

Community of Practice Impact Survey Report – Spring 2025

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Introduction

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) conducted its first Communities of Practice (CoP) Impact Survey in spring 2025 to better understand how its supported CoPs are evolving. The survey aimed to assess the value, effectiveness, and impact of these communities in fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development among members. Administered between April 10 and May 5, the survey received 110 responses from community of practice members. Results reveal that CARL-supported Communities of Practice are fostering strong professional networks, enhancing individual learning and confidence, and contributing to institutional improvements, while also highlighting areas for growth in inclusivity, bilingualism, and engagement strategies. This preliminary report summarizes the key findings and emerging themes from the survey to inform CARL's ongoing support of these vibrant communities.

Background and Purpose

Communities of Practice are member-led networks that bring together librarians and information professionals from across the country to explore shared interests, exchange knowledge, and collaborate on sector-relevant issues. As the number and activity level of CoPs have grown over the years, so too has the need for a structured mechanism to assess their impact and identify areas for growth.

CARL's CoP Impact Survey was designed as an evaluation tool to:

- Gauge how well the CoPs are meeting the needs of their members;
- Understand their contributions to professional development and the research library community;
- Identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities;
- Inform CARL's ongoing support and coordination of the CoPs.

This report provides a snapshot of the current state of the CoPs based on survey feedback and will help guide future improvements in support, resourcing, and engagement strategies.

Methodology

The survey was administered using SimpleSurvey between April 10 and May 5, 2025, and was widely promoted via multiple channels, including all CoP listservs, the CARL website, CARL's social media accounts, and the CARL E-Lert. It was open to all

individuals involved in CARL-supported CoPs, regardless of their level of participation or whether they were affiliated with a CARL member institution.

In total, 110 individuals responded to the survey, 81 of whom answered all questions. Although we don't have exact data on the size of each CoP's membership and therefore cannot determine the precise response rate, we consider this a strong level of participation for a first survey.

The survey included 11 questions combining multiple choice, Likert scale ratings and open-ended responses to allow for both quantitative and qualitative insights. This mixed-methods approach enabled CARL to capture both broad trends and nuanced perspectives from across the CoP landscape.

Survey Results

The survey findings illustrate the influence of CARL-supported CoPs on participants and their professional environment. Responses reflect a high level of appreciation for the CoPs' role in supporting professional development, collaboration, and peer learning. Participants identified key strengths, such as strong community ties, impactful programming, and meaningful knowledge exchange, alongside challenges like time constraints, limited bilingual resources, and the need for broader visibility. The data paints a compelling picture of the CoPs' positive influence and points to actionable ways CARL can continue its support.

Participant Demographics

Participation by Community of Practice

Of the 110 survey respondents, members of the Bibliometrics and Research Impact CoP had the highest level of survey participation, representing 37.3% (41 respondents) of total responses. This was followed by the Canadian Repositories CoP with 25.5% (28 respondents), and the Communications [CommUNITY] CoP at 17.3% (19 respondents).

Respondents indicated lower levels of participation in other CoPs: the Copyright and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) CoPs each accounted for 7.3% (8 respondents), while Library Publishing and Open Education were the least represented, with only 2.7% (3 respondents) each.

The low participation rate for the Open Education CoP was expected, as the group was in transition at the time of the survey and not actively meeting. A new iteration

of the OE CoP is currently being planned. Similarly, the EDI CoP is relatively new and operates with a curated membership model: participation is subject to approval from the steering committee and is limited to individuals actively working in EDI in research libraries, resulting in a smaller group.

However, the low response rate indicates that Copyright and Library Publishing CoPs may benefit from additional outreach and support to help increase awareness, participation, and engagement. This may be partly due to the fact that these two groups do not consistently identify or brand themselves as Communities of Practice, which could have contributed to lower recognition and response.

Participation by Level of Experience

The results for the question "How many years have you been practicing in this subject area?" indicate a healthy mix of experience levels among respondents:

- 30.00% (33 respondents) have been practicing in this subject area for less than 3 years.
- 42.73% (47 respondents) have 3–10 years of experience.
- 24.55% (27 respondents) have more than 10 years of experience.

This diverse range of experience highlights that the CoPs attract both newer professionals and those with more seasoned expertise. The significant portion of respondents who are relatively new to the profession or to a specific area of practice, alongside those with more extensive experience, suggests that the CoPs are balanced, inclusive, and supportive of professionals at all stages of their careers.

Communication Channels for CoP Engagement

The responses to how participants heard about their CoP highlight the most effective communication channels for engagement. Most respondents learned about the CoP's activities through the CoP listserv or email announcements (31.19%, 34 respondents), word of mouth (27.52%, 30 respondents), and the CARL E-Alert (24.77%, 27 respondents). Invitations from other CoP members (23.85%, 26 respondents) also play a significant role. Other sources include the CARL website (14.68%, 16 respondents) and social media (0.92%, 1 respondent). These findings underscore email, direct invitations, and CARL's newsletter as the most effective channels for reaching CoP members, whilst work may be needed to grow engagement via CARL's social media channels.

Individual-Level Impact

Participation in Community Events

A strong number of respondents (56%) reported attending nearly every CoP community call or webinar, with another 26% attending about half of them. Only a small proportion indicated occasional (16%) or no attendance (2%).

For those who attend less frequently, common barriers include scheduling conflicts, lack of awareness about events, topic relevance, and time constraints. A few respondents also noted a lack of French-language content. These insights suggest that while overall engagement in community events is high, improving communication and offering more bilingual content may help boost participation further.

Impact on Individual Members (Likert Scale)

This question offers the clearest view of the personal and professional value the CoPs provide. Overall, the results are strongly positive, indicating that CoPs are making a meaningful impact on members across multiple dimensions.

- **Enhanced knowledge and skills:** Nearly 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in their CoP has helped enhance their knowledge or skills.
- **Professional development:** 80% reported a positive impact on their professional development, including new ideas, improved workflows, and growth opportunities.
- **Opportunities and involvement:** While the numbers are slightly lower here, nearly half (48%) said the CoP had created opportunities for them. This suggests room for further growth in leadership and contribution pathways.
- **Sense of belonging:** Over 70% agreed or strongly agreed that participating in their CoP increased their sense of belonging in the research library community, which is an important marker of a healthy, supportive peer network.
- **Confidence in work:** 65% of respondents felt more confident in their work as a result of CoP participation, reinforcing the role of peer learning and support in professional assurance.
- **Professional networking:** 73% indicated that their CoP had expanded their professional network, an especially valuable outcome in a national, cross-institutional setting.
- **Access to tools and resources:** While still positive, this was the most mixed of the responses, with 59% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This may reflect

variability in how resource-sharing is handled across CoPs, suggesting a possible area to strengthen.

In short, these results affirm that CoPs are meeting their core goals: building community, improving practice, and supporting professional growth. They also highlight opportunities to broaden participation, enhance communication around available resources, and continue expanding leadership and engagement pathways.

Impact on Individual Members (Open-ended Responses)

The open-ended responses to the optional question "Can you share a specific example of how the CoP has positively impacted you and/or your work?" highlight a range of meaningful benefits experienced by participants. Common themes included:

- **Networking and community building**, with many respondents sharing that the CoPs allowed them to connect with peers across institutions and feel less isolated in their roles;
- **Professional development and learning**, particularly through webinars, book clubs, and knowledge exchange; practical impact on day-to-day work, such as gaining new ideas, improving workflows, or increasing confidence; and
- **Leadership and engagement opportunities**, especially for those involved in steering committees or organizing events.

Several participants appreciated how the CoPs support professionals in specialized areas like communications or bibliometrics, where few local supports exist. As one person noted, "This is the one space that is specific to communications in university libraries, which I appreciate," while another reflected, "Bibliometrics is very niche—this CoP has been essential to creating a national-level community."

Overall, the responses underscore that the CoPs offer a strong sense of community, access to relevant and timely learning, and meaningful ways to grow professionally.

Challenges or Barriers (Open-ended Responses)

The most commonly cited challenges to engaging with the CoPs are time constraints and scheduling conflicts. Many respondents note it is difficult to attend meetings due to heavy workloads, overlapping commitments, or sessions falling at inconvenient times.

Language barriers are also a recurring concern among francophone members, several of whom mentioned that most content is delivered in English, limiting their

ability to fully participate or feel a sense of belonging. Several suggest offering more French-language presentations.

Additionally, some noted the absence of asynchronous tools like a shared platform for ongoing collaboration as a limitation, especially given the challenge of coordinating across time zones.

While most feedback was positive overall, these repeated themes suggest that improving bilingual support and offering more flexible engagement options could help reduce barriers.

Institutional-Level Impact

The Institutional Impact results reflect generally positive perceptions of how CoPs influence libraries and institutions. Half of respondents agree or strongly agree that CoPs have led to improvements in services, processes, or programs (51.16%) and encouraged innovation within their library or team (50%). Similarly, 51.16% felt that CoPs have facilitated collaboration across institutions, highlighting their role in strengthening inter-institutional connections. While responses were more moderate regarding policy influence, nearly one-third (32.56%) still agreed or strongly agreed that the CoP has supported the development of new policies, guidelines, or frameworks at their institution. Across all four statements, most participants selected “Neutral” or higher, suggesting that while not all CoPs may be driving systemic change, they are generally viewed as valuable contributors to institutional development.

Of the 19 respondents who chose to provide examples, several common themes emerged regarding how communities of practice have influenced institutional change or activity. While individual experiences varied, a number of participants reported tangible impacts in the following areas:

- **Exchange of ideas leading to local implementation:** Respondents frequently described how resources, ideas, and practices shared through CoP activities were brought back to their institutions and either directly implemented or used as a springboard for new initiatives. For example, some participants mentioned adopting new approaches to bibliometrics, drawing on communication strategies discussed in the CoP, or applying shared tools and templates to their local contexts.
- **Professional networking and collaboration:** CoPs supported connections between professionals with shared goals or challenges. At least two respondents highlighted how identifying peers with similar projects helped inform their own work or prompted collaboration. Others noted the benefit of

inviting colleagues to CoP events to increase institutional awareness of key topics.

- **Inspiration from presentations and lightning talks:** Presentations within CoPs, especially informal or short-format talks, were cited as particularly useful for sparking ideas and practical action. For instance, one respondent was inspired by a presentation on TikTok communication strategies and used the idea to engage with their institution's central social media team.

While several respondents indicated they were too new to the CoP to have seen a long-term impact, or that the CoP had influenced their individual practice more than institutional change, the overall feedback demonstrates that CoPs can serve as catalysts for innovation, collaboration, and localized change across institutions.

General Feedback

Type of CoP Activities

Among 81 respondents, the most valued CoP activity was community calls with presentations or panels (86%), followed by informal discussion calls (59%) and resource sharing (56%). These results highlight the importance of regular, interactive programming and access to practical tools. Collaborative projects or initiatives (22%) were less frequently cited, which may be due to limited availability of these types of activities, though write-in comments noted appreciation for peer support and mentorship.

Improvement Suggestions

Of the 17 respondents, most expressed appreciation for the CoPs and satisfaction with their current direction. A few offered thoughtful suggestions for improvement:

- **Increased visibility:** Several noted that CoPs could be better publicized, especially to new members or those outside the CARL network.
- **Consolidation of outputs:** One respondent suggested a public-facing hub or wiki (e.g., similar to SpotDocs) to gather and share CoP outputs in one accessible place.
- **Expanded programming:** Ideas included tool-specific hands-on workshops, more focus on topics like narrative impact of bibliometrics or commercialization of research, and stronger inclusion of colleges.
- **In-person opportunities:** A periodic (e.g., biennial) in-person gathering or CoP conference was proposed as a way to deepen connections.

Overall, feedback reinforces that while CoPs are on the right track, there is interest in improving visibility, expanding programming, consolidating resources, and exploring occasional in-person opportunities to strengthen impact and engagement.

Summary and Conclusion

Overall, the 2025 CARL CoP Impact Survey points to the Communities of Practice as thriving spaces for connection, growth, and collaboration. Participants consistently reported that their involvement led to increased knowledge, professional confidence, and a deeper sense of belonging within the research library community. CoPs are also contributing to institutional innovation, with members bringing back tools, ideas, and strategies that influence local practice and promote cross-institutional collaboration.

At the same time, the survey highlights key areas where CARL and CoP steering committees or planning groups can enhance support, mainly improving inclusivity and equitable access through bilingual programming and asynchronous engagement tools, as well as expanding visibility to reach new or underrepresented participants. Suggestions for centralized resource sharing and periodic in-person gatherings also reflect a desire to deepen community ties and amplify collective impact.

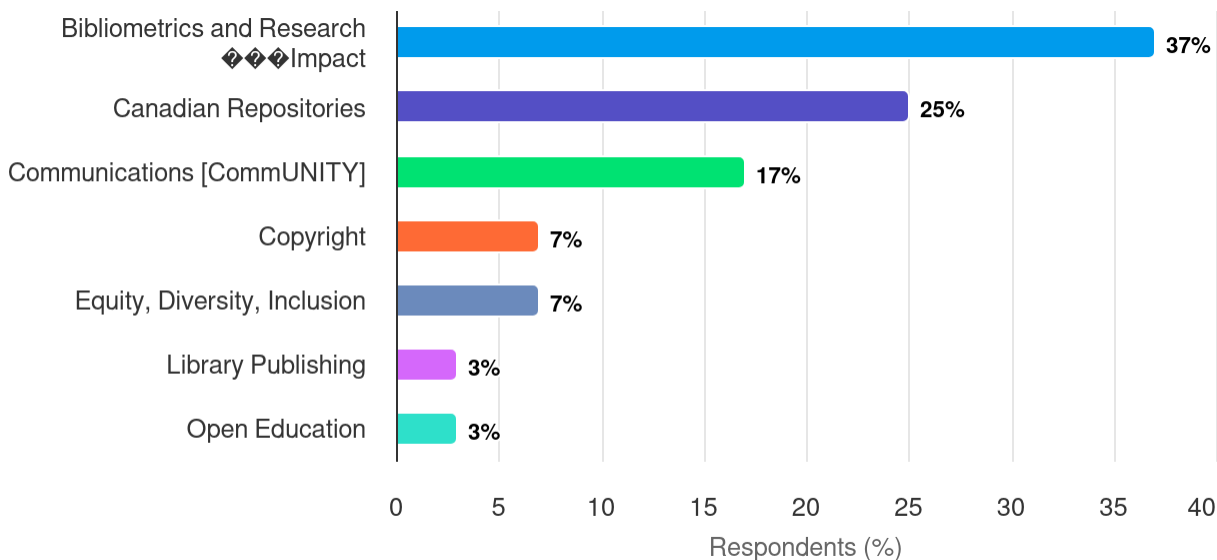
These results will guide CARL's ongoing efforts to support and encourage vibrant, inclusive, and high-impact Communities of Practice.








Annex

Summarized survey results are presented below in chart form. Please note that all open-ended responses have been removed to protect respondent anonymity.

Which CARL Community of Practice (CoP) do you participate in?

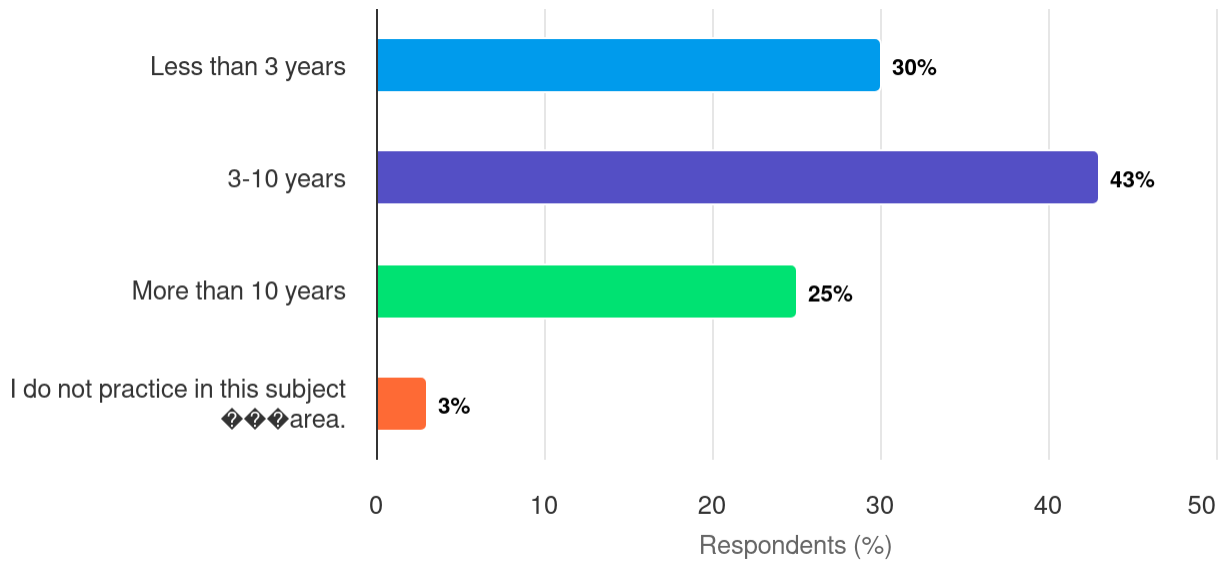
110 respondents







	%	Frequency	
Bibliometrics and Research Impact	37.27%	41	
Canadian Repositories	25.45%	28	
Communications [CommUNITY]	17.27%	19	
Copyright	7.27%	8	
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion	7.27%	8	
Library Publishing	2.73%	3	
Open Education	2.73%	3	
Total		110	

How many years have you been practicing in this subject area?

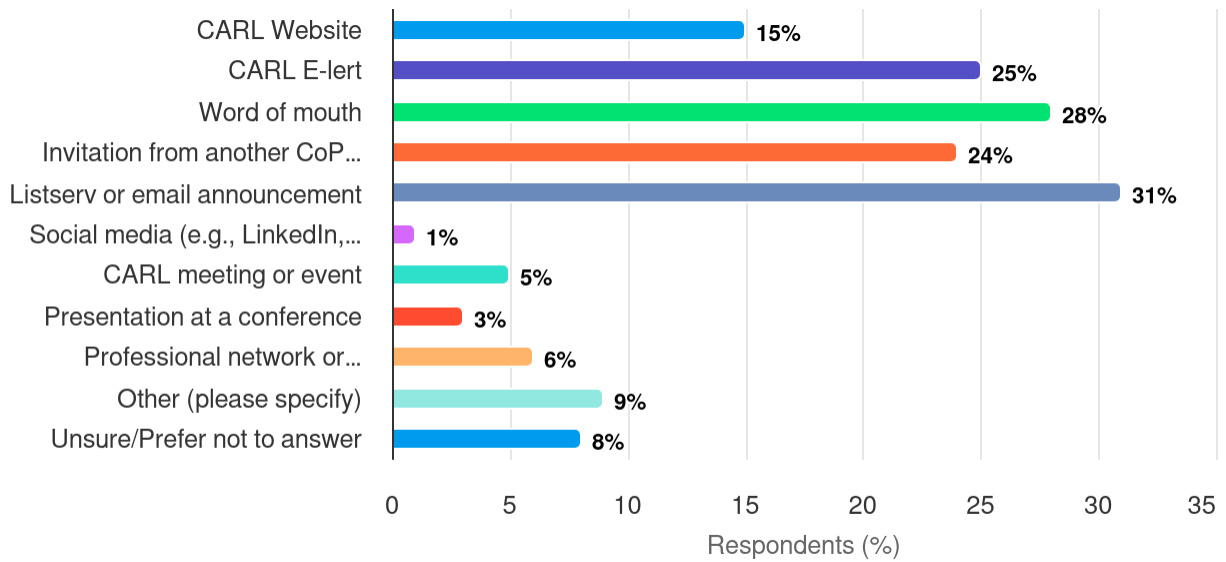
110 respondents

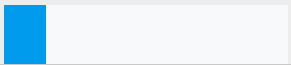
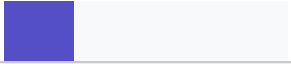
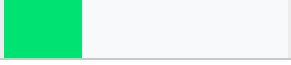

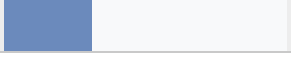
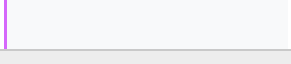
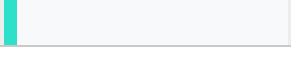
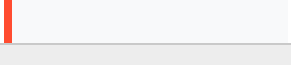
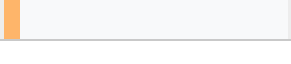
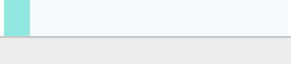



	%	Frequency	
Less than 3 years	30.00%	33	
3-10 years	42.73%	47	
More than 10 years	24.55%	27	
I do not practice in this subject area.	2.73%	3	
Total		110	

How did you hear about this CoP? (OPTIONAL)

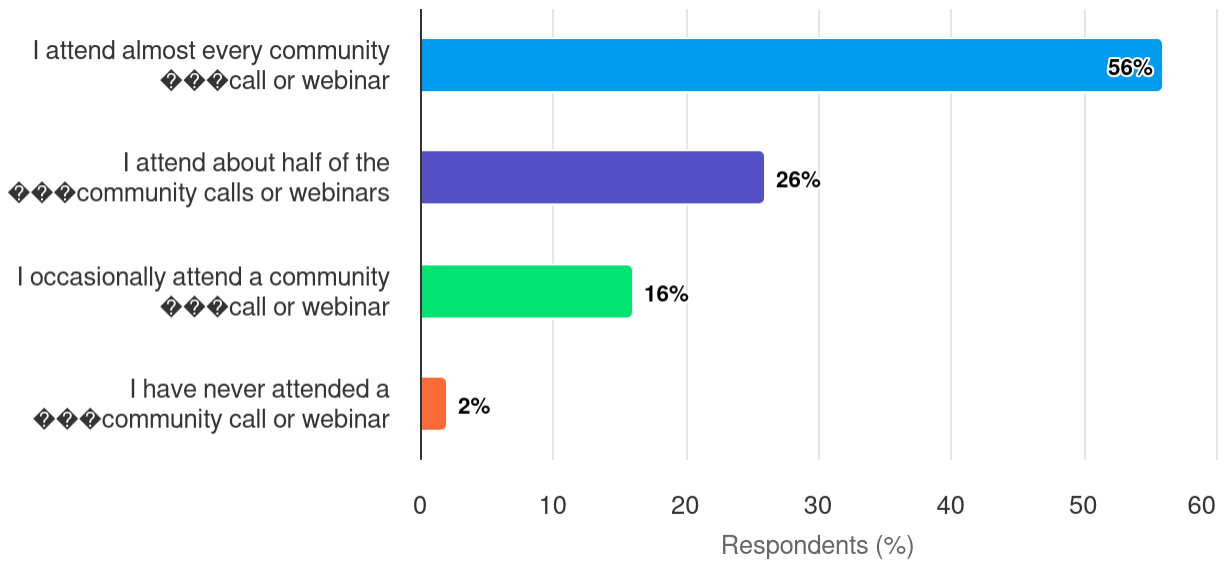
109 respondent







	%	Frequency	
CARL Website	14.68%	16	
CARL E-lert	24.77%	27	
Word of mouth	27.52%	30	
Invitation from another CoP member	23.85%	26	
Listserv or email announcement	31.19%	34	
Social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Bluesky, etc.)	0.92%	1	
CARL meeting or event	4.59%	5	
Presentation at a conference	2.75%	3	
Professional network or association	5.50%	6	
Other (please specify)	9.17%	10	
Unsure/Prefer not to answer	8.26%	9	
Total		109	

How often do you attend CoP community calls or webinars?

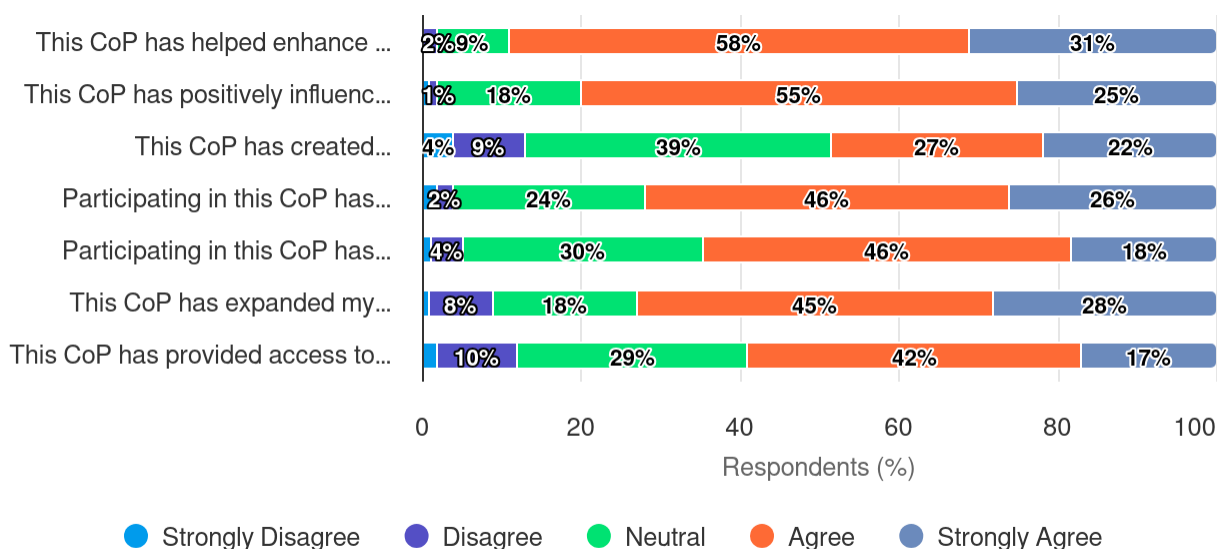
93 respondents



	%	Frequency	
I attend almost every community call or webinar	55.91%	52	
I attend about half of the community calls or webinars	25.81%	24	
I occasionally attend a community call or webinar	16.13%	15	
I have never attended a community call or webinar	2.15%	2	
Total		93	

To help us understand the impact of CoPs on its individual members, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

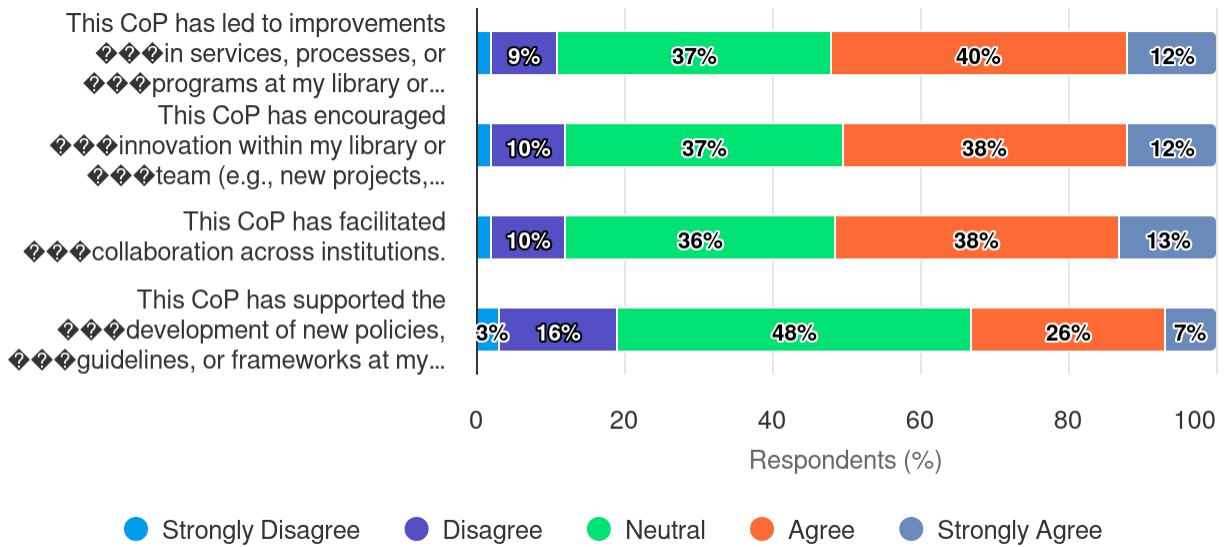
93 respondents



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
This CoP has helped enhance my knowledge or skills.	0%	2.15%	8.60%	58.06%	31.18%	93
This CoP has positively influenced my professional development (e.g., new research ideas, better workflows, etc.).	1.08%	1.08%	18.28%	54.84%	24.73%	93
This CoP has created opportunities for me (e.g., serving on a committee, doing a presentation, etc.)	4.30%	8.60%	38.71%	26.88%	21.51%	93
Participating in this CoP has increased my sense of belonging in the research library community.	2.15%	2.15%	23.66%	46.24%	25.81%	93
Participating in this CoP has increased my confidence in my work.	1.08%	4.30%	30.11%	46.24%	18.28%	93
This CoP has expanded my professional network (e.g., connecting with others, sharing resources, etc.).	1.08%	7.53%	18.28%	45.16%	27.96%	93
This CoP has provided access to collaborative resources and tools.	2.15%	9.68%	29.03%	41.94%	17.20%	93

To help us understand the impact of CoPs at the institutional level, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

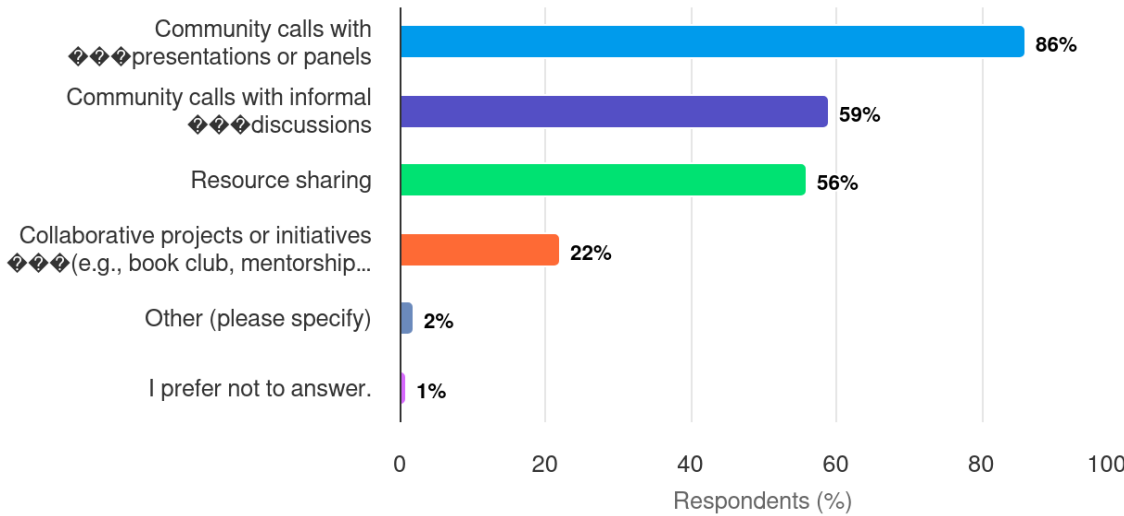
86 respondents



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
This CoP has led to improvements in services, processes, or programs at my library or institution.	2.33% 2	9.30% 8	37.21% 32	39.53% 34	11.63% 10	86
This CoP has encouraged innovation within my library or team (e.g., new projects, improved services, experimenting with new methods).	2.33% 2	10.47% 9	37.21% 32	38.37% 33	11.63% 10	86
This CoP has facilitated collaboration across institutions.	2.33% 2	10.47% 9	36.05% 31	38.37% 33	12.79% 11	86
This CoP has supported the development of new policies, guidelines, or frameworks at my institution.	3.49% 3	16.28% 14	47.67% 41	25.58% 22	6.98% 6	86

What types of activity from the CoP have you found most useful?

81 respondents



% Frequency

Activity Type	%	Frequency	Visual Representation
Community calls with presentations or panels	86.42%	70	
Community calls with informal discussions	59.26%	48	
Resource sharing	55.56%	45	
Collaborative projects or initiatives (e.g., book club, mentorship program, etc.)	22.22%	18	
Other (please specify)	2.47%	2	
I prefer not to answer.	1.23%	1	
Total		81	