

The PMI Virtual Communities Project : What It Means to You

The Virtual Communities Project (VCP) is a major initiative that began in early 2007 with representatives from existing Specific Interest Groups (SIGs) and Colleges and PMI Staff to examine the wants and needs of members and how value is currently delivered through PMI virtual communities. A predecessor initiative named the Community Transformation Project (CTP) provided similar insight into value derived from and delivered by geographically-based chapters.

Overall, the goal of VCP has been to identify opportunities by which current virtual communities can gain operational efficiencies and improvements. To that end, the outcome of PMI's new virtual communities is centered on member value and providing the global project management community with an unparalleled knowledge base—all in one location. Leveraging state-of-the-art enterprise architecture, PMI's virtual communities have consistent and inviting site designs and navigation, search capability across PMI.org, and features such as blogs and wikis to create the ultimate project management collaborative community. The project has also developed criteria and alignment of models that can be used for the creation of new virtual communities in the future.

How Will VCP Benefit Members?

Delivering knowledge to its members, and the global project management community, is one of PMI's responsibilities as an association of project professionals. Becoming the go-to place or "one-stop shop" for project management information, tools, resources and knowledge is a top priority, and the new virtual community structure is one of the gateways to achieving this goal for the benefit of members and the profession as a whole. By creating a knowledge delivery community portal within the PMI.org structure, PMI can provide:

- A connection point for PMI members, and the greater project management community, to network, exchange and validate knowledge and ideas
- Access to a wide range of sources and resources
- Content and knowledge within a variety of topic, focus and motivation areas
- Enable excellence in user experience including ability to find, access, connect knowledge sources and resources

Meeting The Needs Of The Global Project Management Community

A member value survey conducted early in the project yielded significant results. These helped steer the direction of the community models and the types of services that virtual communities of the future will deliver. The survey confirmed that the characteristics most desired of PMI virtual communities are:

- Quality knowledge delivery including tools, templates and specialized information; and
- An active community environment that offers a high degree of engagement, but is flexible to accommodate members' time schedules.

Eighty percent of the survey's respondents said they would participate in PMI virtual communities if these criteria were met. These results demonstrate that the new community models will best serve the members' desires if they focus on knowledge and value creation.

A New World For Collaboration And Knowledge Sharing

Two models for PMI virtual communities are being launched: Forum and Community of Practice (CoP). The Forum community type is discussion board-driven and focused on knowledge exchange through member collaboration, discussion threads and document sharing. The more complex of the two models is the CoP. This community type offers a greater number of features and services than the Forum model. In addition to discussion boards, wikis, and blogs, the CoP will provide services such as professional development opportunities through webinars and potentially knowledge sharing conferences.

The two models are a departure from the current practice for SIGs and Colleges. The new community models are different in governance structure in that they are no longer separately incorporated; rather, they are integrated communities within PMI. One of the benefits will be to allow community leaders to focus significantly more on delivering knowledge and value to the membership, as opposed to managing administrative and financial issues.

Three distinct focus areas for PMI virtual communities have been identified. To align with the project management profession by organizing the knowledge within these focus areas, virtual community team members maximize synergies and eliminate duplication across the different virtual communities.

These distinct focus areas are:

- **Knowledge domains**, aligned to knowledge areas of the *PMBOK® Guide*, PMI global standards, and/or the PMI family of professional credentials and other services.
- **Industry domains**, built around project management knowledge inherent within unique industry groups.
- **Affinity communities**, comprised of individuals who share common topics of interest or affinity to topics not captured in a specific knowledge area or industry.

Building Member Value

In order to best serve member needs, each community type is required to provide a specified set of core services. Optional extended services may be provided as well. Communities of Practice are structured to provide more services than Forums, and therefore require more volunteer roles to manage. Still, both community types will be governed by a Community Council, comprised of multiple volunteer leadership roles. Similar to today, leadership positions will be selected by community members.

What's Happening Now

SIG or College members will begin to notice the collaboration that is taking place to enable the transition to the new virtual community structure. The SIG and college leaders have been dedicating their

volunteer time and attention to providing insights on what members need and how to ensure that consistent value will continue to be delivered in the future.

An important milestone was reached on 12 August 2008, with the launch of the International Development Forum and Human Resources Community of Practice pilot. The pilot was developed through the collaboration of the HR and ID SIG leaders, many volunteers, PMI Community and Information Technology staff, and a design and usability firm with international experience. Needs interviews, usability testing, and prototype testing have been vital to the design process, with iterative releases reflecting the feedback gained from user testing.

A second release was launched 18 September 2008, at which time all members of the current HR and ID SIGs were invited to participate. Valuable user feedback was then gathered and discussed at the PMI Leadership Institute Meeting in Denver, Colorado, USA, 16-18 October 2008.

The Consulting SIG is the next community to transition into the new virtual community model. In the first quarter of 2009, the following communities will also transition:

- Government SIG (will become Government Community of Practice)
- Retail SIG (will become Retail Forum)
- Quality in Project Management SIG (will become Quality in Project Management Community of Practice)
- Utility Industry SIG (will become Utility Industry Forum)

Stay Tuned And Get Involved

In an effort to provide information on VCP and what it means to PMI members, several articles appear in a special section of the October 2008 edition of *PMI Today®*. Updates will also be provided in other PMI publications and website as progress continues to be made in this exciting project.

If you have questions or concerns about the Virtual Communities Project, please speak with your SIG/College leaders and Mentors. The VCP is supported by a PMI internal cross-functional team, as well as by the Virtual Communities Advisory Group (VCAG), which consists of experienced PMI volunteer leaders. The VCAG is actively involved in all actions and decisions of the project and represent the voice of the members.

Specific questions may also be directed to vcp@pmi.org.