

# Special Interest Groups

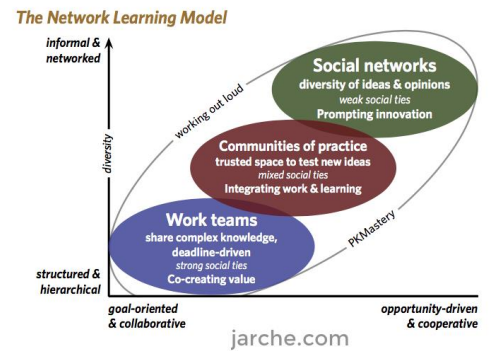
## Brief Guidance



### What is a Special Interest Group?

A SIG is a group of people who come together around a shared interest and a passion to share knowledge and improve research and/or practice. They often cross geographical and professional boundaries and are self-managed by members of the community. Special Interest Groups can take different forms, either being more informal or more structured and either having a particular goal or focus or being more open and opportunity-driven.

Source: *the Networked Learning Model* by Harold Jarche



### How can I start a SIG within the MARCH Network?

It takes time and commitment to start a SIG. Investment in the development of a SIG can lead to more productive working groups. We recommend the following steps:

#### 1. Identify your passion and build a core group

Work out which topic you want to focus your SIG on and identify a core group of 2-3 people who will help you in establishing a SIG. Make sure you check what other SIGs already exist to make sure yours isn't duplicating another. Decide on a name and a brief description.

#### 2. Promote your SIG and tell your networks

Send details of your SIG to [d.fancourt@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:d.fancourt@ucl.ac.uk). This detail will be published on the MARCH website along with other SIGs so that members can see details and join the SIGs. MARCH will help you promote the group and bring together more members. You can also use your own networks and social media to raise awareness. We recommend tweeting about the SIG, writing a blog for the MARCH website, posting about the SIG on LinkedIn and disseminating details via newsletters and professional networks.

#### 3. Create an initial design and plan

You may want to have an initial meeting to design and plan the SIG. This could be face-to-face or via Zoom/Skype. You may find this [simple template](#) helpful. Planning the rules of engagement from the start will help to avoid 'lurkers'.

#### 4. Choose a schedule of activities

Consider what you think the SIG should do. Are you about sharing knowledge? If so, you may like to create a newsletter, arrange twitter chats online, or consider developing a seminar series. Are you about supporting skills development? If so, you may like to invite an external speaker or trainer for an event, or you may like to set up a mentoring or buddy scheme with individuals from other disciplines or sectors. Are you about developing new project ideas? If so, you may like to circulate quarterly updates of funding or project opportunities, or invite speakers from funding bodies to find out more about their opportunities. Or are you about tackling known issues or challenges? If so, you may like to collaboratively develop a report or statement piece, or set a time-limited task (akin to a 'Task and Finish' group) and assign responsibilities to SIG members. You may find these ['Top Trumps' cards](#) helpful for ideas.

#### 5. Keep us updated!

Tweet at @NetworkMARCH, send us email updates on your activities, or blog for us. This will help to avoid SIGs becoming their own silos.

### Further reading

- *A Gardener's Guide to Communities of Practice*, by Chris Collison
- *Enabling change through communities of practice: Wellbeing Our Way*, by Natalie Koussa
- *Wenger-Trayner website* (lots of helpful resources)
- *Network Weaver Handbook – a guide to transformational networks* (2012), by June Holley
- *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (2002) by Etienne Wenger
- *NHS Scotland's Communities of Practice page*
- *Source4Networks* (resources from MARCH adviser Prof Becky Malby)