

**Rural R&D for Profit program
Final Report**

Improved use of seasonal forecasting to increase
farmer profitability



APPENDIX 12

Australian seasonal forecasting Community of Practice; Implementation Strategy – Working Document.

“A group of willing practitioners with a common sense of purpose who agree to work together to solve problems, share knowledge, cultivate best practice and foster innovation.”

Introduction

This document outlines the approach taken and activities required to implement and operate the Australian Seasonal Forecasting CoP throughout the life of the ‘Improved use of seasonal forecasting to increase farmer profitability’ project.

Establishing the CoP will be conducted in three phases over the life of the project:

Phase 1:

A CoP ‘core’ is established consisting of all project personnel. This core will also include a small number of representatives external to the project. This may include other climate/seasonal forecasting organisations and/or agricultural operators with an interest in seasonal forecasting. It is anticipated that this core will consist of 20 to 30 members and will be completed by the end of 2016.

This core will be responsible for agreeing upon Terms of Reference that meet both project and member objectives, user testing potential platform/s and identifying issues and mitigating risks prior to the CoP being made available to a wider audience.

Phase 2:

Phase two will commence in 2017 allowing time for sufficient project related products, tools and services to be developed. These resources will act as a strong incentive for participation.

This phase will expand on the networks of individuals within the CoP where ‘core’ members will invite peers who they feel could positively and actively contribute to and learn from the CoP.

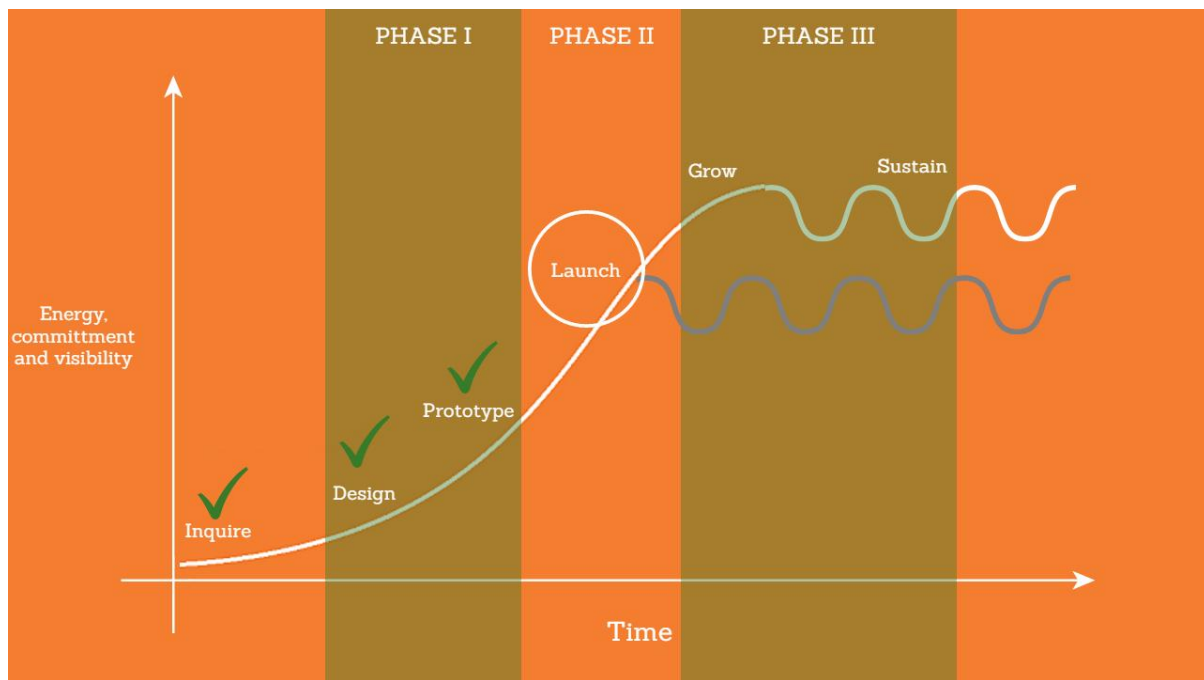
Additionally, participants in project activities (workshops, farm advisory groups, case studies etc.) will be invited. This will provide a mechanism for participants to continue learning and further engagement with the project following initial contact.

Phase 3:

Phase three, beginning in 2018, will operationalise the CoP. Access will be available to any interested party. During phase 3, CoP evaluation and legacy will be discussed and active CoP members may be invited to take on roles within the CoP following the end of the project.

CoP Lifecycle

CoP’s have lifecycles and lifespans. For each lifecycle stage, specific design, facilitation and support strategies exist that help achieve the goals of the CoP and lead it into the next stage of development. The below model outlines the different lifecycle stages, and where they fit within the three phases outlined above.



These stages include:

- **Inquire:** Through a process of exploration and inquiry, identify the audience, purpose, goals and vision for the CoP.
- **Design:** Define the activities, technologies, group processes and roles that will support the CoP goals.
- **Prototype:** Pilot the CoP with a select group of key stakeholders (the 'core') to gain commitment, test assumptions, refine the strategy and establish a success story.
- **Launch:** Roll out the CoP to a broader audience over a period of time in ways that engage newcomers and deliver immediate benefits.
- **Grow:** Engage members in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing activities, group projects and networking events that meet individual, group and project goals while creating an increasing cycle of participation and contribution.
- **Sustain:** Cultivate and assess the knowledge and products created by the CoP to inform new strategies, goals, activities, roles, technologies and business models for the future (legacy systems).

Successful facilitation of a CoP requires understanding of each of these lifecycle stages. Expectations, plans, communications, collaborative activities, technologies and measures of success must map to the current stage of CoP development. Without conscious facilitation and strong commitment and regular engagement by core members, momentum may be lost during the launch phase and the CoP may not achieve the critical mass needed to evolve into a sustainable entity.

Activities and key questions

1. **Inquire** – identify the audience, purpose, goals and vision for the community.

Key Questions	Supporting Activities
Audience: Who is the CoP for? Who are the important stakeholders (core)?	1. Conduct a needs assessment of core group members. (Phone interviews conducted by PC, plus Annual Stakeholder Forum session)
Domain: What are the key issues and nature of the learning, knowledge and tasks that the CoP will steward?	2. Define the benefits of the community for all stakeholders. (Completed, Program Plan) 3. Create a mission and vision statement for the CoP. (Completed, Program Plan)
Purpose, goals and outcome: What is the CoP's primary purpose? What are the benefits to the stakeholders? What specific needs will the CoP meet?	4. Identify the major topic areas for content and exploration. (Completed, Program Plan) 5. Develop estimated cost for CoP. (Completed, BCG budget) 6. Identify 'core' members. (Completed, Annual Stakeholder Forum participants)

7. **Design** – define activities, technologies, group processes and roles to support CoP goals.

Key Questions	Supporting Activities
Activities: What kind of activities will support the emergence of the CoP?	1. Identify tasks that CoP members are likely to want to carry out as part of the CoP 2. Develop scenarios that describe various experiences of the different personas (identified in the inquire stage) that would be necessary to carry out tasks and demonstrate potential benefits defined in the inquire stage.
Communication: How will members communicate on an ongoing basis to accomplish the CoP's primary purpose?	3. Identify face-to-face meeting opportunities for community members and define how these will be incorporated into the CoP.
Interaction: What kind of interactions (with each other and with the content of the CoP) will generate engagement?	4. Lay out a tentative schedule for the CoP. 5. Create a timeline for the CoP development. 6. Create a directory or folder structure for organising discussions, documents and resources.
Learning: What are the learning goals of the CoP? How can collaborative learning be supported?	7. Determine facilitator roles and recruit CoP facilitator.

Knowledge Sharing: **What are the external resources (people, publications, reports etc.) that will support the CoP during initial development? How will members share these resources and gain access to them?**

Collaboration: How will CoP members collaborate with each other to achieve shared goals?

Roles: How will CoP roles be defined and who will take them on?

8. **Prototype** – pilot the CoP with ‘core’ group to gain commitment, test assumptions and refine the strategy.

Key Questions

Supporting Activities

What short term pilot goals will help establish the CoP as a viable and valuable entity?

1. Select the most appropriate community-oriented technology features to support the goals of the pilot.
2. Design the CoP environment and have the core test the functionality through case scenarios.

What technologies will be used to support the pilot CoP’s social structures and core activities?

3. Implement the CoP prototype and give access to core members.
4. Seed the CoP with content.
5. Facilitate events and activities to test the prototype, focussing on achieving short-term value-added goals.

What sort of brand image does the CoP want to project given its audience, domain, purpose and mode of operation?

6. Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and that adequate support structures are in place.
7. Measure success and report on the results of the prototype to sponsors and stakeholders.

What is the tone of interactions and activities that the core wants to model?

How will CoP identity be formed and shared?

How will success be measured and communicated to the broader stakeholder groups?

Phase II

8. Launch – roll out the CoP to a broader audience over a period of time in ways that engage new members and deliver immediate benefits.

Key Questions

Supporting Activities

**Why should someone join the CoP?
 What are the benefits?**

1. Using experience and results from the prototype stage, design and implement the CoP environment (include graphics, predefined content from a variety of sources, prepopulated online discussions, links, databases with best practices and other information, online meeting spaces etc.)

What is the business model behind the CoP?

2. Establish the CoP charter which includes an articulation of the mission, vision, goals and member norms and agreements.

How do new members learn about the CoP?

3. Define roles available for CoP members.
4. Implement communications and marketing plan.

What are the CoP’s norms for behaviour?

5. Determine the member profile/directory structure.
6. Recruit new members.
7. Set up new member accounts or allow self-joining membership and group affiliations.

Based on insights from the prototype stage, what kinds of activities will generate engagement and support the emergence of CoP ‘presence’?

8. Provide a welcome and orientation to new members.
9. Finalise and publicise a CoP calendar of events.
10. Design and deliver events and activities.
11. Set up communication channels (news, social, newsletters, integration with face-to-face meetings etc.)

Based on insights from the prototype stage, how will roles and CoP structure be defined and supported over time?

How will success be measured?

Phase III

12. **Grow** – engage members in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing activities, group projects and networking events that meet individual, group and project goals, while creating an increasing cycle of participation and contribution.

Key Questions

Supporting Activities

- | | |
|---|--|
| What are the emerging benefits of the CoP for different audience segments? | 1. Continue implementation including facilitation and communication. |
| What are emerging roles that could be developed within the CoP? Are there different groups to which members could belong? | 2. Create and share stories of individual and CoP successes. |
| How do members get recognised and rewarded for their contributions? | 3. Identify emerging CoP roles and recruit members to fill them. |
| How do members create their own community identity and presence? | 4. Create and assign members to subgroups to support emerging group activities. |
| What work products can members contribute to support individual and CoP goals? | 5. Conduct a resource inventory and identify and upload additional content to meet the CoP needs. |
| What are the most important elements of the CoP that are emerging that should be recognised and represented in the online environment, as well as in formal policies and procedures? | 6. Create opportunities for sponsored projects (projects with defined work products that may or may not require additional commitments from community members/funders). |
| What are the emerging technical needs of the CoP to support evolving purposes and processes? | 7. Design activities with recognition and awards attached to encourage desired behaviour and participation. |
| | 8. Conduct focus groups, interviews, surveys and other data collection activities to assess and measure the success of the CoP. |
| | 9. Facilitate discussions about the CoP including culture, processes and practices, technology and individual motivations for participation. |
| | 10. Sustain – Cultivate and assess the learning, knowledge and products created by the CoP to inform new strategies, goals, activities, roles, technologies, business models and legacy systems for the future. |

Key Questions

What are the ongoing community processes and practices that will contribute to the longevity of the CoP and keep members engaged after the project finishes.

Supporting Activities

1. Provide opportunities in the CoP for members to play new roles, experiment with new community activities and examine new technology features.
2. Develop a support infrastructure including documentation, mentoring and development

- How does the CoP support members across a wide range of functions?**
3. as well as recognition programs for different roles.
- How are new potential CoP leaders going to be identified, chosen, developed and supported by the CoP?**
4. Ensure that procedures, practices and technology support structured information sharing.
5. Identify opportunities for capturing new knowledge.
6. Develop policies and processes for curating and sharing knowledge outside the CoP.
7. Encourage publication of articles about the CoP and its projects.
- To what extent is the CoP serving its intended purpose and accomplishing its stated purpose and objectives? How might it do a better job?**
8. Test for 'persistence of presence' by evaluating member and group activity reports as well as member focus groups and polls.
9. Review community audience, purpose, goals and domain. Watch for shifts in expectations and needs.
- How does the CoP demonstrate ROI for its funders?**
- Develop legacy system for CoP once project ceases.
- From the perspective of individual community members and from the CoP as a whole, what is the perceived return on participation?**
- How should the knowledge and products created by the CoP be shared beyond the CoP?**

Further Reading

Booth, S. (2012) Cultivating Knowledge Sharing and Trust in Online Communities for Educators. J. Educational Computing Research, Vol. 47 (1) 1-31.

CoP life Cycles

Cambridge, D. and Suter, V. (2005) Community of Practice Design Guide: A Step-by-Step Guide for Designing & Cultivating Communities of Practice in Higher Education. Educause Learning Initiative (ELI)