet Weekly update on school Intranet 	November TBD
			Teachers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-five page overview posted on school intranet Weekly update on school Intranet 	



S/N	Communication Phase	Objective	Audience	Delivery Method	Timeline
3.	Implementing the Action Plan Strategies	Establish a reporting system to update the progress of the execution of the action plan strategies. Communicate progress periodically of the implementation to key stakeholders.	School administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-five page overview posted on school intranet 	Weekly update on school intranet
			School Board		As requested
			Department Chairs/Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-five page overview posted on school intranet 	Weekly update on school intranet
			Teachers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-five page overview posted on school intranet 	Weekly update on school intranet
			Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-page summary 	Spring newsletter
			Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD 	
4.	Evaluating the Implementations Impact on Student Outcomes	Establish evaluation plan. Execute the evaluation plan. Communicate the results and implications of the evaluation plan.	School administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation plan Summary and final report 	March Update June Final Report
			School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerpoint presentation Summary and final report 	June TBD
			Department Chairs/Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerpoint presentation Summary and final report 	March Update June Final Report
			Teachers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary and final report 	March Update June Final Report
			Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary report 	March and June Newsletter



Resource Needs

Resources needs refer to the technical resources, time allocations, and financial needs of the project. Technical resources refer to the professional development needs, software, computing, analysis, and/or report writing aspects of the project.

S/N	Action Plan	Description	Technical Resources	Time Allocation	Financial
1	1.1				
2	1.2				
3	1.3				
4	1.4				



Additional Tools for Managing the Project

Four additional forms are designed to help manage the project – Timeline, meeting notes, matters of concern, and budget.

Timeline

The timeline allows the professional learning community to track the progress and accomplishments of the group. This is a great way to report back to administrators and staff the important progress that is being made.

Timeline					
S/N	Task	Percent Completed	Original Completion Date	Revised Completion Date	Comments
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					



Meeting Notes

The strategy for meeting notes is only to record important decisions and agreed upon actions that need to occur. This allows for a shorter set of notes, clear understanding of who is following up, and can surface issues when they arise.

Meeting Notes for XXX Professional Learning Community

Date

Location

Members Present

S/N	Subject/Actions	Action by
1.0	Topic	
1.1	What action will be taken	Who is following up
2.0	Topic	
2.1	What action will be taken	



Matters of Concern

This form is to follow up on issues that were raised at the previous or recent meetings in order to track whether actions were completed. Generally, the beginning of a meeting would address the Matters of Concern prior to beginning the new business items.

Progress Report

Date

Location

MATTERS of CONCERN

S/N	Ref. No.	Subject	Action to be Taken	Action by	Status
1	1.1				
2	1.1				
3	2.1				
4	2.2				



Budget

Often a budget is needed when applying for funding or when discussing with the administration the costs associated with a given project. Budget detail varies based on the organization. Many organizations will provide a specific budget outline that needs to be followed. This budget is extensive and contains many of the requested elements found in other budgets.

Professional Learning Community Costs							
Personnel							
Role on Project	Name		rate/mo.	% time	Year 1 months		TOTAL
							0
							0
TOTAL SALARIES			FTE -->	0.00			0
Fringe Benefits		Yr 1 Rate					
Fringe Rate		37.50%					0
TOTAL FRINGE BENEFITS							0
TOTAL SALARIES AND FRINGE BENEFITS							0
Supplies		Cost/FTE/Year	-	-	-		
Office Supplies		\$300	-	-	-		0
Other							
TOTAL SUPPLIES							0
Other							
Stipends/Honorariums	teachers over summer						
Refreshments							
Reception location							
Administrative/Computer Support	Cost/FTE/Month	100					0
TOTAL OTHER							0
Total Direct Costs							0

