

Encourage collaboration

To develop a successful collaborative website, creating the site is only the first step: suggestions for encouraging online collaboration follow.

Collaborators must perceive the need for and the benefit to online collaboration

If instructors believe that they already know how to teach well or have sufficient pedagogical resources to support their teaching, they may not see a need to share or collaboratively develop pedagogy. If, on the other hand, there are no readily available sources of good pedagogy, some instructors may be excited about sharing and developing pedagogy. When deciding whether to create a collaborative website, consider asking “What would motivate contributors to devote their time to this collaboration?”

Similarly, consider whether it makes sense for the collaboration to take place online. If collaborators frequently interact in person, a simple joint file-sharing system could be sufficient to support the collaboration.

Collaboration flourishes when collaborators are comfortable taking risks: create a comfortable atmosphere

Some suggestions for creating a comfortable atmosphere follow:

- Limit who can access the collaborative website. Collaborators may be more likely to share partially-formed ideas if they know and trust everyone who has access to the site.
- Model imperfection. Tolerate occasional grammatical errors, poorly phrased explanations, and ideas that aren't fully fleshed out. If a respected contributor displays imperfection on the collaborative website, others will feel less pressure to be perfect and so may be more likely to contribute.
- Do not assess collaborators based on their contributions to the website. Praise for particularly helpful contributions is welcome, but say nothing negative about weaker contributions: the fear of censure will discourage collaborators from contributing.

Seed the site with content and discussion

To start the site, it's helpful to have a core team of motivated collaborators seed the site with existing materials and interesting discussion. Once this tone has been set, others will have a model to follow as they contribute to the site.

It's helpful to have a site editor

Over time, a site can become unwieldy or confusing. To maintain the site's usefulness, it's helpful to have one person with the time to revise or restructure the site as needed.

If the site includes Good Practices pages that summarize the pedagogy available on the site, then the editor may need to maintain these pages by periodically reviewing the new materials added to the site and linking to them from the Good Practices pages. Collaborators may be reluctant to link to their own materials from the Good Practices pages, so if there is no site editor, the collaborators may need to encourage each other to maintain the Good Practices pages.

A site editor should also monitor the tagging of materials, since tagging identifies the relevance of materials to each other and determines which files and discussions appear on which pages.

During active periods of site development, the site editor's time commitment would warrant course release.

Provide departmental encouragement and support

- Collaboration takes time, so there must be a departmental understanding that time will be spent on collaboration.
- Some technical support is likely to be needed during site installation and to tailor the site to meet the needs of the team. WordPress is fairly easy to use, so a team member could perhaps do much of the installation and customization. During active periods of site development, this time commitment would warrant course release.
- It's very helpful if a respected, high-level member of the department occasionally encourages collaborators to contribute to the website. Praise works wonders.