TESOL International Association

Knowledge-based Member Communities Proposal

Professional Learning Networks and Professional Knowledge Sections

1 PURPOSE

TESOL’s knowledge-based member communities (KBMCs) generate knowledge of and for English language teaching while supporting expertise already within the Association. They develop and enrich the knowledge-base of the Association and the profession by staying abreast of current practice, policy, and research trends. When appropriate, KBMCs share ideas and issues with other KBMCs, Professional Councils, the TESOL Board of Directors, and the whole of TESOL membership. This commitment to practice and research-based knowledge establishes the legitimacy and profile of the TESOL profession.

KBMCs also provide a mechanism for TESOL professionals to be more involved with the Association and each other. They are supportive communities of practice where participants can share insights or solicit guidance on the professional issues that arise every day.

2 TYPES OF KBMCs

There are two types of KBMCs, Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) and Professional Knowledge Sections (PKSs). Both PLNs and PKNs adhere to TESOL’s Mission, Vision, Core Values, & Nondiscrimination Policy and support TESOL’s strategic direction, but each type has a different set of expected activities and functions to perform. This allows groups with various goals to engage in activities in a way that makes sense to them and works best for them—i.e., the flexibility that helps not only the KBMCs but also the Association. Please see sections below for a detailed description of each type of KBMCs.

3 FUNCTIONS FOR TESOL’S KBMCs

TESOL’s KBMCs, Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) and Professional Knowledge Sections (PKSs), share the following functions:

3.1 KNOWLEDGE-GENERATING FUNCTION

- Assist in cultivating content in areas of expertise
- Serve as areas-specific resources
- Stay abreast of the issues in their areas of expertise and interest

3.2 COMMUNICATIVE/FACILITATIVE FUNCTION

- Develop leaders within the profession and within the Association
- Disseminate relevant information to members
- Engage with members around professional issues relevant to their areas of interest
- Facilitate dialogue and community
4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles shape the relationship between the Association and all KBMC groups within the Association:

4.1 TRUST
The Association strives to cultivate a culture of trust among its KMBCs, members, Association leaders, and staff. This should be achieved through open and frequent dialogue, information-sharing, and transparency in decision-making.

4.2 LEADERSHIP
KBMC volunteer leaders contribute significantly to the Association’s body of knowledge and sense of community. They should be provided opportunities for leadership development and progression within the Association and should be recognized for their contributions.

4.3 FLEXIBILITY
At any one time and over time, areas of significant knowledge generation within the TESOL profession are varied, overlapping, and evolving. They encompass social and functional issues, pedagogical content topics, and domains of work. KBMCs should work together whenever possible, be open to new directions, and avoid overlap of issues and activities. They should be flexible and open to change with respect to specific activities and how they serve the Association and their respective members.

4.4 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
KBMC activities should explicitly align with and seek to further the strategic direction of the Association. Moreover, there should be strategic alignment within the configuration of KBMCs in order to limit overlapping areas and redundancy.

4.5 SUSTAINING
KBMCs should engage in sustained, year-round activities that promote dynamic and vibrant communities. KBMC activities should not focus solely on the annual convention.

4.6 INCLUSIVITY
In principle and in practice, TESOL values and seeks diverse and inclusive participation within the field of English language teaching. TESOL KBMCs should promote involvement and broad access to professional opportunities for all. KBMCs will not allow any kind of discrimination including, but not limited to, language background, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, appearance, or geographic location in their membership and the activities they undertake.
5 Organization

5.1 Life-Cycle

5.1.1 Establishment
Parties interested in becoming a Professional Learning Network (PLN) or a Professional Knowledge Section (PKS) will have to complete an application. A rubric will be used to vet both types of applications. These rubrics will be available alongside the applications for public view.

5.1.1.1 Professional Learning Networks
PLNs are informal, discussion-based groups. They are self-structured by their members. They can form and dissolve fairly easily and may have a short lifespan. PLNs are expected to use a minimum of TESOL resources. These groups will not have a direct contact with the TESOL Board of Directors.

TESOL members who wish to engage in discussion and cultivate knowledge for a specific content or context area important for the TESOL field and profession year-round can choose to become a PLN. To ensure the group’s viability, a minimum of 20 members is necessary to form a group.

Steps to create a PLN - fill out an online application with the following:

- A proposed name for the group that accurately represents the group’s purpose
- The group’s Statement of Purpose, with an explanation of how it is related to TESOL’s Mission and strategic direction
- The name and email address of one TESOL member who will serve as the contact person for the group. This person will be responsible for keeping the group’s information up to date, and submitting the renewal application each year in order for the group to continue using the TESOL platform
- The name and email address of one TESOL member who will serve as the discussion facilitator and moderator. This can be the same as the contact person
- The name, email addresses, and confirmation of at least 20 TESOL members who are interested in being part of the group
- Confirmation that the group will be open to all interested TESOL members, following the principle of inclusivity listed above, and will be guided by the highest level of legal and ethical behavior

TESOL will provide PLNs:

- An easy to find application on the Association's website
- An online discussion platform with instructions on its use
- A TESOL Staff point of contact who will also review applications for compliance with above steps and facilitate the establishment of the group’s presence on the TESOL platform.

Applications may be submitted at any time. If there are instances where the Staff contact has questions about an application, the application will be reviewed by the Executive Committee for a decision.
5.1.1.2 PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE SECTIONS

TESOL members who share a specified common interest related to the TESOL profession and wish to engage in discussion, projects, and outreach year-round and at the annual convention can choose to become a PKS.

PKSs are TESOL member communities focused on a specific area of knowledge-generation within the field. They provide a greater variety and level of sustained activity than PLNs. PKSs should be rooted in and contributing to current practice and research.

Because they have access to Association resources and are more formal in structure, PKSs will take time and effort to establish. A minimum of 100 members will be needed to establish a PKS and maintain the group’s status. Initially, one Staff liaison and one Board Liaison will be assigned to work with the PKSs as a group.

Steps to create a PKS - fill out an online application with the following:

- A proposed name for the group that accurately represents the group’s purpose and is not duplicative of another PKS, PLN, or of a Professional Council
- The group’s Statement of Purpose, with an explanation of how it is related to TESOL’s Mission and strategic direction and how it supports the TESOL field and profession
- A detailed annual plan with a timeline for suggested activities and projects that help the group achieve its Statement of Purpose along with any requests for the funding of specific projects
- A leadership succession plan that shows a just order of rotation and encourages group members to become leaders
- A plan for use of TESOL International Association resources including but not limited to discussion forums, blogs, group website, virtual workshops/seminars, and one to four staff-aided newsletters
- A plan for communicating with TESOL entities outside the group, such as other PKSs, PLNs, Professional Councils, non-TESOL members, etc.
- A new member engagement strategy
- The name and email address of at least one TESOL member who will be the main contact person for the group
- The name, email address, and function (i.e., communication, advocacy, professional development) of at least three additional members of the initial leadership team
- The name, email addresses, and electronic or paper confirmations from at least 100 TESOL members who wish to be part of the group once established
- Confirmation that the group will be open to all TESOL members, following the principle of inclusivity listed above, and will be guided by the highest level of legal and ethical behavior.

Applications to become a PKS will be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors on an annual basis as part of its October meeting. If a proposed group is found to substantially duplicate actions of another group, the two groups will be expected to discuss and collaborate in order to form a unified group. The Board of Directors may choose to approve a group as a PLN rather than a PKS. In reviewing applications, the Board of Directors will consider the resources of the Association and the ability of the Association to support an additional group.
Once established, a PKS will

- Write a detailed procedure manual and turn it into TESOL within the first 3 months of operations
- Appoint one person for the group to be responsible as part of the annual planning process to renew the application: making changes as appropriate, reporting on progress toward annual goals and responsibilities, and identifying any requests for the funding of specific projects.

The Board of Directors will review renewal applications at its October meeting along with applications for new PKSs. As always, the Board of Directors is responsible for ensuring that the Association has the resources to support approved PKSs. To the degree that the Association’s resources are limited, preference will be given to supporting existing PKSs over new applications all other factors being equal. PKSs will be notified of deadlines for budget requests so that their requests may be fairly considered as part of the annual budget approval process.

TESOL will provide PKSs

- An easy to find application on the Association’s website
- Feedback and status of application in a timely fashion
- Templates for creating a procedure manual, annual application renewal, and budget requests
- An online discussion platform with instructions on its use
- A TESOL Staff liaison to help organize virtual seminars, newsletters, and such
- A Board Liaison to facilitate communication with the Board of Directors and the Association as a whole
- Due consideration of requests for funding.

5.1.2 Closing Process
Outlined below are the formal steps whereby each type of KBMC may cease to exist. In addition, if a KBMC is unable to fulfill its Statement of Purpose or adhere to TESOL’s Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Nondiscrimination Policy, the TESOL Board of Directors or Executive Committee may take immediate steps to dissolve a group.

5.1.2.1 Professional Learning Networks
Any PLN can choose not to continue at the annual renewal date. A group that does not submit an annual renewal application will be dissolved.

5.1.2.2 Professional Knowledge Sections
Any PKS can choose not to continue at the annual renewal date. A group that does not submit an annual renewal application will be dissolved. If the annual renewal application indicates a significant lack of progress on meeting annual goals, an explanation must be provided as part of the renewal application and a plan provided for future progress. Failure to address a significant and prolonged decrease in member engagement with the PKS will be grounds for the Board of Directors to dissolve it.
5.1.3 Transitioning to another type of KBMC  
Any group may, during the annual renewal period, request to become a different type of KBMC. The group’s contact person or leadership should fill out the appropriate online application. A move from a PKS to a PLN will be automatically granted. A move from a PLN to a PKS will go through the same vetting process as a regular PKS.

5.2 Leadership

5.2.1 Selection

5.2.1.1 Professional Learning Networks
When a PLN is formed, a contact person and discussion leader are specified (this may be the same person in both roles). Each year at the annual renewal, the contact person/discussion leader can be changed, with the new person or people listed on the online application. The group should discuss among itself to decide who should serve in these leadership roles.

5.2.1.2 Professional Knowledge Sections
When a PKS is formed, a contact person and three additional leaders are specified, as well as a leadership succession plan that lays out how new leaders will be encouraged and mentored. The Chair position should be a one-year term, preceded by one year as Incoming Chair. Each group will also appoint a Communications Manager who will be responsible for coordinating with TESOL staff on the production of the group’s digital newsletters. PKSs may decide to have other leadership positions such as Past Chair, Professional Development Coordinator(s), and Steering Committee members. The group should determine the length of service for these additional positions, but all leadership changes should be effective November 1 and indicated on the annual renewal application. PKS leaders are encouraged to take TESOL’s Leadership Development Management Certificate Program to learn more about the Association.

5.2.2 Responsibilities
TESOL will provide general training for incoming leaders, helping them understand their roles and responsibilities within the Association. This should be online training, available at any time for review.

5.2.2.1 Professional Learning Networks
A discussion leader will be responsible for identifying initial questions and issues for the group and for encouraging and facilitating discussions. This may include posting follow-up questions, finding interesting readings to share, managing discussion forums, and other communication activities for the group. The discussion leader should encourage as many group members as possible to participate in discussions and intra-group communication.

5.2.2.2 Professional Knowledge Sections
Leaders, with feedback and input from their members, are responsible for creating an annual plan; soliciting and mentoring volunteers to help in achieving group goals; engaging in advocacy for the group and the Association; facilitating professional development via discussions, blogs, virtual meetings, or other communication means; providing up to four digital newsletters per year; and soliciting and mentoring group leaders, encouraging them to become Association leaders. Leaders are responsible for completing the annual online renewal application for the group, which reports on annual plan progress. PKSs should specify specific areas of accountability for each of the leaders as part of a procedure.
A detailed procedure manual should be reviewed by the group’s leadership each year. New procedures should be added as needed at any time during the year.

5.3 Participation in Association Decision-Making

Both Professional Learning Networks and Professional Knowledge Sections participate in the Association’s decision making process. The Board of Directors will be responsible for establishing ongoing procedures to elicit input from KBMC leaders and members. This may occur through responses to electronic surveys as well as participation in leadership meetings online and/or at the annual convention. Areas for input may include the TESOL strategic plan, changes in governance, and other matters that relate to their areas of expertise.

5.4 Responsibilities and Scope of Activities

Professional Learning Networks primarily engage in online collaboration, focusing on skill-building, knowledge generation, and providing community.

Professional Learning Network expected activities include:

- Offering online discussion opportunities in line with their Statement of Purpose
- Providing leadership in the form of a discussion leader or a community manager

Professional Knowledge Sections have a focus on activities within their group, and activities that support the Association. For the majority of TESOL members, these groups serve as their primary home and place of interaction with the Association, generating and sharing knowledge and building community in their area of expertise. PKSs identify and encourage leadership for the group and the Association. PKS leaders interact regularly with staff and with the Board as needed. They are expected to support the Strategic direction of the Association.

Professional Knowledge Section responsibilities include:

- Strategically promoting new and existing member engagement in their community
- Soliciting, managing, and supporting appropriate volunteers for appropriate tasks
- Serving as the locus for their content area within the Association in their area of expertise through, for example, the creation of resources or tools and producing up to 4 digital newsletters per year
- Engaging in activities with other groups including other KBMCs and Professional Councils.

Potential activities might include:

- Identifying and sharing on issues related to the group’s area of expertise and encourage possible actions for the Association to take
- Working with Professional Development and Publishing Professional Councils to create evidence-based content for the TESOL field
- Encouraging and supporting their group’s members in engaging in research, coordinating with Research Professional Council
Working with Standards Professional Council to give feedback and disseminate standards as needed within their area of expertise

- Organizing a 1 hour 45-minute session relevant to their Statement of Purpose for the annual convention and collaborating with at least one other PKS on an intersection
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Professional Learning Networks</th>
<th>Professional Knowledge Sections</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adhere to TESOL vision, mission, core values and anti-discrimination policy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge-generating function</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicative function</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid duplication of purpose</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete an application</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal-based discussion groups</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement of purpose needed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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| Organization | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Leadership for member groups | One discussion leader required | One contact person + 3 leaders required |
| Minimum number of members needed to form a group | 20 | 100 |
| Application cycle | Ongoing? | Once a year |
| Procedure manual | No | Yes |
| Detailed annual plan required | No | Yes |
| Leadership succession plan | No | Yes |
| Communications plan needed | No | Yes |
| New member engagement strategy | No | Yes |

| Benefits | |
|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Use of TESOL resources | Online discussion resources | same + newsletters + funding (pending Board approval) |
| One staff contact | Yes | Yes |
| One Board liaison | No | Yes |
| Online discussion platform for each group | Yes | Yes |
| Leadership training by TESOL | No | Yes |
| Participation in Association decision making | Yes | Yes |
| Are provided conference session | Through the adjudication process | Yes, outside the adjudication process |