



LEARNING CIRCLES  
IN LIBRARIES

# FACILITATING LEARNING CIRCLES

Facilitator Handbook

## Part 1:

Learning About the Learning Circles

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union





Authors:

**Grif Peterson**

**Noemi Gryczko**

**Peer 2 Peer University**

Content editing:

**Magdalena Jackiewicz**

Publisher:

**Information Society Development Foundation, 2020**

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

ISBN 978-83-955082-4-0

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
How to use this book .....	4
<b>Module 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Check-in .....	6
Read & Watch .....	7
Do/Make/Say/Think .....	11
Reflect: Notice what you noticed .....	13
<b>Module 2: Course Selection</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Check-in .....	14
Read & Watch .....	15
Do/Make/Say/Think .....	20
Reflect: Plus/Delta .....	21
<b>Module 3: Logistics &amp; Tools</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Check-in .....	22
Read & Watch .....	22
Do/Make/Say/Think .....	27
Reflect: Hopes & fears .....	28
<b>Module 4: Facilitation</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Check-in .....	29
Read & Watch .....	29
Do/Make/Say/Think .....	37
Reflect: Facilitation is a practice .....	38
<b>Module 5: Organizing Teams</b> .....	<b>39</b>
Check-in .....	39
Read & Watch .....	41
Do/Make/Say/Think .....	42
Reflection: Peer leadership .....	43

# Introduction

---

This Facilitator Handbook was developed as part of the Learning Circles in Libraries project, oriented at making adult learning more organized, interactive and fun. The purpose of this handbook is to help facilitators understand how people acquire knowledge through self-learning, as well as how they learn from others, so that they could subsequently train facilitators in running their own Learning Circles. This manual will guide you at every step of the process.

*Facilitating Learning Circles - Facilitator Handbook* is composed of 4 parts. You are currently reading Part 1 which brings the concept of learning circles closer through a complete course, designed as a learning circle. By completing this course, you'll gain a better understanding of the concept, as well as its methodology, and can further use this course to train future facilitators. The course is divided into four modules, each of which can be explored in 90 minutes. By completing this course, you'll gain a firm grasp on the concepts, skills, tools, and resources needed to start running learning circles in your neighborhood.

*Part 2: Self-Learning* of this Facilitator Handbook is devoted to the concept of self-learning. *Part 3: Facilitating Learning Circles* explores how to best facilitate Learning Circles and finally, *Part 4: Virtual Learning Circles* provides practical tips on running the Learning Circles online.

The Learning Circles in Libraries project is a collaboration of 6 institutions: Information Society Development Foundation (Poland), Stadtbibliothek Koeln (Germany), Suomen eOppimiskeskus (Finland), Biblioteca Lúcio Craveiro da Silva (Portugal), Fundatia Progress (Romania) and Peer 2 Peer University (USA). It is implemented as part of the Erasmus+ program, administered by the European Commission.

## How to use this book

---



You'll see this hammer and wrench icon throughout the course. This calls out places that reference the P2PU software tools, which have been designed to help you run learning circles. Comprehensive documentation of our tools can be found on our [Read the Docs](#).



In each module, you'll see this yarn ball icon next to prompts to share on [our P2PU community forum](#). These prompts are designed to help you get acquainted with the resources available in our P2PU online community, and it also will connect you with learning circle practitioners from around the world!

*This course has been designed to be run as a learning circle. Each of the four modules have been thoughtfully put together for small groups to work through in 90 minute meetings. So, by participating in this course about learning circles, you'll also be participating in a learning circle! Pretty meta, huh? We've included boxes like this throughout the course to provide you with some extra commentary that will help you transition from being a learning circle participant to a facilitator.*

## Running this course as a learning circle

---

While you are free to go through this course on your own, it was designed to be taken as a learning circle in a group of ~4-15 people meeting over four weeks. Ideally, somebody who has already facilitated a learning circle can serve as the facilitator for this course. If that's not possible, then we recommend that participants themselves switch off who serves as the facilitator for each module. As in any learning circle, your group is ultimately in charge of how you work through the materials: you can watch videos together as a group, add in extra discussion questions or activities, pull from other sources...whatever you think is going to work best for your group!

For the full experience of running this course as a learning circle, we recommend that you use the P2PU website to [create a learning circle](#) for your group. This will give you access to email reminders, notifications, and surveys. This way, when you're running your first learning circle, you'll have a clear idea of what your learners' experience will be like!

We also recommend that everybody have a computer and headphones. Pens, notebooks, and post-it notes are helpful but not essential.

## P2PU's facilitator training workshops

---

Many of the materials in this course have been pulled from P2PU's in-person facilitator training workshops and modified for this online course. If you're interested in learning more about P2PU's in-person training workshops and other offerings, please visit our [Work With Us](#) page or reach out to [thepeople@p2pu.org](mailto:thepeople@p2pu.org).

# Module 1:

## Introduction

### Check-in

 Suggested timing: **15 minutes**

#### By the end of this module, you will:

- Start to develop an idea of what learning circles look like in practice.
- Understand P2PU and the values that underlie our work.
- Understand the theory behind learning circles, and why they work.
- Be able to talk about both P2PU and learning circles in your own words.

### Group Introductions

For the first check-in, make sure that you are all gathered in a circle so that everybody can see everybody else. Figure out whose birthday is closest to today—this person will introduce themselves first!

- If the group already knows one another, you can start by sharing what you hope to achieve by taking this course, as well as any prior experience that you may have with learning circles.
- If most people have not met one another before, then start with names and some personal (but not too personal) questions. “How did you get here today?” usually works well.

Before moving on to the next section, take a moment to make sure that all participants in your group can access these online course materials. P2PU courses are all [openly licensed](#), meaning that our courses are not only free, but also fully accessible without needing to create an account for login. When you’re facilitating a learning circle with a different online course, you may need to spend more time with your learners ensuring they’re able to login, remember their password, etc.



## Read & Watch



Suggested timing: **30 minutes**

### Welcome to P2PU

Welcome to Peer 2 Peer University, the home of the Learning Circles

Peer 2 Peer University (we mostly say P2PU) is a grassroots organization whose mission is to create alternatives to formal education that are both practical and liberating. Our primary project is called learning circles, which are groups of people who meet in-person to learn something together, using free online courses or other learning resources.

P2PU is a small team, but learning circles have reached six continents because we are an open-source and grassroots project. This means that anybody can freely adapt learning circles to their context and also contribute to our work. We involve learners and collaborators in all stages of the design and delivery of our work and believe that sustained learning communities are created through grassroots collaboration, not hierarchical mandates.

P2PU is guided by our three values of equity, community, and peer learning. You can read more about what those mean to us on [our website](#).

### What is a learning circle?

What does a Learning Circle look like?

Simply put, a learning circle is a group of people who meet in-person to learn something together. Every learning circle looks a little different, but they all have a few things in common.

#### Free

Learning circles utilize freely accessible learning materials such as online courses. Along with this is an expectation that learners are never charged a fee to attend a learning circle, and that you are not charged to start a learning circle.

#### Recurring

Learning circles usually meet for 90 minutes/week for 6-8 weeks, but this is flexible depending on the course and your goals. Generally, we find that learning circles shorter than 4 weeks don't have enough time to form a group culture, and learning circles longer than 8 weeks can be alienating due to the time commitment. While some groups have continued to meet indefinitely after the learning circle finished, this should not be the expectation up front.

### Facilitated

Every learning circle has a facilitator. The facilitator does not have to be an expert in the subject, so with a little practice and training, anybody can facilitate. In addition to serving as a host for the learning circle each week a facilitator is responsible for:

- finding a quiet space to meet
- publicizing the learning circle
- communicating with learners
- gathering supplies like laptops, paper, and pens
- delegating tasks
- leading group discussions
- fostering curiosity and exploration.

### Collaborative

Learning circles are rooted in peer learning, which values each participant's experience and expertise. Three values underlie P2PU's concept of peer learning:

- Everybody is an expert in something
- Sharing is how we learn best
- Feedback is necessary in order to improve

Peer learning can create a rich learning environment in which everyone simultaneously teaches and learns, acts and observes, speaks, and listens. This exposes learners of all backgrounds to new perspectives, provides an opportunity to develop useful social skills, and allows individuals to achieve something greater than they could have on their own. One way we capture this sentiment is by saying that we are all teachers and we are all learners.

By convening a group of learners who are interested in a similar topic, you have the basis for an open, collaborative learning environment and a helpful support system. We find that learning circles work best with between 4-15 learners. Outside of this range, you may find extra burden placed on you as the facilitator. That being said, there have been successful groups of three who have worked through courses together and learning circles as big as 60 people, supported by a team of facilitators!



**Dirk is a teacher and a learner**



## Structured

Every learning circle meeting has the same overarching structure: a check-in, time spent watching and reading background materials, a group activity (do/make/say/think), and time for reflection.



### Check-in

Learning circles begin each week with a ~5-10 minute check-in. This is a chance to (re)familiarize yourself with other participants and to set your personal goals for the meeting. Check-ins may include icebreakers, reviews of personal goals, and/or a recap of the prior week.



### Read & Watch:

The majority of each learning circle is devoted to working through the online course materials. There are certain course topics (e.g. web design and basic computer skills) where it will make sense for everybody to have their own computer and work through a lot of the materials on their own. There are other course topics (e.g. public speaking and interview skills) where it might make more sense to project the course on a wall and go through all the materials as a group. It is completely up to you and the learners who you are working with to determine how you best want to spend this time: oftentimes, what is best is a mix of both individual and group work.



### Do/Make/Say/Think

Incorporating group discussions and activities into the course ensures that you are doing more than just proctoring a study hall. Sometimes group activities emerge naturally from the online course, but sometimes you need to look elsewhere. We have created some of our own activities which you can use to support peer learning and bridge the gap between the online course and real life.



### Reflect

Reflection is a core component of learning circles, and we recommend doing a short group reflection exercise at the end of every learning circle meeting.

*You'll notice that each module of this course is broken into these same four sections, making it perfectly suited for use in a learning circle format! However, not all online courses are as learning circle friendly, so as a facilitator, you'll work closely with your learners to adapt existing courses to this format. Don't worry, we'll be covering this topic later in this course.*

## Setting expectations

Some learners will inevitably come to the learning circle expecting a traditional classroom experience (where you are the teacher). Therefore, it is important for the facilitator to model peer learning from the very first meeting and involve learners in setting the tone of the group.

One easy way to do this is to set up the room in a circle. We encourage groups to sit in a circle whenever possible. If you are in a computer lab, you can still stand in a circle for the check-in and reflection. Sitting in a circle brings up important questions that can help you re-enforce peer learning: how is this different from classrooms that the learners are used to? Who holds the expertise when there is no front of the classroom?

Let's hear from some P2PU facilitators, and get their advice on how to start learning circles off on the right foot.

Setting up a peer learning environment

How is a Learning Circle different from a class

## Additional readings & resources

The ideas behind learning circles are not new. To the contrary, there is a long and important legacy of anti-oppressive education practices that P2PU honors through our work with learning circles. We've compiled a brief history of learning in a circle on our community forum, which we encourage you to read and comment on. We draw inspiration from iconic texts and historic social movements as much as we do from modern movements that fight against the hegemony of formal education.

Additionally, a lot of what we addressed in this module - particularly the question of how learners perceive expertise when there is no teacher in the room - was addressed in an award-winning 2017 PhD dissertation by our friend Cristiane Damasceno entitled [Massive Courses Meet Local Communities: An Ethnography of Open Education Learning Circles](#). It makes for great weekend reading!

## Do/Make/Say/Think

 Suggested timing: **30 minutes**



### Create a P2PU account

---

In order to best utilize the resources in this course, please [create a free P2PU account](#). Your P2PU account will allow you to perform a number of tasks including:

- create learning circles
- publicize learning circles
- manage learning circle event details
- communicate with learners via email and SMS
- collect feedback from learners
- add online courses to our database.

Each of these tools is embedded within P2PU's global community of practice. For instance, when you share feedback about an online course you used or a learning circle, you aren't just sharing that with P2PU staff; it will be useful for other facilitators who are considering using the same course. To help enable these connections, P2PU accounts also provide access to:

- a group of mentors who can help answer questions when you start your learning circle
- a global community forum
- a monthly digest of what's happening across the P2PU community
- a mailing list featuring monthly calls and professional development opportunities.

*While you need a P2PU account in order to create a learning circle, learners can sign up with an email address; they do not need a P2PU account. If a learner does not have an email address, you can manually add them to your learning circle and add a phone number so that they can receive SMS reminders and updates.*



## Explore the P2PU website

---

The P2PU website is the hub for all the tools and resources you'll need to run a successful learning circles. Some of the most prominent resources are:

- Learning circle signup page: This is where potential learners can find all the learning circles currently happening around the world.
- Community forum: This is the place to discuss all things learning circles with other facilitators.
- Facilitator page: The page aggregates a number of featured resources from our community forum.
- Facilitator dashboard: The dashboard is where you can create, manage, and share feedback about your learning circles. We also feature up-to-date information from around the community, including links to recent discussion on the forum, an Instagram feed, recently added courses, and a roll of upcoming learning circles worldwide and in your city.
- Courses page: The courses page features all the online courses that facilitators have used to facilitate learning circles. This course library is built by the community; any facilitator can add a new online course to the list.
- Blog: The latest updates and information from the P2PU team.



Now that you have a P2PU account, head over to the "[Introduce Yourself](#)" thread on the P2PU community forum (if you're prompted to log in again on the forum, you can use your new P2PU credentials to do so; you don't need to create a separate account!). Say "hi" and let us know that you are working through this course!

## Reflect

 Suggested timing: **15 minutes**

**In this module, you have familiarized yourself with learning circles, explored the P2PU website, and connected with the P2PU community on our forum. This also may have been your first time participating in a learning circle! As we mentioned above, reflection is an important part of learning. That's why we suggest that every learning circle meeting take some time at the end to wrap-up with a reflection activity. So now it is your chance to do so!**

Individually, take 5 minutes to reflect on the questions below. We recommend jotting down some notes for yourself as you do so. Then take the remaining time to discuss as a group.

- How do you feel after this first module? What did you notice? What questions do you still have?
- How is this format different or similar from other learning experiences that you've been a part of?

There will also likely be some practical issues to address as you wrap up. Some questions that often arise in the first week include:

- Do we want to stay in touch somehow during the week?
- Should we assign ourselves homework?
- Should we continue to let new people join our group?
- Do we want to go through the course separately on our own computers, use a projector, or a combination of both?



*After each learning circle, the facilitator can log into their dashboard and choose to send a wrap-up message to the group and, separately, to P2PU. This is a good way to remind the group what you spoke about before the next meeting, and to let us know if you have any questions or concerns. If you're running this course as a learning circle, we recommend that the facilitator go ahead and send out one of these wrap-up messages, so the group can get a sense of what they're like!*

## Module 2:

# Course Selection

### Check-in

 Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

#### By the end of this module, you will:

- Be familiar with terms like OER and MOOCs.
- Understand the general landscape of online learning.
- Know how to search for and evaluate online courses for learning circles.
- Have some ideas on how to adapt online courses for the learning circle model.



### Explore the P2PU course database

P2PU maintains a database of courses that has been used in other learning circles. For this check-in, have a quick look at the courses that are already in the database, and play around with the filters and search options. After you've looked for five or so minutes, discuss what you found with your group. Here are some conversation starters:

- What are the most popular languages for courses in our database?
- Approximately what percent of the courses are OER?
- What is the most used course for learning circles?
- Can you find any courses that you'd be interested in facilitating? Which ones?

## Read & Watch

 Suggested timing: **35 minutes**

### A quick history of online learning

On March 20, 1728, an advertisement appeared in the Boston Gazette offering shorthand writing lessons. Notably, this wasn't meant exclusively for Boston residents, but rather for "Person in the Country desirous to Learn this Art". The instructor, Caleb Philipps, was proposing to send weekly lessons to people through the post, allowing anybody to learn from him "as perfectly as those that live in Boston". This advertisement set a tone of overpromising and under-delivering that has largely persisted in distance education over the ensuing 300 years, whether the format be radio, television and or internet. Throughout history, many of the successful distance learning programs, whether it be the Chautauqua Movement, Open University, or Ivan Ilich's learning webs, have rooted distance education in a distributed network of in-person meetings.

Over the past twenty years, the vision for free learning programs online has largely unified under the banner of Open Educational Resources, or OER. By definition, OER are "resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others".

Around 2008, a few individuals and institutions began to take OER one step further. Instead of just sharing learning materials online, they started "running" free online courses, where learners from around the world could sign up and work through course materials together as an online community. These experiments were coined as MOOCs: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The MOOC name has lost a lot of currency in the past few years (as many things that get branded as MOOCs are neither massive nor open), but that doesn't mean they are any less popular. According to Class Central (a MOOC search engine and review site), 110 million people participated in 13,000 online courses in 2019.

### Common types of online courses

Online courses come in all sorts of varieties. They might be authored by subject-matter experts, faculty members, learning designers, or hobbyists. They might be hosted on somebody's personal website, or they might be part of a broader university effort. Some courses are open access, meaning that they come with a license that allows for both re-use and adaptation, while others are free to use but maintain copyright, preventing users from remixing the course materials to better address their own needs. There are four common types of courses that we encounter in learning circles:

- **Courses that carry an open license** are known as Open Education Resources or OER. OER is not only free to access, but also allows for repurposing by users. This means we can host old versions, translate activities, and adapt materials for use in new contexts. We prefer working with OER because we know we will always retain the right to access these materials.
  - Examples: MIT OpenCourseWare, Open Learning Initiative, OpenLearn, Wisc-Online. OERu, freeCodeCamp, Saylor Academy and Skills Commons.
- **Courses that are free but not open** comprise the vast majority of courses currently used for learning circles. While the quality of these courses is often good, there is a risk that these courses might not always be around, as they sometimes get taken offline or put behind paywalls.
  - Examples: edX, Coursera, Khan Academy, and Udacity.
- **Free/open-access tools and databases** can serve as the foundation of a great learning circle. Facilitators have developed light curricula around these tools to help create a group environment.
  - Examples: Scratch, Tinkercad, GIMP, Wikipedia, Youtube, and Project Gutenberg.
- **Proprietary courses** charge licensing fees in order to access materials. While we don't allow for learning circles to charge learners to participate, oftentimes libraries and school systems will have existing contracts with these vendors, and in this case, it's fine to run them as a learning circle. If you choose a course from a proprietary vendor, you'll be able to run a learning circle with it but the course will not be visible to others on the P2PU course database.
  - Examples: GALE Courses, Lynda, and Universal Class.

## Searching for courses

Learning circle participants come together around a common interest, supported by freely accessible learning materials. As the facilitator, it is your job to identify these materials before the learning circle begins.

Most facilitators use online courses as the subject material for their learning circles because online courses are generally: (1) freely available (2) developed by subject matter experts, and (3) designed in a linear format that is easily adaptable to group study. There are, however, many things that an online course cannot do. It cannot understand you as a person, it cannot make decisions for you, and it cannot tell you when you need to look elsewhere to find what you are looking for. Additionally, free online courses are a mixed bag: they aren't always free, they aren't always developed by experts, and the format doesn't always support learning circles.

So for all of these reasons, we try to avoid looking for the "perfect course": it simply does not exist! All we can do is try to find the best materials around to help your specific community of



learners reach the goals that they have set out to achieve.

Don't worry if you can't find a course that you like on P2PU's course page, because anybody with a P2PU account can add new courses to the P2PU database at any time using this form. Some of our favorite places to search for new courses are:

- Open Culture, a blog that stays up-to-date highlighting free online courses from around the web.
- Class Central, a search tool that allows you to search for certain subjects by a number of different filters including start date and course rating.
- Of course, you can also simply search on Google or any other search engine for "free online course in <topic>".
- Finally, we keep a fairly up to date list of popular courses providers on our website. You can review this to find providers who you may not have heard of before.

## Searching for courses

You do not need to be an expert in the course material in order to facilitate a learning circle. However, whether you are looking on P2PU's course database or elsewhere on the web, you'll want to review the course before you create a learning circle. A few key points to consider when evaluating courses:

- Is the course free and do you expect that all resources will remain available for the duration of the learning circle? (A Creative Commons license is a good sign!)
- Is the course self-paced? If there is a set start and end date, does it align with your schedule?
- Does the weekly time commitment and duration of the course align with your expectations?
- Does the course require additional resources or software aside from a web browser and a word processor? If yes, do you have these resources available?

If you are struggling to choose between a few courses, P2PU has a detailed rubric that you can use to evaluate and compare courses for learning circles.

## Adapting courses

Once you've searched for courses and evaluated them, the final step is to adapt them for learning circles. As we mentioned in the first module, not all online courses are as learning circle friendly as this one is, so as a facilitator, you'll need to take steps to adapt the course to the learning circle format. So, what exactly, makes a course work well for learning circles? In September 2019, we asked this question to learning circle facilitators who joined us at

Boston Public Library for our annual gathering. Here's what we came up with:

## Creating new courses

In some cases, facilitators have created their own courses. Here's a few examples of what that can look like:



### Tinkercad in Cambridge, MA

Suzannah, a librarian in Cambridge, MA, ran a few instances of a learning circle about Tinkercad, the free web-based 3D modeling software. Tinkercad is not a course, however, it's just a tool. But after running two learning circles, Suzannah was able to put together a curriculum for running a 4 week learning circle about Tinkercad, which she then shared on our community forum for other facilitators who are interested in Tinkercad.



### Fiction Writing in Boston, MA

Across the Charles River, Jordan, a librarian in Boston, MA, was unsatisfied with the free options for fiction writing courses. Being a writer herself, she made a Wordpress site and then built a course on fiction writing for beginners that was specifically designed for an 8 week learning circle. The course was so successful, that she has since made two additional courses: one about world building and the other about writing a series. All three of these courses are now available on the P2PU courses page. If you want to read more about this, Jordan's experience was featured in *The Writing Platform*, an online community for writers, in 2019.

There is of course no obligation to create your own course to run a learning circle. However, if this is something that interests you, we encourage you to check out *Course in a Box*, the open source tool for creating online courses that we developed. We used *Course in a Box* to create this course, and we've also worked with partners to create other courses that are designed for learning circles, such as *Making and Learning*.

### Additional readings & resources

If you're interested in going deeper and learning more about some of the topics covered in this session, we recommend the following resources:

- For a history of distance education and online learning in the US, check out *Distance Education and the Evolution of Online Learning in the United States* by Hope Kentnor,

published in Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue in 2015.

- For a twenty year history of trends in online learning, check out Twenty Years of Edtech, an article by Martin Weller published in Educause in 2018.
- For a connection between this history of online learning and teaching, check out Teaching in a Digital Age v2 by Tony Bates, self-published in 2019.
- And for an ongoing analysis of education technology more broadly, consider subscribing to Audrey Watters' Hack Education Weekly Newsletter and/or Stephen Downes' OLDaily or OLWeekly.

## Do/Make/Say/Think

 Suggested timing: **35 minutes**

### Adapting a course for learning circles

For today's activity, we're going to go through the process of finding, evaluating, and adapting an existing online course for use in a learning circle.

First, form small groups of 2-3 people. Each group should have an access to a laptop or computer to complete this activity. Spend 20 minutes working through the activity below. Make sure that you choose someone in your group to document and take notes on the small group discussion, as there will be a large group share-out at the end of this activity.

#### Step 1: Find & select a course

- What topic area(s) are you interested in?
- How many weeks will your learning circle be?
- Who is the audience for your learning circle?
- Are you able to find a course on the P2PU site?
- Where else can you look for courses?

#### Step 2: Evaluate your course

- How is the course licensed?
- Will your learners be able to access the course materials free of charge? Will they need to create an account to gain access? How does your group feel about that?
- Does it seem like the course materials will be available/accessible in a few months? A year? How can you know for sure?
- Does the scope of the course make sense for your learners? Does it align with how long

you intend your learning circle to be?

### Step 3: Adapt your course

- What additional materials or resources will you need to gather in order to successfully use the course materials in a learning circle?
- How can you leverage the existing course structure in a group format? How do you envision learners working together through this course material?
- Does the course content lend itself towards group activities? If yes, how do you envision these activities working with your learners? If not, what activities can you think of to add?

After you've finished, take another 15 minutes for each group report back to the full group, highlighting which course you chose and some of the more interesting things you noticed when answering the above questions. At the end of each report out, ask each small group to answer the following: Would you use the course you selected in a learning circle? Why or why not?



Check out the “Latest Courses and Topics” category on the community forum, and share your thoughts about any courses or topics that you investigated. If there is a topic that you are interested in but can't find a good course for, let us know on the “What Topics are Missing?” thread.

## Reflect

 Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

For this reflection activity, each member of the group will share one Plus and one Delta for the meeting. A plus is something that went well today, while a delta is something that you'd like to change for next time. After everyone has gone, take a few minutes to discuss if there are any ways that you can address the deltas for the next meeting.

*Plus/Delta is a reflection activity that we really love to use in learning circles. It is a great exercise because it underscores the fact that the group is in charge of making this experience work for them. When you're facilitating your learning circle, Plus/Delta is a great way to wrap up each week. We'll also be covering some other reflection activities that we love later in this course :)*

## Module 3:

# Logistic & Tools

### Check-in

 Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

#### By the end of this module, you will:

- Understand what prep you need to do for a learning circle.
- Feel comfortable using your facilitator dashboard.
- Know what tools and supports are available to you from P2PU.
- Draft messaging for your learning circle.

### Space is the Place

Chances are that you can't make major changes to the space that you are meeting in for your learning circle. But that doesn't mean you can't make a few small changes that will improve the experience for yourself and your peers.

Individually, read our post on the community forum about setting up a room for learning circles. Then, jot down a few notes about what you like about the space you're currently in and what can be improved.

Once everybody is finished, discuss your thoughts as a group and see if you can come up with at least one thing to change before your next meeting.

### Read & Watch

 Suggested timing: **35 minutes**

### Preparing for a learning circle

Facilitating a learning circle requires about three hours/week on the part of the facilitator, most of which is spent in the actual learning circle. In addition to that, you'll need to spend some time setting-up and cleaning-up each week, communicating with learners between each meeting, and familiarizing yourself with the upcoming week of course materials.

We recommend that you schedule your first learning circle for at least six weeks in the future. This will provide you ample time to promote your learning circle and address any outstanding questions with the P2PU team and community. As you think about planning for your first learning circle, here's our recommended course of action:

#### **6 weeks prior**

- Discuss plans with any affiliated organizations.
- Choose a course.
- Find a space.
- Confirm supplies will be available (laptops, headphones, pens, nametags, snacks, etc.).

#### **4 weeks prior**

- Establish additional web presence.
- Customize a flyer.
- Connect with local communities.
- Publicize online and offline.

#### **2 weeks prior**

- Confirm with all registered learners.
- Confirm with venue.
- Gather supplies.

You can also download this list as a PDF checklist and check out the “Promotion and Outreach” category on our community forum, which features a number of flyer templates, messaging ideas, and logos that you can use for marketing your learning circle!

## **Gathering input from your community**

Before you start running learning circles, you may want to run a small outreach project in your community to both get the word out and better understand the needs of potential learning circle participants. Below, we outline a few ways that the P2PU community has developed or used to integrate community opinions into learning circle program planning!

### **The Q method**

The Q Method is a participatory public bulletin used to solicit feedback about course topics that people are interested in. It's named after our friend Qumisha (a.k.a. Q) from Detroit Public Library, who came up with the idea as a way to promote learning circles at her library branch.



### The Q method in action

As you can see in the example above, the most popular course with 20 votes was Marketing in a Digital World. There was a tie for second place – Introduction to Public Speaking and Social Entrepreneurship 101 both received 16 votes. Based on the results, the Q offered both the marketing and public speaking courses as learning circles.

What's great about the Q Method is that it both invites community contribution for deciding topics, and serves to promote the program. This concept has been re-used by learning circle facilitators around the world, and can also have applications for other community feedback issues, such as strategic planning, programming decision-making, and understanding community satisfaction and engagement. In our community forum, you can download a template to create your own Q method and see how others have implemented it around the world.

### Focus groups

If you want more feedback on program design, you may wish to bring a small group of people together and ask them questions about what they are looking for in learning circles. This is a great way to not only generate data and insight, but also to get to know people and build relationships. In Kenya, libraries run focus groups as part of their learning circle training; we've adapted their focus group questions for you on the forum.

### Community partnerships

How do I know what people want to learn? - watch this video clip of Athanasia Fitos, a librarian from Miami, discussing the role of community partnerships in building a successful learning circle community. As you watch, think about (or discuss) your responses to these questions:

- How do you currently understand and document the needs, interests, and experiences of the various communities you serve?
- Which communities does your organization not serve who you might want to reach?
- What audiences or communities do you aim to serve through learning circles, and what might benefit or interest them most?

Here are some final thoughts from the P2PU community on how to best promote learning circles.





## How to create a learning circle on the P2PU website

---

Once you have selected your course and confirmed where and when you're going to meet, it's time to create your learning circle on the P2PU website!

The creation flow is a 5-step process; you can click through it all without needing to log in to the P2PU site. The only thing worth calling out here in more detail is "Step 5: Finalize". Here, you have the option of answering two questions that will be shared with P2PU and a group of volunteer facilitators who we call the Welcome Committee.

- What do you hope to achieve by facilitating this learning circle?
- Is there anything that we can help you with as you get started?
- Can you find any courses that you'd be interested in facilitating? Which ones?

Once you create a learning circle, we'll automatically spin up a website for you to promote your learning circle. That will look something like this:

Sample learning circle signup page

You'll then receive a confirmation email which includes the link to your sign up page and a number of other resources (including promotional and outreach materials and a supplies checklist). If you answered the questions in Step 5, the P2PU Welcome Committee will be copied on this email and someone will reach out to ensure that your concerns are addressed before the learning circle begins.

You can manage your learning circle at any time through your facilitator dashboard. From there, you'll be able to:

- edit the learning circle description
- toggle sign up on and off
- edit the date and time of individual meetings
- view details of learners who have signed up
- send emails or SMS messages to individual learners or the entire group
- share weekly feedback with learners, your colleagues, and P2PU.



## Communication and feedback

---

Feedback is an important part of peer learning, and P2PU's tools help gather and share information between learners, facilitators, and the P2PU team across the learning circle. P2PU holds user privacy to the utmost importance and we are compliant with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Here is the type of communication that you can expect during a learning circle:

## P2PU feedback tools

### At sign up

When creating a learning circle, facilitators are prompted to state their goals for leading a learning circle and ask any questions or concerns they might have. Their responses are shared with a group of people that can assist a facilitator. Similarly, when learners sign up, they are asked what their goals are for joining a learning circle. They are then introduced to their facilitator in an email containing their answers to the signup questions.

### During the learning circle

Each week, a reminder message is automatically sent to learners two days beforehand via email or SMS. Before the reminder is sent, you have the opportunity to log into their dashboard and customize the message.

After each weekly meeting, you can record a weekly reflection on their dashboard and send it to your learners and/or P2PU.

### Upon completion

At the end of a learning circle, learners and facilitators receive an email with a link to a survey that asks everyone to reflect upon the goal they first set, what worked well, what could be improved, and what their next steps will be.

The responses to the surveys are used to generate a summary of the learning circle, we call this the “learning circle insights” (here is an example). The learning circle insights are shared with the facilitator, any team organizers, and all the registered learners by email and is made public for other facilitators and learners to see.

*In the final week of the learning circle, you may wish to give certificates to learners. You can read more about that process, and download a certificate template, from our community forum.*

## Additional readings & resources

You are, of course, encouraged to utilize whatever existing methodologies you use to identify learner needs and do community outreach, whether that be informal 1-1 discussion at a circulation desk or facilitated workshops. There are a number of resources out there that can help you discover new ways of conducting community outreach. In particular, we recommend:

- Design thinking for libraries (from IDEO, Chicago Public Library, and Dokk1), which adapts IDEO’s human-centered design methodology for use in library programs.

- Team Playbook (from Atlassian, the creators of Trello and Jira), which includes here is a framework for empathy mapping, which can help you both empathize with and derive insights from possible learning circle participants.
- ToolboxToolbox, which is a curation of business, design, and organizational change toolboxes from various companies and institutions, many of which touch on community outreach and user testing.

## Do/Make/Say/Think

 Suggested timing: **35 minutes**

Creating a learning circle only takes about five minutes once you've made your plan. In this activity, we've developed some questions that will help you move towards publishing your first learning circle.

Alone or in pairs, go to the learning circle creation flow on the P2PU website.

Talk through the following questions. Wherever possible, fill in your answers on the learning circle creation flow. Note that throughout the creation flow, there are some suggestions and tips on the right hand side of the screen.

- What do you hope to achieve facilitating this learning circle?
- How will you go about deciding a topic? Do you need to do outreach before you select a course?
- What course is best suited for your needs?
- Where will you host the learning circle?
- What time of day works best for the audience that you're trying to reach?
- How will you go about promoting the learning circle?
- Is there an extra question that you want all learners to answer when signing up? How will the answer to this question help you prepare?
- What questions remain at this point?

If you're able to fill in a number of fields, you can save your learning circle as a draft and return to it later.



When you're finished, talk as a group through your plans. What are the sticking points? Can the group help each other in any way? Would the group benefit from speaking with a past facilitator? Share these thoughts on the "Creating a learning circle" category on the community forum.



## Reflect: Hopes & fears



Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

Now that you've made a plan to get your first learning circle off the ground, let's reflect a bit on how we hope it will be and what we're worried about. This is a reflection exercise called Hopes and Fears.

Using post-it notes (or small pieces of paper), take some time as individuals to write down some hopes and fears (or worries) that you have about facilitating your first learning circle. Write just one hope or fear per piece of paper.

After everyone is done, combine your notes as a group, creating a hopes grouping and a fears grouping. Take a few minutes to cluster them into common themes and then discuss. Are there hopes or fears that are shared among the group? How can the group support each other through the rest of this course? How might the P2PU community support you?

# Module 4:

---

## Facilitation

### Check-in

 Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

#### By the end of this module, you will:

- Understand what is expected from you as a facilitator.
- Feel comfortable trying this out in the real world.
- Reflect on this learning circle experience.
- Explore the opportunities for support provided by the P2PU community.

### What did you learn recently?

What is something you learned recently? Go around the group and share briefly -- remember it doesn't have to be academic! For example, maybe you learned a new cooking technique or you finally saw that arrow hidden in the FedEx logo.

As a group, discuss the role that teachers, facilitators, and experts played (or didn't play) in helping you learn these things.

### Read & Watch

 Suggested timing: **35 minutes**

### Learning circles in practice

People attend learning circles for different reasons including professional development, supplementing formal education, and building new social relationships. As a learning circle facilitator, your job is to help each learner achieve the goals that they set out to achieve, without being an expert in the subject matter. In this section, we'll dig into the question of what good facilitation looks like. To start, let's review some specific examples of recent learning circles.

## Business development in Charlotte

### Business development in Charlotte

Janet, a librarian at Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, received a number of requests over the years to offer small business development programs at her library branch. After hearing about learning circles from a colleague, she went to the P2PU website and found a course that she thought could work: Marketing in a Digital World, offered for free by the University of Illinois through Coursera.

Janet knew that weekday evenings would work best for the individuals who had mentioned this to her, and so she chose Wednesday from 6-7:30PM as the time for the learning circle, and booked a group meeting room in the library for each of the six meetings. Once this was taken care of, she put a flyer up in the library, reached out directly to some patrons who she thought would be interested, and contacted a few small business support networks across the city. 10 people showed up to the first meeting. As most everybody had signed up beforehand using the P2PU registration, Janet knew how many people didn't have their own laptop or headphones and she was prepared with library hardware to borrow.

Even though everybody had their own computer, the group decided to watch videos together, often projecting them onto a wall in the library. After working through the course, learners created social media accounts for the business, designed logos, and shared feedback with one another. The learning circle ended after six weeks, but a number of learners kept coming back week after week to further develop their business plans together.

A few months later, patrons started asking for another learning circle. The course she used the first time wasn't available, but she found a similar course called Strategic Social Media Marketing, offered for free by Boston University through edX. She has since run this learning circle a few more times, becoming not only a more confident facilitator but also an expert in her own right, as she's now helped dozens of small businesses better market themselves online.

Recently, Janet has started experimenting with new formats. She invited a past learner to join her as a co-facilitator for upcoming learning circles, and she started running learning circles at a local shopping mall as part of the library's outreach effort!

## The people's university in Nakuru

### The people's university in Nakuru

Learning circles came to the Kenya National Library Service in late 2016, when P2PU ran a facilitator training workshop for a small group of librarians from Nairobi and Nakuru. Since then, the program has blossomed into a key strategy for the library's community outreach and education program strategy: more than 1,000 patrons take learning circles at KNLS each year!

The librarians in Nakuru, Joseck and Purity, were eager to offer new learning programs through the library. They advertised learning circles across the city, paying special attention to university students. Joseck realized that many students who were pursuing a computer science degree were not spending adequate time tinkering around on a computer; it was a largely lecture based program. So Joseck decided to offer a web design learning circle at the library. 53 people showed up the first week, and the learning circle actually grew week-by-week as learners started telling their friends. (You can read more about the success of the web design learning circles in this blog post from EIFL).

Joseck quickly devised a strategy to empower learners with more expertise to help him facilitate, and the group divided into smaller groups of about 16 people. Joseck has talked at length about his strategies for empowering volunteers in a P2PU community call (funnily enough, when he led this community call one of his learning circles was happening in the background -- the group didn't need him anymore!). Joseck serves as an ICT Officer at the library, and has found learning circles to be an incredible way to engage patrons around topics like web design, cybersecurity, and computer basics. He's led two dozen learning circles, reaching more than 750 library patrons.

While he was doing this, Purity was experimenting with a variety of other topics, including public speaking and interview skills. In 2017, she was about to begin a learning circle in community journalism, when the course got taken offline just days before the meeting (there were more than 30 people signed up!). She reached out to P2PU, and we were able to get in touch with the university and have them release the content for the group. But while that was happening, something incredible happened - the group came together for the first meeting with no course at all, and they managed to figure it out. Somebody reached out to a friend who was a journalist, some other people found free resources available online, and the group was able to make due without a course, knowing that each person who showed up had both an interest in community journalism and personal life experiences that they could bring to the group. Purity has herself led 12 learning circles, reaching 300 patrons. Recently, she's run two learning circles on the basics of sign language.

## Facilitator responsibilities

Let's break down these examples and speak to some of the specific responsibilities that you'll have as a facilitator.

Tips for new facilitators

## Model Peer Learning

As discussed in the first module, some people will inevitably show up to a learning circle expecting a passive experience where you transmit information to them. From the beginning, you

should avoid positioning yourself as the only person in the room with an answer, and encourage learners to help one another out along the way. All this being said, when we say that everybody has something to teach and learn, we mean you too! So don't be afraid to lend a hand and offer assistance to learners along the way.

## Listen to Learners

Be observant, and learn to read the energy of the room. Who seems really motivated today? Who is particularly quiet? Once you have an understanding of each learner's goals, you'll be able to respond to this energy productively. Is one learner quiet because they are struggling with a basic concept? Ask somebody who is a few steps ahead if they don't mind helping out.

## Encourage Social Cohesion

Social cohesion begins to develop within the first hour that a new group spends time together, and as the facilitator you can do a lot to help people to self-identify as a member of the group. Some ideas on achieving this include:

agreeing on a group name

- using non-verbal symbols (mascot, logo, colors)
- establishing rituals (traditions, habits, weekly activities)
- using plural pronouns ("we" instead of "I")
- invoking group metaphors (referring to the group as a team)
- making verbal pledges (commitments to future action)
- establishing group narrative (saying things like "Remember when we...")
- developing groupspeak (inside jokes, jargon).

## Probe Assumptions and Clarify Statements

Learners will ask you many content related questions, since you are the closest thing to the traditional teacher in the room. When this happens, your response should demonstrate that their peers are a valuable resource, and that most questions are answerable by the group.

Examples of responses you might give are: I'm not sure, did you ask anyone else if they ran up against the same problem? Hmm, where would you start looking to figure that out? In general, think about giving suggestions rather than directions.

## Encourage Meaningful, Frequent Interactions Between Learners

Shared emotional connections serve the dual purpose of helping individuals learn and reinforcing community. You should look out for opportunities to summarize what you've heard



and elicit new perspectives and viewpoints. If you find that questions or conversations are taking the group off track, you should feel comfortable intervening to get things back on track. Other learners will greatly appreciate this.

## Manage Expectations

When learning something new, optimism can quickly turn into discouragement. To navigate this, express confidence that learners can achieve their goals, while also being realistic and aware of what is possible in six weeks. For instance, it's unlikely that somebody with no programming background will get a fancy tech job after one HTML/CSS Learning Circle. However, they will gain a better understanding of how to build a website, get a sense as to whether this is a subject they'd like to continue in, and have a peer group of like-minded individuals they've gotten to know.

## Encourage Growth Mindsets

A growth mindset is the belief that one's skills and abilities can be continually developed through hard work, rather than stay fixed at a certain level. As a facilitator, try praising a learner's processes (effort, strategies, choices) rather than their innate intelligence (e.g. saying "you're so smart!").

## Turn Frustrations Around

Try to flip frustrations into positive statements and involve the group. For example, if learners in a job skills learning circle aren't happy with the interview tips in the online course, ask the group if they can come up with better questions. You'll find that often, the online course is merely a starting point for learners to bring their personal experiences into the learning circle.

### Delegate Responsibilities

A good facilitator empowers learners to take charge of their own learning, making the role of the facilitator smaller and smaller over time. As the learning circle progresses, you can start asking learners to take on some extra responsibility, such as:

- helping other learners who are having technical issues
- sending a wrap-up email afterwards reflecting on the meeting
- summarizing the week's material at the beginning of each meeting
- setting up beforehand and cleaning up afterwards
- sharing a resource or article that relates to the course content
- helping a learner who is struggling
- bringing snacks.

## Celebrate the process, not just the finished product

- Don't forget to celebrate the journey along the way with learning circle participants. The check-in and reflection exercises are designed to help you all call out the journey.

## Remember that facilitation is a practice

Don't stress about being "good at it" right away. Becoming a learning circle facilitator will be a continuous process of trying, reflecting, and iterating. A few reflection questions to keep in mind as you begin:

- How might my cultural assumptions influence my interactions with learners?
- How might the backgrounds and experiences of learners influence their motivation, engagement, and learning?
- How can I modify course materials, activities, facilitation techniques, and expectations to be more accessible to all the learners in my learning circle?

*On your facilitator dashboard, you'll find a space where you can write a reflection after each learning circle meeting. You can share a message with your learners and/or the P2PU team. We encourage you to use this space to reflect on your evolving facilitation practice.*

## Support activities

It may sound daunting to lead a learning circle with just the content of an online course. This is where the format of the learning circle comes in to help. We've developed a number of check-ins, group activities, and reflections to help you structure your meeting time. The format of the learning circle is here to help you—but if it ever feels like it's getting in the way, then feel free to change it. Below, we call out a few specific examples of activities that we've used in many learning circles.

### Check-in

As you've hopefully felt by now, check-ins provide a space for the group to convene and be with one another before everybody gets to work. Check-ins can be playful icebreakers, or they can be thoughtful discussions about events that have happened recently. What's most important is that everybody feels like they have a chance to reorient themselves to the group and make known anything that they are bringing into the learning circle this week. A few questions that we think work well include:

- What are you hoping to achieve today?
- How did you get here today?
- Share an example of a meaningful learning experience that you had. What made it meaningful? Is there anything from that experience that we can bring into this learning circle?
- Share one thing that you can teach somebody else how to do.

## Group activities

A good group activity provides both contextualization (what does the course material mean in your current environment?) and personalization (how does the course relate to your own personal goals and how you learn?). Group activities have the added benefit of supporting dialogue between learners, which is a fundamental component of peer learning. When an activity is not emerging naturally from the course, you can consider these ideas to help design something:

- 1-1 or small group critiques
- presentations on individual progress to date
- brainstorming how to help each learner reach their goal
- problem solve around a common issue that is coming up frequently
- identifying and presenting supplemental learning materials
- sharing examples of relevant work that learners find inspiring
- planning some collective action or next step that the group can take after the learning circle
- providing feedback to the online course provider / P2PU about how the course can be improved
- going on a field trip
- hosting a local speaker or expert.

## Reflection exercises

A reflection exercise should provide some closure for the week. As you've experienced in this course, reflections offer an opportunity for everybody to share something from the day. In addition to plus/delta, reflection questions include:

- What is something that surprised you?
- What is something you want to work on for next week?
- Who would you like to thank today?
- Any eye opening revelations? Any burning questions?
- Sketch or write down a personal reflection
- Write a letter to a future learning circle (if you send it to us, we'll pass it along!).
- Reflections don't always have to be done in the full group - you can advocate for small 1-1 or personal reflections as well.



## Communication and feedback

---

- Receiving feedback is necessary to improve, both as a learning circle participant as a facilitator. As such, facilitating a learning circle means that you will be invited to share your experiences and reflect and troubleshoot with other facilitators from around the world. While your learning circle is happening in person and our community of practice is largely virtual, we strive to model the same P2PU values in our community of practice, so that you can continue to refine your facilitation skills when you meet with facilitators. Here are some of the key components of our community of practice:
- Community forum: P2PU's online platform where facilitators ask questions, share resources, and discuss relevant issues.
- Facilitate page: Featured resources and discussions from the community forum, designed to help newcomers get started.
- Digests: Monthly email which summarizes everything that is happening in P2PU including news, events as well as recently added learning circles and courses.
- Events: P2PU hosts a mix of virtual community calls, regional meetings, open trainings, and meet-ups throughout the year.
- Course ratings: Feedback from learners and facilitators are summarized on the course cards on the course page. Here's an example of feedback for the public speaking course.
- Learning circle insights: Every learning circle has the opportunity to share their experience through feedback forms that we send to facilitators and learners. [?](#) Social media: We encourage facilitators and learners to share what they're learning throughout their learning circle on Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, and Facebook. #learningcircles.



## Your facilitator dashboard

---

In the prior module, we introduced your learning circle dashboard as the place to go to edit learning circle details. In addition to this, your dashboard aggregates the latest and greatest information from across P2PU's community of practice and shows it to you in one place. You'll see a number of resources featured including:

- recent courses added to the database
- popular discussion topics on the community forum
- new facilitator resources
- insights from recently completed learning circles
- P2PU's Instagram feed
- announcements from the P2PU team
- upcoming learning circles in your area.

Before moving onto the activity, take a few minutes to explore the dashboard. How does what you see change depending on whether you are logged in or not?

## Additional readings & resources

Two resources that we rely heavily on to help plan our learning circles are Liberating Structures and the HyperIsland Toolbox. Each of these websites includes a number of free activities that can be easily adapted to serve as a check-in, group activity, or reflection. We encourage you to have a look and bookmark any activities that you might like to try in your learning circle.

### Do/Make/Say/Think

 Suggested timing: **35 minutes**

Earlier in this module, we shared some tips for learning circle facilitators. With these in mind, break into small groups and take 15 minutes to talk through (or role play) the following scenarios. Each of these scenarios has come up in a real learning circle!

1. After the third week, one learner is still treating you like the teacher. They direct all their questions to you, they don't speak much to the other learners, and they are not taking much ownership over their own learning. They are genuinely interested in the material, but it's becoming hard for you to meet their expectations while also looking after the rest of the group.
2. Two learners in your public speaking learning circle keep butting heads, and it's starting to affect the experience of the other learners. Neither seems more at fault than the other; but their personalities are clashing and they have very different ideas of what they want this learning experience to be like.
3. In the first week of your web design learning circle, one person shows up who did not sign up and does not seem to have the basic computer skills necessary to participate in the learning circle. You want to encourage them to make use of programs at your library, but you feel strongly that this learning circle is not a good fit for them at this time.
4. Even though you thought the first week of the learning circle went really well, when you show up the second week, only about half as many people are there as the prior week, everybody is sitting facing the front of the room, and nobody is talking to one another.
5. In the fifth week of your fiction writing learning circle, you notice that one learner who is usually very outgoing seems extremely upset. They aren't disrupting the group, per se, but you are worried about them and want to make sure they are ok.
6. By the middle of the second week of your learning circle on learning Spanish, it's clear that

you are dealing with two groups of people who are at very different levels. There are five learners who seem to already have a strong beginner ability, and three learners who are true beginners.

7. During your first meeting, some group members are very excited about the social aspect of the learning circle, while a few others just want to go through the course on their own.
8. (Or come up with your own scenarios - what are you worried will happen?)

When you're finished, come back together as a full group and discuss your reactions and responses to the scenarios. What facilitation tips did you find most helpful when coming up with responses to these scenarios?

Finally, as a group, come up with a definition of what facilitation means to you.

*Share your group definitions in the "Tips for New Facilitators" post on the community forum. If you came up with any other scenarios, you can share those as a new topic within the Facilitation category.*



## Reflect: Facilitation is a practice



Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

As you've gone through this course, what is something that surprised you when thinking about yourself as a facilitator?

What is something that you'd like to keep practicing?

*These are the types of things that we speak about on our monthly P2PU facilitator praxis calls. We encourage you to join the next one!*

# Module 5:

## Organizing Teams

### ✓ Check-in

🕒 Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

#### By the end of this module, you will:

- Decide if starting a team makes sense for you.
- Learn how to support facilitators on a daily basis.
- Understand the tools and supports available to you as an organizer.
- Reflect on the roles and responsibilities required of organizers.
- Draft a project plan to get learning circles started in your community.

### How do you define a learning circle?

P2PU is a strong advocate for learning circles, but the concept of peers learning together to address common challenges predates our organization by thousands of years. Therefore, we don't think we should tell you exactly what is or what isn't a learning circle - that is for you to decide. From our perspective, there are a few core values that are essential in any learning circle, but beyond that, it's up to you. In order to help you come up with your own working definition, we've compiled a number of "borderline" scenarios - real life examples of learning experiences that definitely shared some, but maybe not all, core values of a learning circle.

For today's check-in, review each of these scenarios and decide which ones you consider a learning circle and which ones you do not. After you've done this, try to write a one sentence definition of a learning circle with your colleagues.

1. After taking a Science of Happiness online course, a number of participants who live near each other decide that they want to start meeting at the library informally to discuss self-improvement ideas and how to live happier lives. They continue to meet every week to share and talk about happiness strategies without a facilitator.
2. A group of people come together for a learning circle on community journalism. When they arrive, the facilitator tells everyone the online course on community journalism is no longer available and no other comparable course can be found. The group decides to talk about what their goals are and together they identify some readings, videos, and friends

who can help them. The group continues to meet for two months. No online course or pre-set curriculum is ever used.

3. Somebody puts up a flyer at a coffee shop, announcing that she's going to be there at 2PM every Wednesday for the next six weeks to take an online course. Five strangers join her each week. Aside from a brief introduction and a few back-and-forth questions, they mostly take the course on their own.
4. A group of neighbors decide that they want to start a community garden. They choose to meet once a week at the same time and come up with solutions and plans, although nobody is an expert on the topic. Their discussion is guided by resources that group members found online. At the end, they have identified a space to start their garden.
5. A librarian organizes a weekly coding meeting for 15 people. The librarian arranged months in advance to have guest speakers from local tech businesses speak for 30 minutes each week.
6. Ten people who are interested in public speaking come to the library to watch Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. They have a brief discussion afterwards and do not meet again.
7. A community center advertises a six-week long program in which peers meet weekly to go through an online course to help them find jobs and improve their resume and interview skills. In order to be listed on the community center's job board at the end, the center asks that each participant pay \$10.
8. Six graduate students form a weekly study circle to review each week's lecture materials. At the end of the semester, each student feels like the group study experience helped them excel in the class.
9. A librarian advertises a learning circle for advanced Excel training. On the first day, somebody shows up who is a beginner. The librarian asks this person to leave, as they do not have the prerequisites required for the learning circle. The rest of the group meets weekly and things go well.
10. An ESOL teacher adapts the methodology of learning circles to make her classroom more participatory. Even though the students aren't using computers, the teacher uses her own teaching resources to help guide the discussion each week.
11. A climate scientist finds out that people in his local area are very interested in understanding climate change. He decides to offer a learning circle at his local recreation center. He decides to use the same curriculum from when he taught a course on climate change at the local university last fall. Most meetings consist of a 60 minute lecture and a short discussion afterwards.
12. A bookshop learns about P2PU and decides that learning circles are a great way to organize book groups that they host regularly at the store.



13. Spanish language speaking group has been using MeetUp for a long time, and they've become frustrated that they now have to pay to access certain features. Someone suggests using the P2PU system to organize their weekly meetups instead.
14. Seven people sign up for a HTML learning circle at a public library. After 6 weeks, everybody has had a good experience but only two people have finished all the course materials.

## Read & Watch

 Suggested timing: **30 minutes**

### Review current teams

Teams offer a way to coordinate and support a group of learning circles that are happening in the same city or across a single institution. Each team has an organizer (or two), and this person is charged with leading the learning circle initiative in their region and coordinating with P2PU. The best way to familiarize yourself with teams is to see what's already happening. So, to start, take a few minutes to look through the active P2PU teams at [p2pu.org/teams](https://p2pu.org/teams) and try to answer these questions for yourself:

- What team is closest to you?
- Which teams are particularly active right now?
- Is there any information missing from team pages that you'd like to include on yours?
- Are there any teams that you'd like to reach out to for guidance as you get started?

### Juliana's organizer guide

Similar to the facilitate page, P2PU has a webpage that highlights resources for organizers. Here you'll find resources that you can use to build a team of learning circle facilitators in your area.

Notably, this page is where you can download a copy of Juliana's Organizer Guide, a 25 page document that we put together with Juliana Muchai, P2PU's very first organizer, and her team at the Kenya National Library Service. This guide introduces the six steps to starting a team:

1. Orient yourself to P2PU
2. Gather a team
3. Host a facilitator training workshop
4. Support your facilitators

5. Grow your program
6. Participate in the global P2PU community

Download your copy of the guide, and spend 15-20 minutes reviewing what's there.



## Your facilitator dashboard

Creating a team will all grant you access to new features on your learning circle facilitator dashboard. This includes:

- **A dedicated landing page (and memorable URL) for your team.** This allows you to promote all learning circles across your team with a single URL. (For example, check out Saint Paul Public Library and P2PU Berlin).
- **Team features on your dashboard.** Facilitators will be able to see what's happening across their team from their dashboard.
- **Weekly updates from your team of facilitators.** These updates include the number of learner sign-ups from each learning circle, a weekly team schedule as well as a summary of facilitator feedback. All facilitators can opt in to receiving this weekly email from their dashboard.
- **Aggregated feedback.** Data from learning circles in your team can be aggregated and shared for evaluation and reporting purposes.

Comprehensive and up-to-date details on the technical side of things can be read on the team section of our Read the Docs.



## Do/Make/Say/Think



Suggested timing: **40 minutes**

This is a two part activity. The first part is designed to get you thinking about the role that organizers will take on in your institution. In the second part, we'll introduce P2PU's team planning worksheet, which will help you take steps towards the goals that you've identified for your teams.

## Roles and responsibilities

---

**Step 1:** Individually, take five minutes to brainstorm all the ways that an organizer can support facilitators in your team. Using post-it notes or small pieces of paper, write (or draw) one idea per page. Quantity over quality!

---

**Step 2:** As a group, take ten minutes to arrange your notes into overlapping clusters, highlighting the themes that are emerging.

---

**Step 3:** Once you're finished, take five more minutes to reflect on your findings.

- Are you finding opportunities to embody peer learning principles when working with facilitators?
- Are there places where you could adopt a more community-based approach to supporting facilitators?
- What steps are you taking to reach individuals who may historically be sidelined from programs like learning circles?
- Are there places where you are worried that your responsibilities are in conflict with P2PU's vision?

## Team planning worksheet

For the second part, download a copy of the Team Planning Worksheet, and go through the questions with your team members (this should take about 20 minutes).

When you go back through the worksheet to assign responsibilities, focus on the things that you have the freedom and discretion to get started on right away. If you need additional resources or authority in order to take on a task, make sure that is included as a step on the worksheet.



When you're finished, turn your planning worksheet into a PDF (or take a photo of it) and share it in the "Starting a P2PU Community" category on the community forum.



## Reflect: Peer leadership



Suggested timing: **10 minutes**

How has participating in a learning circle changed your approach to organizing? What can you do to embody the spirit of learning circles as you build a coalition of facilitators?



FRSI FUNDACJA  
ROZWOJU,  
SPOŁECZENSTWA  
INFORMACYJNEGO

P2PU

