

2021 NASPE Award Nomination for the
Advancing the HR Profession Award

Developing HR Professionals through Communities of Practice



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What is a State of Arizona Human Resources Community of Practice (COP)?

The State’s Communities of Practice (COPs) are *think tanks* focused on various HR disciplines and comprise HR professionals with various levels of experience and tenure. Members bring both public and private sector perspectives and learn from each other to solve challenging *real world* HR-related issues. COPs range in size from 10 to more than 50 members and provide enterprise solutions to more than 100 agencies, boards and commissions. Membership is at the discretion of the State’s Chief HR Officers.

These *think tanks* are commissioned to research challenging HR-related issues and propose, deploy, and advocate adoption of best practices across the state enterprise. COP members work to break down silos through networking and collaboration across agencies and divisions to provide viable solutions. These efforts develop HR professionals’ skills in ethical practice, consulting, business acumen, communication, and they enhance practitioner knowledge in alignment with the State’s HR competencies.

How long have COPs been in existence?

The first COP was inaugurated on February 20, 2018; since then six new COPs have commenced (see **Table 1A** below). COP members establish their meeting cadence ranging from monthly to quarterly, and all adhere to the Arizona State Personnel Rules. Other established guidelines require regular attendance, availability to research and document findings, discussion facilitation and group presentations, root cause and other types of analyses, as well as advocacy for identified solutions.

Table 1A

Community of Practice Initiation Dates						
Classification and Compensation	One-on-One Coaching	FMLA and ADA	Employee Relations (ER)	Recruiting	HR Operations	Learning and Development
February 2018	October 2018		November 2018	December 2018	September 2019	August 2020

Why were Communities of Practice created?

The Department of Administration (DOA) is responsible for setting statewide policies and executive governance. However, in the State’s decentralized HR structure, each agency has its own HR staff who set and execute policies, conduct investigations and perform all other HR duties. Thus, it is imperative to have highly trained, capable HR professionals across the State.

COPs were developed in alignment with the State’s HR Academy to provide ongoing learning and growth opportunities for HR professionals, break down silos and collaboratively offer *enterprise* solutions to challenging HR issues. COP members are accountable for conducting their own research, data collection, and issue analysis to identify root causes. Significant areas of development include:

- Deeper understanding of HR disciplines (e.g. employee relations, compensation)
- Learn/Enhance research skills (e.g. benchmark other jurisdictions, SHRM, etc.)
- Strengthen business acumen skills (e.g. understand HR’s impact on business operations)
- Improve communication, facilitation, consultation, negotiation and advocacy skills
- Transform from *HR practitioners* to *strategic thinkers* and capable business partners

See **Table 2B** for significant COP contributions and professional development.

Table 2B

COP SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	
Recruiting	SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS: Replacement of the State’s 11-year-old job board PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Learned project management skills, iterative testing/ feedback and a deeper understanding of the job board’s internal process flows. The job board was replaced in November 2020. (AZStateJobs.gov)
Employee Relations (ER)	SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS: (1) Created ‘Reasonable Suspicion Testing in a Telework Environment’ guidelines and (2) Currently creating tools for investigations and reports. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: (1) Increased understanding of employer/employee issues in cases of reasonable suspicion when teleworking, and (2) Learned effective ER investigation skills and best practices when preparing investigative reports.
FMLA/ADA	SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS: The COP conducted a kaizen event ¹ on the FMLA/ADA processes including forms and timeframes, then created an enterprise wide process flow and forms . PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Learned root cause analysis, process flow and

¹ A Kaizen Event is any action whose output is intended to improve an existing process.

	identifying and eliminating waste in HR processes.
Learning & Development	SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS: Created virtual learning modules for Remote Work PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Learned research techniques, storyboarding and curriculum development and new accommodation tools for persons with disabilities.
Class and Comp	SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS: Created Position Description Writing Guidelines PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Learned how to coach managers to draft effective position descriptions.
1:1 Coaching	SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS: Created tips for “virtual” coaching and ways to stay connected with remote work employees PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Learned how to coach leaders to lead remote teams and maintain employee engagement in a remote work environment.

For more information on COP contributions, click [here](#).

What are the costs for the Communities of Practice?

The cost of the employee’s participation in a COP is funded by their employing agency. Funding for office supplies, meeting space (when in-person), and other ancillary costs comes from various sources within the enterprise including the Pro Rata Fund within ADOA.

How do you measure the success of the Communities of Practice?

Arizona has about 500 employees who spend at least 51% of their day performing HR duties; 53% of them are COP members, which means over one-half of the State’s HR professionals participate in *think tanks* to strategically solve issues. Success is measured by the meaningful solutions and metrics documented in **Table 2B** above.

How have the Communities of Practice changed since inception?

Since the inception of COPs, they have matured into highly respected and powerful resources. Today, HR challenges are addressed promptly, without the lag time that occurs when assembling an ad hoc problem solving project team. COPs dutifully meet two important State needs by providing: (1) ongoing HR professional development and exposure, and (2) teams of professionals readily available to tackle HR challenges. COPs are low-cost, easy to initiate and a great source of continuous professional development for HR practitioners. The State of Arizona HR would be happy to assist other states in initiating COPs.