

Growing Together: A Toolkit for Building Connection and Community for Adjunct Faculty

GROWING TOGETHER: A
TOOLKIT FOR BUILDING
CONNECTION AND
COMMUNITY FOR ADJUNCT
FACULTY

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Contents

Introduction	1
Project History and Overview	3
PART I. <u>MAIN BODY</u>	
1. When and Why to Start a Learning Community	9
2. Getting Started: Defining Your Learning Community's Purpose	14
3. Multilevel Model of Professional Development	17
4. Continuous Quality Improvement Diagram	26
5. Structuring the Adjunct Faculty Learning Community	30
6. Recruiting and Engaging Adjunct Faculty	35
7. Measuring Impact and Evaluation Sustaining the AFLC	41
8. Assessing the AFLC: Surveys and Data	45
9. Sustaining the Community	52
10. Closing the Community	55

11. Conclusion	58
12. Templates and Other Documentation	60
About the Authors	63

Introduction



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<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/adjunctcommunity/?p=4#video-4-1>

An Adjunct Faculty Learning Community (AFLC) is a structured, collaborative space where faculty engage in ongoing professional development, interdisciplinary discussion, and shared inquiry to enhance teaching and learning. This toolkit provides a roadmap for departments looking to initiate, sustain, and grow their own AFLCs. Our learning community was structured around [Designing Accessible and Inclusive Professional Development for NTTF created by the Delphi Project](#), Multilevel model of professional development. Prior to starting your professional

development, read and review the Designing Accessible and Inclusive Professional Development for NTTF article.

Project History and Overview



Note: While this is a longer section, it is an important section. The information about the Delphi Project and our participation, is what lead us to this valuable and important initiative.

Phase 1 of the Delphi Project

In 2018, the School of Social Work, MSW Online Program was asked by KC Culver and Adrianna Kezar, by way of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Boise State University, to share the support we provide for our Non-Tenure Track Faculty (NTTF) (we use the term Adjunct Instructor). KC Culver and Adrianna Kezar are researchers with the Delphi Project. The project aims to raise awareness about shifting faculty trends by using research and data to better support non-tenure-track faculty. Its ultimate goal is to help develop new faculty models that can support the future of higher education institutions. The researchers are funded by a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant.

This specific NSF* grant investigated the following research questions for Phase 1:

1. (RQ#1)Design of Intensive Professional Development (IPD): What aspects of IPD design do NTTF report influence their ability to engage in equitable and inclusive ways to achieve intended outcomes?
2. (RQ#2)Impact of Learning Communities (LC): Do NTTF report participation in IPD achieves intended outcomes (such as teaching effectiveness, sense of belonging, and career development)? If so, in what ways?
3. (RQ#3)Influences on the Success of Intensive Professional Development: What policies and processes do design teams report influencing their ability to engage NTTF in professional development in equitable and inclusive ways?

*The NSF Grant funds The Delphi Project to support the project researchers, KC Culver and Adrianna Kezar.

Phase One Delphi Findings

Through the formative research examination of *14 institutions with varying mission, size, institutional type, and student populations that have modified their learning communities or professional development for NTTF. The researchers learned about the types of modifications that campuses make to LCs in order to support NTTF (RQ #1). They also learned about several ways that LCs benefit NTTF (e.g., sense of belonging, professional network, instructional effectiveness) from those leading

professional development efforts during formative research. Institutions also rethought their teaching practices and course designs to better support students (RQ #2, #3) and assessed influences on the design and success of LCs in meeting NTTF's needs.

*Boise State University School of Social Work Online Program (SOCWRK OP) was a participant in Phase One.

For information about the full research process and findings, please see “Designing Accessible and Inclusive Professional Development for NTTF” (Non-tenure track faculty) linked below in the “Supporting Document” section. Based on the Phase 1 findings, the Delphi project moved into Phase Two.

Boise State SOCWRK OP was invited to participate in Phase Two of this research, which focused on RQs #1 and #2 related to design and impact of IPD, exploring these questions with a greater focus on NTTF's experiences engaging in professional development. These questions also allowed the research team to identify changes to IPD practice that resulted from the learning and innovations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers are striving to provide greater detail to RQ #3 related to the process of design teams, including how they function within their institutional environment, by exploring efforts that are focused on institutional changes needed to support professional development.

Phase Two Project Rationale and Goals

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Boise State University, has offered an Adjunct Faculty Learning Community (AFLC) since 2015. Since its inception, the AFLC has had 83 unique adjunct faculty participants, 44%

of whom continued to teach at the University as of Spring 2021. This model has proven effective at supporting adjunct faculty in integrating evidence-based practices into their teaching and connecting them with the University community. We believe that this model of support for adjunct faculty could be replicated at the department level as part of the Phase Two of the research project.

The goals of moving an AFLC to a department level was to create a space for adjunct faculty to:

1. Engage in dialogue about their teaching
2. Connect with each other and the campus
3. Get feedback on their teaching beyond the end of course evaluations

Supporting Documents for The Delphi Project Phase Two

["Designing Accessible and Inclusive Professional Development for NTTF" \(Non-tenure track faculty\)](#)

[Summative Research on Professional Development for NTTF](#)

- [Survey Modules](#)

[Scaling Support for NTTF in STEM through Learning Communities and Design](#)

[Teams: Progress and Study Design for Phase 2 \(summative research\)](#)

When and Why to Start a Learning Community

Creating a learning community for adjunct instructors can be an impactful step to support teaching excellence, reduce instructor isolation, and foster professional and personal connection. The question is, how do you know when it's time to start one? This section explores some of the possible indicators that suggest your adjunct instructors may be silently asking for more support or for more connection, even if they're not saying it explicitly.

STOP AND ASSESS

Signs Your Adjunct Faculty May Need a Learning Community

Adjunct faculty (online and face-to-face) often work in some sort of isolation teaching online or evening courses, balancing multiple jobs, or working remotely from other cities or states. While some instructors have the skills to navigate this environment, many can quietly struggle, especially newer adjunct instructors. The signs may not be obvious, but they're there.

Here's what to look for:

1. Repeated Questions That Could Be Answered Through Peer Sharing

Are adjuncts frequently emailing about where to find policies, gradebooks, or syllabus templates? This is likely less about content and more about a lack of connection. A learning community creates a space for shared knowledge

and reduces redundancy by building a culture of mutual support.

2. Minimal Engagement in Department Communications

If adjuncts rarely attend meetings or respond to department-wide emails, it may not be disinterest, it may be disconnection. A learning community can provide a more welcoming, tailored space for adjuncts to engage, ask questions, and contribute.

3. Expressions of Burnout or Overwhelm

Do you notice comments that hint at burnout, “I’m just trying to survive the semester,” or “I wish I had someone to bounce ideas off of”? These might be subtle calls for support. A learning community offers not only resources but also encouragement, connection, community, and peer validation.

4. High Turnover or Low Retention

If your department struggles to retain adjunct instructors, it may be time to ask: Do they feel valued? Are they supported? Do they feel connected? A well-designed learning community shows that adjuncts are important contributors, not just temporary workers.

5. Lack of Cross-Talk Between Instructors

When instructors don’t know each other, or worse, don’t know there are other adjuncts teaching alongside them,

that's a sign. A learning community fosters relationships, reduces silos, and builds cohesion among instructors.

6. Questions That Reflect Uncertainty in Institutional Culture

Adjuncts may feel unsure about how to communicate with students, what tone to use in emails, or how flexible to be with deadlines. If you operate from a Primary course (courses are copied each semester), adjunct instructors may not know how they can make their course customized. These questions are often less about content and more about culture and teaching philosophy. A learning community can help contextualize expectations, norms, and they can help build a strong teaching foundation for even the most seasoned of instructors.

7. Faculty Asking for Mentorship or Feedback

If instructors are asking for mentorship, feedback, or places to grow, take note. A learning community can create peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities and a safe space to grow.

8. Professional Development Opportunities are Provided but Very Few Take Advantage

If adjunct faculty are not taking advantage of professional development opportunities, it may be because the topics don't meet their needs, the timing is inconvenient, the delivery method isn't accessible, or they don't feel a sense of belonging or invitation to participate.

It is also possible adjunct instructors may not see how

the offered development opportunities connect to their teaching context or professional goals.

Listening Beyond the Surface

Sometimes the signs are subtle. They show up in short comments, awkward silences, or in the volume of one-on-one requests for help. As a leader, administrator, designer, or faculty developer, listen closely to what's said and unsaid.

Some questions you can ask yourself:

- Are adjunct instructors operating in isolation?
- Are they engaged and thriving, or just “getting through” the semester?
- Do they have spaces where they can share challenges and feel heard?

If the answer to these questions reveals gaps, a learning community may be just what your department needs.

Getting Started: Defining Your Learning Community's Purpose

Pre-Launch Discussions

Now you have recognized a faculty learning community might be best for your adjunct instructors.

Before launching an adjunct faculty learning community, consider the following questions. As you review these questions, refer to the [multilevel model of professional development](#) (MMPD)(pg. 21) to help guide your brainstorm/discussions to answer some of the following questions:

- What are your goals? (e.g., improving online teaching, fostering active learning, integrating AI)
- Who will participate? (full-time faculty, adjuncts, graduate instructors, etc.)
- How will you recruit and market to adjunct instructors? (emails, announcements, phone calls)
- How will it be structured? (frequency of meetings,

online/in-person, format)

- What are the expected outcomes? (publications, course redesigns, collaborative projects)
- Who do you want to collaborate with? (Center for Teaching and Learning, eCampus, other departments)
- What will the compensation be and where will it come from? (Will it be hourly pay, workload, learning credits)

The questions above are not the only questions. As you review the MMPD, decided which components of your learning community are most important starting with the needs of the adjunct instructors and ending with the needs of the adjunct instructors. If the decisions about the layout, format, flow, etc of the learning community ultimately meet the needs of the adjunct instructors, you have designed your community by way of the multilevel of professional development.

Watch this short video below to introduce yourself to the Checklist Tracker sheet.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/adjunctcommunity/?p=28#video-28-1>

[Access the video transcripts here.](#)

As shown in the video above, use the
“Checklist Tracker” to help guide your design

**Checklist
Tracker**


discussions.

Multilevel Model of Professional Development

Use this section to deep dive with the MMPD. Here are some examples of our design decisions based on the multilevel of professional development model and our faculty needs:

- **Pay:** We paid our adjunct instructors for participation. Every semester we revisit our budget to ensure we have a stipend.
- **Collaboration:** We collaborated with departments across campus such as eCampus, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and various faculty across campus.
- **Topics:** Adjunct faculty requested topics of discussion when they applied for the learning community. Based on those topics, we found resources to build the community around their requests. Surprisingly, (or not) the faculty requested similar, if not the same, topics.
- **Synchronous Sessions:** Originally our community

was 100% asynchronous. Per the learning community application, adjunct instructors requested, unanimously for synchronous sessions.

 **Note:** The reality is, it is difficult to encompass every consideration listed on the MMPD so pick the ones that are most important to your adjunct instructors.

Multilevel Model of Professional Development

Implementation (Center Circle)

Role of Facilitators

Facilitators are key to shaping the tone and dynamics of the learning community. They guide discussions, foster trust, and ensure conversations stay inclusive and meaningful. Choose facilitators who are empathetic, flexible, and committed to centering the adjunct experience.

Recruitment and Choosing Participants

Consider how participants are invited and selected. Strive for a balance of voices across departments, teaching modalities, and experience levels. Transparent recruitment that clearly communicates

the purpose and benefits can boost engagement.

Delivery Mode

Choose a format (in-person, online, hybrid, synchronous/asynchronous) that makes participation accessible and comfortable for adjunct instructors, who may be balancing multiple jobs or teaching at different institutions.

Length

The time commitment should be realistic and respectful of adjuncts' schedules. Think about offering shorter cycles or flexible participation structures. Consistency is key, even in shorter engagements.

Content and Deliverables

Select topics and activities that align with what adjunct instructors truly need, whether that's practical teaching strategies, community support, or opportunities for professional growth. Deliverables should feel achievable and relevant, not burdensome.

Design (Second Circle)

Scholarship and Professional Networks

Offer opportunities to engage with teaching and learning and connect instructors to broader professional communities. This helps adjuncts feel more integrated into the academic conversation.

Strategic Alignment and Integration

Ensure the learning community is not an isolated effort, connect it to institutional goals, faculty development plans, and departmental initiatives. This gives the program longevity and credibility.

Structural Factors

Consider the structural supports needed to sustain the community: time, funding, administrative backing, and tools (e.g., LMS, meeting platforms). Design the community so it doesn't rely solely on volunteer labor.

Evaluation

Build in ways to assess the community's effectiveness, both formally (surveys, feedback forms) and informally (check-ins, reflection prompts). Use what you learn to adapt and improve future iterations.

Rewards and Recognition

Adjunct instructors often work without formal acknowledgment. Consider ways to honor their contributions: stipends, certificates, digital badges, letters of appreciation, or inclusion in faculty

development records.

Needs Assessment

Begin by listening. Survey adjuncts, conduct listening sessions, or use informal check-ins to learn what they want and need from a learning community. Let their input drive the design.

Group Composition

Think intentionally about who's in the room. A mix of disciplines can foster fresh perspectives, but shared experiences (e.g., all online instructors) can strengthen relevance. Consider what mix will best serve your goals.

Purpose and Objectives

Clarify the “why” from the start. Is the goal community-building? Skill development? Institutional integration? A clear purpose keeps the community focused and helps participants understand the value.

Partnerships and Coordination

Collaborate with departments, centers for teaching and learning, or other faculty groups. Shared ownership can expand resources, enhance credibility, and ensure the work is woven into the fabric of the institution.

Environmental (Outer Circle)

Institutional Leadership

Visible support from deans, provosts, or department chairs can validate the learning community and encourage participation. Leadership can also help remove barriers for adjunct involvement.

Institutional Policies

Review how institutional policies support or hinder adjunct engagement in faculty development. Policies around pay, course load, or access to resources may need adjustment to support equitable participation.

State Policies

Be aware of any state regulations that influence faculty development, adjunct employment, or teaching evaluations. While you may not control them, understanding the context helps with planning.

Accreditation

Accrediting bodies often value professional development and inclusive teaching practices. A learning community can support these goals and may contribute to documentation for review processes.

Faculty Governance

If your institution has a faculty senate or other shared governance structures, consider how the learning community aligns with or is represented within those bodies. Inclusion strengthens legitimacy.

Faculty Union

If adjuncts are represented by a union, coordinate to ensure alignment and avoid conflicts. Unions may also be powerful partners in advocating for resources, compensation, or recognition.

Hiring Practices

Reflect on how hiring practices affect adjuncts' sense of belonging. Are they onboarded into the community? Can the learning community help fill gaps in orientation, mentorship, or support?

Institutional and Disciplinary Cultures

Every institution and department has its own culture. Build your learning community in a way that honors those cultures but also helps adjuncts feel they are part of the academic whole, not just “temporary help.”

Continuous Quality Improvement Diagram

Watch the brief video below on our Adjunct Faculty Learning Community, Continuous Quality Improvement Diagram.



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<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/adjunctcommunity/?p=52#video-52-1>

[Access the video transcripts here.](#)

Designing and Implementing an Adjunct Faculty Learning Community: A Step-by-Step Process

This visual flowchart in the video (or linked in the resources

section) outlines a structured, iterative process for designing and implementing a supportive and engaging learning community for adjunct faculty. Each step is intentionally sequenced to reflect both planning and adaptability. Here's a breakdown of each phase:

1. **Write Proposal** (*possibly in tandem with Budget Approval*)

The process begins with crafting a clear and compelling proposal. This document should outline the goals, scope, and anticipated outcomes of the adjunct learning community. It helps administration understand the value and secures necessary support.

2. **Get Budget Approval**

Once the proposal is in place, seek budget approval. Funding may cover facilitator time, adjunct stipends, learning resources, or software tools. This step ensures the community is not only conceptualized but sustainable. Paying our adjunct instructors was our financial priority.

3. **Design Brainstorming** (*in tandem with Needs Assessment*)

With funding secured, the design phase begins. Here, you'll outline the community's structure, considering the number of modules, delivery format, time expectations, and flexibility for participants. This phase is collaborative and often iterative, adapting as new information emerges.

4. **Conduct Needs Assessment** (*Application*)

At the same time, it's important to gather information directly from potential participants. Using an application or interest form, collect data on faculty goals, availability, and topics of interest. This feedback directly shapes the design, ensuring the community is relevant and adjunct faculty-centered.

5. **Identify Resource Locations & Integrate into Course Design**

Once the design and needs assessment are complete, move into implementation. Identify key resources such as readings, videos, institutional supports and integrate them directly into the learning community's course space. The content should reflect the interests and needs uncovered in the application process.

6. **Run Course**

Deliver the course using the established structure. Whether spread over several weeks or condensed into modules, ensure that the environment encourages meaningful dialogue, reflection, and connection.

7. **Adjunct Feedback**

Upon conclusion of each module and/or course, gather formal and informal feedback. This may include surveys, reflection prompts, or discussion forums. Feedback from

this phase is crucial for adjusting the design and improving the community for future cohorts.


8. Ongoing Iteration

As shown by the arrows looping back to earlier steps, this is not a one-and-done model. Feedback informs redesign, new needs emerge, and additional brainstorming may be needed to continuously enhance the community.

Lessons Learned

- Embed continuous improvement practices into everyday/process workflows.
 - Competing demands can limit capacity to maintain and implement (sustainability)
- Document and act on lessons learned
 - Without intentional follow-through, valuable insights may be lost, and the community risks encountering similar challenges rather than building on prior progress.

Structuring the Adjunct Faculty Learning Community

 **Note:** All adjunct faculty have different needs so it is ok to adjust based on their needs. That is the goal, build what works for them!

When building a learning community for adjunct faculty, the structure is just as important as the content. The goal of our community was to create space for adjunct instructors in higher education to engage in meaningful dialogue about their teaching, to connect with one another and with the broader campus community, and to receive feedback on their practice that extended beyond standard end-of-course evaluations.

The structure of the learning community was built around three key design principles: responsiveness, relevance, and reflection.

Custom Design: Building from What Adjunct Instructors Need

The foundation of the community was rooted in the experiences and interests of the adjunct faculty themselves. When participants applied to join the community, they were asked about their teaching context, challenges, and professional interests. Their responses directly shaped the topics of the modules. This meant that no two versions of the community were exactly the same and topics shifted depending on what adjuncts identified as most pressing.

Rather than assuming what adjunct instructors needed, the process centered their needs from the application which was provided to applicants at the early stage of the community recruitment. This responsive design helped ensure that the community was tailored, timely, and grounded in reality of what adjunct instructor need.

Structure: Modules with Flow and Flexibility

The community was organized into a series of modules, each unfolding over several weeks. While the number of modules and the timeline can be adjusted depending on your institutional calendar, the following structure worked well for our goals.

Our Structure

Module 1: Topic 1

- Week 1: Readings, Podcast, Video (1hr)
- Week 2: Collaborative Discussion (1hr) – Canvas Discussion Boards

- Week 3: Community Meeting (1hr)

Module 2: Topic 2

- Week 1: Readings, Podcast, Video (1hr)
- Week 2: Collaborative Discussion (1hr) – Video Discussion Boards
- Week 3: Community Meeting (1hr) – Guest Facilitator

Module 3: Topic 3

- Week 1: Readings, Podcast, Video (1hr)
- Week 2: Collaborative Discussion (1hr) – Social Annotation “Discussion” Boards
- Week 3: Community Meeting (1hr) – Guest Facilitator

Week One was anchored by curated readings, podcasts, or videos aligned with themes that emerged from the adjunct faculty’s application responses. Instructors were also encouraged to explore and share their own resources if the provided ones didn’t resonate with them.

Week Two focused on asynchronous discussion. Prompts were intentionally adaptive, shaped by ongoing conversations allowing for dynamic, emergent dialogue rather than a rigid or predetermined path. Week 2 of each module advanced

Week Three featured a synchronous community meeting. This one-hour live session gave adjunct instructors a chance to reflect on the previous two weeks and connect in real time. While synchronous meetings may not fit every learning community, in our case,

anonymously, participants requested and valued this component. It became a highly rewarding and meaningful part of their experience.



Reflection: Trial, Error, and Iteration

One of the most important lessons in designing this community was learning that structure requires iteration. Finding the right flow takes time. What worked one term may need

adjustment the next, depending on who is in the room and what they bring with them. The structure you start with should be seen as a draft, a launch point rather than a fixed blueprint.

Create a space that invites honest feedback from participants and use that feedback to adjust the pacing, content, or facilitation approach. “The goal is not perfection; it’s responsiveness.” Start with a community and reshape it as needed to best support adjunct instructors where they are.

Lessons Learned

- We did not recognize how difficult it would be to find a time to meet synchronously that would work for all participants.
 - After our first learning community, we learned to set the times and then notify

adjuncts of these times during the application phase. This way they could decide if it would work for them.

- We did not set an expectation for faculty about what level of participation is expected in order to receive the stipend and credits.
 - Set expectations for the minimum level of participation to receive credit and/or a stipend for participation.

Recruiting and Engaging Adjunct Faculty

Effectively recruiting and engaging adjunct faculty for a learning community involves a thoughtful, personalized approach that balances clear communication with relationship-building. Below is a strategy that worked well in our context and can be adapted to suit different institutional settings.



STEP 1

Broad Awareness and Initial Outreach

Start by sharing information about the learning community through broad, low-pressure channels such as:

Mass communication tools – Announce the opportunity through your program or department’s resource site and regular newsletters.

Keep it concise – In these announcements, include key highlights only: the purpose of the community, meeting dates, and compensation. Too much information up front can overwhelm busy faculty members.



STEP 2

Personalized, Individual Invitations

Tailored emails – Each message to your adjunct faculty should feel personal, mentioning their specific teaching context or expressing appreciation for their work. This shows that the invitation is more than transactional; it's relational.

Make space for curiosity – The email should contain just enough information to spark interest. Avoid overloading the message. Instead, include a link to a brief application or interest form where they can learn more.

Clarify that the application is exploratory – Reassure faculty that filling out the application doesn't commit them to participation. This reduces pressure and allows them to express interest without obligation.

Mass communication helps raise awareness, but

individual outreach is where true engagement and relationship building begins.



STEP 3

Post-Application Follow-Up

Once an adjunct faculty member completes the application:

Send a follow-up email with full program details- In follow-up emails including expectations, time commitments, and what it's like to be part of the community. This helps set clear expectations while maintaining transparency and trust.

Reaffirm connection and support – This is a great time to remind faculty of your role as a supportive resource and emphasize the community aspect of the program.

Finding the Balance: Supportive, Not Overbearing

When recruiting adjunct faculty, it's important to strike a balance between enthusiastic encouragement and respectful space. The goal is to invite, not pressure faculty to participate. A personalized approach helps faculty feel seen and valued, but pushing too hard can feel transactional or burdensome, especially for those already managing heavy workloads. Keep the tone of your outreach warm and supportive, clearly expressing that this is an opportunity, not an obligation. Be open about the benefits while making it easy for faculty to explore more information or politely decline without guilt. Leading with connection and respect ensures that participation is rooted in genuine interest and readiness, which leads to a more engaged and committed community.

Lessons Learned

- Don't assume a lack of response equals disinterest, many faculty need reminders or time to consider the opportunity.
- Recruitment is more successful when aligned with natural planning cycles. Aim to avoid peak grading periods or term starts when bandwidth is often low.

- Peer testimonials help! Share quotes or short videos from past participants can build credibility and show real-world value (make sure you have their permission).

Measuring Impact and Evaluation Sustaining the AFLC

Creating an AFLC is a meaningful step toward fostering connection, growth, and teaching excellence. To ensure the community remains effective and sustainable over time, it's important to measure its impact and align ongoing efforts with evolving goals. As you design and implement your faculty learning community, facilitators must consider what kind of data would meet the goals. When conducting assessment and evaluation there are many questions to ask. One may collect user satisfaction data, impact data, student success metrics to see if there was a change in student metrics, and assessing how well community participants met learning objectives. Data can help you understand participant engagement, inform continuous improvement, and potentially show impact on teaching practices or student outcomes.

Measuring Impact

Data collection doesn't have to be complex. In fact, small-scale, meaningful data can provide valuable insight. Focus on gathering both quantitative and qualitative data that reflects faculty experience, engagement, and development.

Here are a few recommended ways to measure impact:

- **Pre- and post-participation reflections:**
Invite participants to reflect on their sense of connection, confidence in teaching, or familiarity with institutional resources at the beginning and end of the FLC.
- **Mid- and end-of-semester surveys:**
Use short surveys to capture what's working, what could improve, and how participants are applying what they've learned.
- **Focus groups or exit interviews:**
Consider offering optional small-group or one-on-one conversations at the conclusion of the FLC to gather more in-depth feedback.
- **Participation tracking and engagement analytics:**
Track attendance, participation in activities, and resource usage (if you use a shared site or platform) to identify patterns and areas of success.
- **Faculty impact indicators:**

Where possible, look for downstream effects such as improved student feedback, enhanced course materials, or greater faculty engagement in other professional development offerings.

- **Short surveys** after modules or community meetings to assess perceived usefulness and engagement.
- **Feedback forms** to gauge satisfaction, relevance, and suggestions for future communities.

If your goal for the AFLC includes measuring the effects of the community (like improvements in student success or course outcomes), plan early to identify what indicators you'll track and how you'll access that information. Above all, make sure data collection aligns with your purpose. Not all communities need rigorous assessment, but having some mechanism to understand what's working (and what's not) helps ensure your learning community remains relevant and responsive.

For the AFLC held with Social Work adjunct faculty, the facilitators used a pre-community assessment, post-community assessment, midcourse assessment process (MAP) provided by eCampus Center, and end-of-module reflections.

Lessons Learned

The results from pre and post surveys showed that participants gained skills, became more

connected, and gained proficiency in technical tools.

- Model Effective Online Teaching
 - Online adjunct faculty learn and emulate what AFLC facilitators display.

Assessing the AFLC: Surveys and Data

The purpose of an assessment is to measure how well you met the objectives of an activity. Sometimes the purpose is to achieve certain learning objectives within a population. Sometimes facilitators measure the impact of the learning and the gains from making change. In this case, the goals were to increase connectedness of a key population that was online adjunct faculty and thus fully remote spread across the world, to increase comfort teaching online, and to increase levels of technical confidence. In all three measures, the AFLC conducted at Boise State was a success based on self-report survey data of before and after the participation in the AFLC.

Facilitators working with adjunct faculty will want to gather feedback. They are an overlooked population in academia, and their input can help avoid teaching redundant and less important content. The data collected can inform whether or not to offer the AFLC again. In this case, the data gains were significant.

An assessment framework should begin with two questions: what we want to know and how we will use the

information. In this case, we wanted to see if we were meeting the AFLC's goals. This kind of data can also show its importance in higher education administration and can help secure funding to offer a facilitated community again.

Conducting a self-report survey is one type of data that can be used. Other measures can look at student success in the courses taught, qualitative studies with the participants, and other measures of impact, like retention rates of students and adjunct faculty. In this case, we used an anonymous self-report survey. If the survey is not anonymous, one can match the pre-responses to the post-responses and use different statistical tests to evaluate. In this case, a Mann-Whitney statistical significance test can be used.

Our goal was to assess the adjunct faculty's sense of community and belonging, comfort in teaching and online, and confidence with technology. A combination of Likert-scale and open-ended questions was used. The surveys were administered before the start of the AFLC and at the end. They were sent by an administrator who was not a lead facilitator on the AFLC, who kept the data secure until after stipends were distributed.

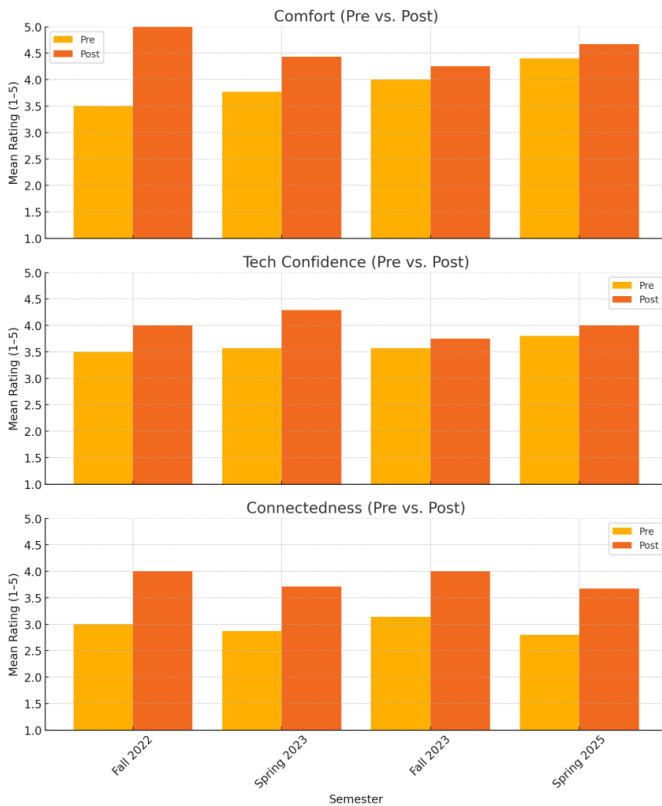
The significant findings included:

- Increased comfort in teaching online
- Greater connectedness
- Improved technical confidence

Using the Mann-Whitney test of significance, the increase in connectedness was statistically significant.

Future Facilitators

Future facilitators will want to make a non-anonymous survey to use additional statistical tests to show improvement of individuals.



Three bar charts comparing pre and post mean ratings for Comfort, Tech Confidence, and Connectedness over four semesters.

Variable	U Statistic	p-value	Int
Comfort Teaching Online	115.5	0.031	Sta
Confidence with Technology	118.0	0.014	Sta
Connectedness to Other Faculty	68.0	0.0004	Hig

Pre and Post Surveys Administered

Pre-Assessment for the SOCWRK Online Faculty Learning Community

It will take about 5 minutes to complete the Pre-Assessment for the SOCWRK online FLC.

By selecting the “Yes, I consent” choice below, you consent to participating in this research.

If you do not consent, please choose “No, I do not consent” below and it will take you to the end of the survey.

Questions 1-3 will be on a Liker scale (5= extremely comfortable, 1=extremely uncomfortable)
 1= extremely uncomfortable, 2 = uncomfortable, 3 = neutral, 4 = comfortable, 5 = extremely comfortable

Q1 – How would you rate your comfort level teaching online?

Q2 – How confident are you at using technology to advance relationships with students?

Q3 – How connected do you feel with other faculty members within the SOCWRK program?

The following are free text questions –

Q4 – What level of expertise do you expect from this community?

Q5 – What are your top three muddiest topics related to online learning/teaching?

Q6 – Which skills do you hope to improve during the Faculty Learning Community?

Q7 – In a few sentences, what is one of the most memorable/exciting/interesting things you learned while teaching last semester (or in general if you did not teach)?

Q8 – What is the most important thing you hope to learn from this community?

Post-assessment for the SOCWRK Online Faculty Learning Community

It will take about 5 minutes to complete the Post-Assessment for the SOCWRK online FLC.

By selecting the “Yes, I consent” choice below, you consent to participating in this research.

If you do not consent, please choose “No, I do not consent” below and it will take you to the end of the survey.

Questions 1-3 will be on a Likert scale (5= extremely comfortable, 1=extremely uncomfortable)

1= extremely uncomfortable, 2 = uncomfortable, 3 = neutral, 4 = comfortable, 5 = extremely comfortable

Q1 – How would you rate your comfort level teaching online?

Q2 – How confident are you at using technology to advance relationships with students?

Q3 – How connected do you feel with other faculty members within the SOCWRK program?

Q4 – Do you feel more comfortable teaching online? (Y/N with free text)

Q5 – Do you feel more connected with other faculty members within the SOCWRK program? (Y/N with free text)

Q6 – Did you gain the expertise you expected from this community? (Y/N with free text)

Q7 – In a few sentences, what is one of the most memorable/exciting/interesting things you learned while teaching last semester (or just in general, if you did not teach)? (Free text)

Q8 – Which skills do you feel you improved by being in this faculty learning community? (Free text)

Q9 – What did you learn that you did not know before this community? (Free text)

Lessons Learned

We kept the survey responses anonymous to encourage participation.

- Start with Community not Content
 - The most powerful transformations can arise when adjunct faculty are involved in their own goals for participation, and that they felt heard and connected about their needs. Content matters less than belongingness.

- Design for Flexibility
 - Many adjunct faculty balance multiple roles and jobs. Offering asynchronous or flexible options

Sustaining the Community

Align With Clear Goals

To keep the AFLC thriving, sustainability must be intentional from the start. For example, our community was designed to:

1. Create space for adjunct faculty to engage in dialogue about their teaching
2. Help faculty connect with each other and with the broader campus community
3. Provide opportunities for meaningful feedback on teaching beyond end-of-course evaluations

Grounding the community in clear, shared goals ensures relevance and focus over time.

Secure ongoing support

Work with program leadership to secure funding for stipends, staff time, and digital tools needed to run the AFLC. Demonstrating impact with data can support long-term investment.

We partnered with the Center for Teaching and Learning, eCampus, Innovation and Innovation Team, and several Faculty Associates (guest-facilitators) from across campus to create a deeper connection for faculty.

Build departmental ownership

Transitioning the AFLC from a university entity (Center for Teaching and Learning and eCampus) to a department-supported model can embed the community more deeply into faculty development culture. Collaborate with department chairs, program leads, and university stakeholders to co-own the vision and process.

Create reusable structures

Document email templates, course materials, and announcement templates to make the AFLC easy to replicate and run each semester. This also allows new facilitators to step in with ease. Remember, the AFLC is adjusted to the needs of your adjunct instructors, templates might not perfectly align each semester but having a starting point (such as templates) makes it easier to manage.

Maintain flexible participation

A one-size-fits-all model is rarely effective in professional development; instead, the learning community should be a space where instructors can engage in ways that support their individual growth. Allowing varied levels of participation makes the community more accessible and meaningful. Prioritizing perfect attendance over authentic

engagement isn't realistic or sustainable. Their presence, when they're able to show up fully, is truly invaluable.

Celebrate and share success

Highlight participant stories, showcase faculty achievements, and share outcomes with leadership and the wider campus. Recognition helps fuel future interest and institutional buy-in.

Closing the Community

Closing a learning community intentionally is just as important as launching and designing. A thoughtfully designed conclusion reinforces the value of participation, gives adjunct faculty a sense of accomplishment, strengthens long-term engagement with the institution, and models course closure for their course. Below are elements we include in our own wrap-up process, offered here as a flexible template or inspiration for your own community's closing activities:

Optional Closing Discussion

Provide a space for final reflections. This can be as simple as a discussion board or shared document prompt. We made it fun and integrated AI reflections and goodbye memes.

Certificate of Participation

Recognize participants with a certificate noting their completion of the learning community. This small gesture acknowledges their time and professional development. If your institution tracks professional development hours, include credit details as well.

eLearning or Professional Development Credits

If available, ensure participants receive institutional credit

for their engagement. Per our collaboration with eCampus, participants earn eLearning credits that contribute to their ongoing professional development records.

BSU Lapel Pin or Institutional Token

We give each participant a Boise State University lapel pin to represent their connection to the broader academic community. A small, branded token like this reinforces their belonging and professional identity.

Thank You Letters to Collaborators

Behind every successful learning community are contributors, faculty mentors, facilitators, instructional designers, guest speakers, or program staff. We recommend sending personalized thank-you notes and including a small token of appreciation (e.g., a coffee card or modest gift card) to express gratitude for their support. This simple gesture helps foster long-term goodwill and continued collaboration.

Final Thought

Closing with care communicates that adjunct faculty are seen, valued, and celebrated. Whether through recognition, reflection, or a small token of appreciation, this final step helps solidify the community you've built and encourages future engagement.

Lessons Learned

- Provide opportunities for continued connection or ways to stay involved with professional development.
 - We created a “Faculty Commons” where everyone that completed the learning

community are within one Canvas course

- We host semester “Whole Community Meetings” that bridges all cohorts together in one community meeting.

Conclusion

Adjunct instructors are not just content deliverers, they are essential contributors to your academic community. When they lack support, confidence, and connection, everyone, students included, feel it. An adjunct faculty learning community is more than a program, it's a commitment to connection, belonging, and professional growth. Your adjuncts may not say they need a learning community but it is likely they are looking for more support, connection, and more professional development opportunities to meet their unique needs.

Remember, no two communities will look exactly alike and that's a strength. Lean into flexibility, listen to your adjunct faculty, and adjust based on what you learn along the way. Most importantly, center connection. When adjunct instructors have access to professional development and authentic community, the impact ripples beyond the course, it touches student learning, departmental culture, and institutional belonging.



Note: You don't have to get it perfect to get it started. Use what serves your adjunct instructors,

adapt what doesn't, and trust that growing together, intentionally, is the most important step.

Templates and Other Documentation

Templates

- [Email Template: Initial Individual Outreach](#)
- [Application Template: Ajunct Faculty Learning Community Application](#)
- [AFLC Faculty Letter Template: Start of Learning Community](#)
- [Pre/Post Community Community Assessment Language](#)
- [Assessment Templates: Pre- and Post-Assessment](#)

Other Documentation

- [Implementation Diagram](#)
- [AFLC Project Overview and History](#)
- [“Designing Accessible and Inclusive Professional Development for NTTF” \(Non-tenure track faculty\)](#)

Heather Sanders, M.Ed.



Heather serves as an Principal Instructional Specialist for the Master of Social Work Online program at Boise State University. With over 20 years of experience in education, Heather is dedicated to fostering connection, confidence, and community among learners and faculty especially adjunct instructors through personalized professional development, orientation support, and ongoing, meaningful connection.

Her work includes leading course improvement processes, promoting evidence-based teaching discussions, and building meaningful relationships with all instructors teaching in the program. Heather believes

that cultivating a sense of connectedness and confidence is essential to supporting adjunct faculty, which in turn enhances the overall teaching and student learning experience.

A recent key highlight of her work is leading the initiative for the, department embedded, Faculty Learning Communities that empower adjuncts to thrive in their online teaching environments. Drawing from experience in teaching, instructional design, online learning, and faculty engagement, Heather is passionate about creating inclusive, supportive spaces where educators feel seen, supported, and confident.

Jennifer Obenshain MSW, DSW, LCSW.



Jennifer Obenshain is a compassionate and dedicated social work professional with extensive experience in supporting individuals, families, and communities through advocacy, education, and direct service. With a

strong foundation in trauma-informed care, mental health, and community engagement, Jennifer has worked across various settings to promote social justice and improve access to critical resources. Passionate about empowering others and fostering systemic change, she continues to be a driving force in advancing the values and impact of the social work profession.

Jennifer has built a reputation for innovative thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and a deep commitment to supporting diverse learners. She has led initiatives that improve academic outcomes, integrate technology in meaningful ways, and foster inclusive learning environments. Her work often bridges the gap between pedagogy and practice, ensuring that institutional goals align with the real needs of students and faculty. Passionate about continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making, she is a trusted advisor and dynamic leader in her field.

Amy Vecchione, MLIS.

Amy Vecchione Image

Amy Vecchione is an educational leader, researcher, and technologist committed to advancing equity, innovation, and student success in higher education. With over 15 years of experience in academic libraries and online education, she brings a collaborative and forward-thinking approach to instructional technology, faculty development, and digital pedagogy.

Amy is pursuing her Doctorate in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education

Administration from Idaho State University. Her research interests include shared governance, procedural justice, learning analytics, and the integration of AI in teaching and learning. She is an advocate for open educational resources (OER), inclusive teaching practices, and data-informed decision-making.

Currently serving as a leader in eCampus initiatives at Boise State University, Amy mentors faculty, leads research projects, and supports innovation in online learning environments. She is also an active contributor to grant-funded research and institutional efforts to enhance student engagement and retention.

When she's not teaching, researching, or leading new initiatives, Amy enjoys trail running, traveling with her son, and exploring the natural world.