2014 GUIDE TO REGIONAL ECET² COLLEAGUE CIRCLES

The goal of Colleague Circles is to empower every teacher and teacher leader with a successful model of small group collaboration, support and encouragement.

This guide is designed to provide a set of recommendations to make the most out of your Colleague Circle. It is the result of hours of interviews and focus groups with fellow teacher leaders and experts in successful small group organization.

WHAT ARE COLLEAGUE CIRCLES?

Colleague Circles are groups of 10-20 peer teacher leaders who meet virtually and/or in the real world to support, encourage and learn from each other. The goal is to create a valuable forum that members can’t find elsewhere.

Colleague Circles can take the form of a discussion group that meets regularly online or in-person on topics of shared interest, an in-person group that chooses to take on a project that benefits the larger community in which they operate, or a virtual group sharing daily lessons of practice.

Colleague Circles can organize around topics or simply serve as a trusted environment for supporting and encouraging peer teachers. For example, Colleague Circles may find the following topics valuable to discuss:

• Common Core Implementation
• School Culture & Collaboration
• Reaching All Learners
• Teacher Leadership
• Student Engagement
• Instructional Strategies

As part of 2014 Colleague Circles, ECET² is launching a new online community of teachers and teacher leaders. Within the larger online community, teachers can draw on the strength, knowledge and passion of the community as a whole, as well as create Colleague Circles within the community.

Members are encouraged to start or participate in the most relevant Colleague Circle to them, based on their ongoing interests and goals. A teacher can be a member of the ECET² Community without participating in a Colleague Circle (but we think they are fantastic, so join one!).
COLLEAGUE CIRCLE PRINCIPLES

There is no wrong way to do a Colleague Circle. Each Colleague Circle defines its own purpose, goals and member expectations. Your Colleague Circle is yours.

We have a few simple principles that have been proven to make Colleague Circles unique and valuable to you and your members:

1. **Find True Peers**
   We recommend you select people for your Colleague Circle who share a common interest or goal and with whom you feel comfortable sharing. A good rule of thumb is to choose members for your Colleague Circle with whom you’d be comfortable sharing tricky situations at work or home.

   You may want members from the same grade level or topic area for their shared experiences, or prefer people with more diverse professional or geographic experiences who can offer a different point-of-view. It’s up to you.

2. **Choose Confidentiality**
   The most successful Colleague Circles create a trusted environment to learn and grow together with other teacher leaders. Confidentiality is critical to creating a safe environment for this deeper level of sharing. The strictest definition of confidentiality is “Nothing, No one, Never.” This agreement will positively change the dynamic of your Circle, making it a very different environment for mutual learning and support than you find in other activities.

   We encourage each Colleague Circle to adopt some level of confidentiality. Start your Colleague Circle by talking about the importance of confidentiality and coming up with your own guidelines as to what is shared or discussed outside the Circle.

3. **Agree to Good Group Communication**
   One of the benefits of Colleague Circles is a forum to practice good group communication. Here are the key agreements:

   - **Seek to listen beyond words** and understand the feelings and motivations of the person sharing, not just to prepare a reply.
   - **Accept Circle members** and topical discussions without judgment.
   - **Ask questions** to help the member see their situation from a different angle. Avoid asking leading questions that suggest opinion in the form of a question (“Have you ever considered…”).
• **Share experiences, not opinions or advice.** Your experiences under similar circumstances are something the entire Circle can learn from. Use “I” statements and speak only for yourself.

### 4. Define Type of Participation

At the start of any Colleague Circle, be clear with your fellow members what is important to you to get out of your Colleague Circle, what you can contribute and the type and frequency of meetings or activities that will work for you, given your schedule and other responsibilities.

Set aside time with your Circle in live chats, posts or meetings to ask each member what is working, what is not and suggestions for making your Circle work better. Adjust your Circle accordingly.

Each Colleague Circle has its own virtual space in the ECET² online community on Mightybell. Each circle may define expectations of participation in your virtual space in a variety of ways. You may agree to contribute:

- Quick daily check-ins in your Colleague Circle virtual space to share one new thing you are learning
- Exchanging resources, articles or stories at least once a week on a topic of shared interest
- A weekly 30-minute optional live chat or video hangout for members
- A monthly two hour video hangout or in-person meeting
- A six month project that results in a video, brochure or website contributed back to the community of teacher leaders or relevant stakeholders

We have found that members in your area or time zone will help make any live online or in-person meetings (should your circle choose to have them) easier to schedule.
COLLEAGUE CIRCLE LEADERS

We encourage each Colleague Circle to identify two co-leaders to divide up responsibilities. This will reduce the work asked of any one member of a Colleague Circle and increase the likelihood of success. The suggested roles of Colleague Circle Leaders are:

A Circle Manager who focuses on the operations of the Colleague Circles and handles:

- Capturing the mission and agreements of the circle
- Scheduling meetings and activities
- Managing the topics and agenda of meetings
- Timekeeping during meetings

A Circle Moderator who guides the discussions and/or activities of the circle, including:

- Guiding live discussions
- Helping members prepare topics they want to cover
- Ensuring everyone respects the Colleague Circle principles and communication guidelines

COLLEAGUE CIRCLE MEETINGS

There are many ways to have a successful Colleague Circle. The most important contributor to success is that each member has a clear definition of the circle’s mission, agrees to confidentiality and good group communication and can commit to the level of participation the circle has chosen.

The Exploration Meeting

If your Colleague Circle chooses to have live meetings - either via live video or in-person - one successful meeting model we recommend is the Exploration Meeting.

Exploration Meetings are an opportunity for members to support, encourage and learn from each other through sharing individual experiences. In an Exploration Meeting, a member presents a personal story with the circle. A personal story is a challenge, opportunity or upcoming decision. After listening to the Exploring Member, the rest of the group shares their own related experiences and insights.
The idea behind the Exploration Meeting is that everyone benefits from hearing the group’s experiences and insights.

Exploration Meetings take an hour and benefit from a bit of preparation by the Exploring Member. The Circle Manager should be prepared to serve as Time Keeper.

**Exploration Meeting Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Updates</th>
<th>2 Minutes Each</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members take turns sharing what is happening in their lives</td>
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**Exploration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderator sets up the conversation</th>
<th>1 Minute</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconfirms commitments to confidentiality and good group communication</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring Member shares his or her personal story</th>
<th>5-7 Minutes</th>
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<tr>
<th>Circle members ask questions to understand details and shape their own stories</th>
<th>Up to 5 Minutes</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members share their own experiences and insights (not advice or opinions)</th>
<th>2 Minutes Each</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Exploring Member shares how he or she benefited from the conversation</th>
<th>1 Minute</th>
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<tr>
<th>Members take turns doing the same, completing the phrases “I learned…” or “I’m feeling…”</th>
<th>Up to 5 Minutes</th>
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**Wrap Up**

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<th>Moderator leads a discussion of what worked, what didn’t; confirms the next meeting’s topic as well as date, time, location</th>
<th>Up to 10 Minutes</th>
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**Sharing a Personal Story**

The Exploring Member will share a 5 to 7 minute personal story with your Colleague Circle, and then field questions from other members before listening to their related experiences and insights. The most effective personal stories include:
• Nature: What is the nature of your personal story? Is it related to work or home or something else?
• Background: What is the background on the story? This is the “who, what, when, where and why.”
• Purpose: Why did you choose this topic? What question do you want to answer? What is the challenge or the opportunity you want to address?
• Feelings: How are you feeling about the situation you are presenting? Sad, mad, anxious, scared?
• Options: What are your options? What are the pros and cons of each? Do you have a preference? Are there elements of the situation that are out of your control?
• Outcomes: What are the outcomes of your different options? What will happen if nothing changes?

Listen, Ask and Share
Remember your circle’s commitment to good communication during the Exploration Meeting. After the Exploring Member has shared his or her personal story, we suggest other members ask thought-provoking questions and use the prompts below to support and encourage the Exploring Member with your shared experiences, rather than opinions or advice:

• Listen: What are the key considerations of the Exploring Member? How are they feeling about the issue?
• Ask: Is there a question you’d like to ask to better understand the situation?
• Share: What experiences have you had that might be helpful to the Exploring Member?

Summarize and Reflect
The last step of an Exploration Meeting is for both the Exploring Member and other members to summarize and reflect what they are taking away from the discussion:

• What have you heard from the group?
• Is there a new angle or way of looking at it that you haven’t thought of before?
• What new topics or paths will you be thinking about exploring based on this discussion?
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT COLLEAGUE CIRCLES

What is Mightybell?
The ECET² Community on Mightybell is a community of fellow teachers, teacher leaders and Colleague Circles. Mightybell is a community platform that specializes in supporting groups like Colleague Circles.

Within the community, Colleague Circles on Mightybell have the ability to share and organize resources, participate in live chats, message members and organize events. Circles have the ability to “Find a Time to Meet” with other members, making ongoing meetings a little easier to organize. (We still recommend finding Colleague Circle members in your time zone and with similar participation expectations!)

How do I find Colleague Circle members after the convening?
Within our ECET² Community on Mightybell, we can create a vibrant community of teacher leaders who can move fluidly between Colleague Circles and/or create new Colleague Circles based on evolving interests or initiatives with other teachers back in your districts. The benefit of our own ECET² Community is that you can choose to participate as a member of the larger community or just within your Colleague Circles.

The power of organizing Colleague Circles within ECET²’s new online community is that you can see participants who want to join a Colleague Circle or other Colleague Circles to join. The most important thing is to become a member of the community, share your interests and be clear about the level of participation you are able to make.

If you have feedback or ideas for how we can make finding prospective members of your Colleague Circles easier, please do not hesitate to share your feedback with us at feedback@mightybell.com.

How can I participate in a Colleague Circle alongside my other responsibilities?
The goal of a Colleague Circle is to bring unique value to each and every member of your circle not found in other activities. Colleague Circles accomplish this by creating a trusted environment with true peers where the guiding principles allow for a deeper level of sharing than you can find elsewhere.
Some of the busiest executives and professionals in the world take time for a version of Colleague Circles because they are able to talk about topics, issues and opportunities in their circles they cannot share in other situations.

Healthy Colleague Circles organize regular check-ins with members to ensure that they are achieving the value necessary for members to continue with the circle. If you are feeling like your Colleague Circle could be providing you and other members more value, we encourage you to speak up and propose a change within your circle to make it better.

**Does the ECET² Community replace the need for a Facebook Group?**
Yes. Our goal is to create a special place for teacher leaders to meet each other and organize into Colleague Circles. This is our new ECET² Community on Mightybell, a new service dedicated to creating communities of small groups.

**Do Colleague Circles have to do a project?**
No. A Colleague Circle does not have to do a project. The key characteristic of a Colleague Circle is that it provides a valuable, trusted environment to its members that they can’t find anywhere else.

Colleague Circles can take the form of a discussion group that meets regularly online or in-person on topics of shared interest, a virtual group that chooses to take on a project that benefits the larger community of teacher leaders, or a simple virtual group sharing daily lessons of practice.