Communities of Practice Pilot Initiative

Winter 2026 Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

In Winter 2026, SPARK launched a pilot Communities of Practice (CoP) initiative in response to growing community interest in collaborative professional learning opportunities. AI and UDL were selected as the pilot themes due to their relevance across teaching, learning, and institutional practice, as well as the increasing demand for spaces to explore opportunities and challenges.

The primary purpose of the pilot was to evaluate Communities of Practice as a model for engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovation at Sheridan.

SPARK offered four CoPs

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Ethics and Integrity - AI
- Faculty Workflow - AI
- Student Experience - AI

Across the four communities, 38 individuals expressed interest and 24 participants actively engaged throughout the semester. Participants represented diverse faculties, departments, and roles.

The pilot generated eight practical resources and demonstrated strong demand for continued Communities of Practice. Feedback consistently highlighted the value of cross-disciplinary dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and opportunities to collectively explore emerging challenges and opportunities.

Based on pilot outcomes, Communities of Practice should be considered a recurring component of SPARK's professional learning ecosystem.

Purpose of the Pilot

The Winter 2026 Communities of Practice Pilot was launched in response to growing community interest in collaborative professional learning opportunities.

While AI served as the main thematic focus, the pilot sought to answer three key questions:

- Is there sufficient appetite for Communities of Practice at Sheridan?
- What structures best support meaningful participation and engagement?
- What outcomes emerge when faculty and staff are provided dedicated space for collaborative inquiry and resource development?

The pilot also aimed to generate practical resources that could support teaching, learning, and institutional academic excellence and priorities.

Pilot Overview

The Winter 2026 Communities of Practice Pilot consisted of four streams facilitated by Lana Alrifai and Dina Moati. Participation was open to all Sheridan employees through an institution-wide call for participation and was offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

All Communities of Practice met biweekly throughout the Winter 2026 semester in 45-minute sessions designed to balance accessibility with meaningful engagement.

Community of Practice	**Focus Area**	**Expressions of Interest**	**Active Participants**	**Deliverables**
UDL	Accessibility and inclusive design	11	7	2
Ethics and Integrity	Responsible AI use	7	6	2 (one common with Student group)
Faculty Workflow	Productivity and workflow enhancement	6	4	2
Student Experience	AI-supported learning	7	7	2 (one common with Ethics group)
Total		**38**	**24**	**7**

Community Highlights

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

This community explored the intersection of accessibility and inclusive learning design. Discussions focused on reducing barriers to learning, designing flexible assessments, and applying Universal Design for Learning principles within learning environments.

Resources Developed

- Sheridan Inclusive Course Design Guide
- Sheridan SLATE Template

Ethics and Integrity

This community explored ethical, transparent, and responsible approaches to AI use in educational settings. Discussions focused on academic integrity, disclosure, accountability, and communicating clear expectations regarding AI use.

Resources Developed

- Sheridan's AI Usage Form (common output with Student Experience CoP)
- Sheridan AI Stoplight Guide

Faculty Workflows

This community examined how AI can support faculty productivity by reducing administrative burden, automating routine tasks, and creating more time for teaching, mentorship, and student support.

Participants explored workflow optimization, agentic AI, and institution-wide opportunities for AI-enabled support. One session featured an external guest speaker who shared insights into the development of an AI agent, prompting discussion about future possibilities for Sheridan-specific solutions.

Resources Developed

- Sheridan AI Prompt Guide for Teaching & Learning
- Sheridan Human in the Loop Review Guide

Student Experience

This community explored how AI can support student learning while preserving critical thinking, creativity, and learner agency.

Discussions emphasized the role of AI as a tutor, coach, and learning partner rather than a tool for producing completed work. Participants explored ways AI can support reflection, questioning, and skill development without replacing the learning process itself.

Resources Developed

- Sheridan AI Usage Form (common output with Ethics & Integrity CoP)
- Sheridan Student Guide: Using AI as your Tutor

Key Findings

1. Strong Appetite for Communities of Practice

The pilot demonstrated significant interest in Communities of Practice as a professional learning model. Thirty-eight individuals expressed interest across the four streams, and participant feedback consistently indicated a desire for Communities of Practice to continue and expand beyond the pilot phase.

2. Community Was as Valuable as Content

Across all four communities, participants consistently identified discussion, collaboration, and exposure to diverse perspectives as among the most valuable aspects of the experience.

While AI served as the catalyst for participation, the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues emerged as one of the most significant outcomes of the pilot.

3. Communities of Practice Generate Practical Outcomes

The pilot resulted in the development of eight practical resources intended to support teaching, learning, and institutional practice.

This demonstrates the potential for Communities of Practice to function as both professional learning environments and collaborative resource-development spaces.

4. Facilitation Matters

Participant feedback consistently highlighted facilitation as a key contributor to engagement, psychological safety, and productive dialogue.

The combination of structured discussion, responsiveness to participant interests, and flexibility in adapting conversations contributed significantly to the success of the communities.

5. Time Is the Greatest Barrier

While participants appreciated the accessibility of 45-minute sessions, many expressed a desire for longer conversations and deeper engagement.

Competing priorities and scheduling challenges impacted participation for some individuals, suggesting a need to balance accessibility with opportunities for more sustained collaboration.

Lessons Learned

Several important lessons emerged from the pilot.

First, interest in Communities of Practice extends beyond the topic of AI itself. Participants demonstrated a strong appreciation for opportunities to connect with colleagues, share experiences, and collaboratively explore complex issues.

Second, structured flexibility proved effective. While each community was launched with intended discussion themes and planned outputs, facilitators adapted discussions and deliverables based on participant interests, emerging questions, and time constraints. This balance between planning and responsiveness contributed to participant engagement and ownership.

Third, practical resource development increased the perceived value of participation. Participants appreciated contributing to resources that could be shared with the broader Sheridan community and support future teaching and learning initiatives.

Finally, the pilot highlighted an ongoing tension between interest and capacity. While enthusiasm for participation was high, competing priorities and limited time affected attendance and continuity. Future offerings will need to continue balancing accessibility with opportunities for deeper engagement.

Participant Reflections

Participant feedback highlighted the value of Communities of Practice as spaces for connection, collaboration, and shared learning. Across all four communities, participants consistently emphasized the importance of engaging with colleagues from different disciplines, exploring diverse perspectives, and having dedicated time to reflect on emerging challenges and opportunities.

"Meeting with peers and feeling part of a community. Hearing various perspectives. Getting to know new colleagues and reconnecting with old ones."
– Student Experience CoP Participant

"The smaller consistent groups made it a lot easier to delve into topics."
– Ethics and Integrity CoP Participant

"I really appreciated the small group discussions and the opportunity to share with and hear from colleagues."
– UDL CoP Participant

"This was my first CoP. Thank you for the experience. For the amount of time required I think we all got a lot out of it."
– Student Experience CoP Participant

Recommendations

Based on participant feedback, facilitator observations, and pilot outcomes, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Establish Communities of Practice as a recurring SPARK offering.
2. Expand topics beyond AI while continuing to respond to emerging institutional interests and priorities.
3. Prioritize depth over volume by offering fewer Communities of Practice each semester and supporting stronger engagement within each community.
4. Extend session length from 45 to 60 minutes while maintaining the biweekly format.
5. Launch information sessions prior to registration to clarify expectations, commitments, and intended outcomes.
6. Create dedicated Teams spaces and collaborative work environments to support engagement between meetings.
7. Introduce cross-community showcase opportunities to share outcomes, resources, and emerging practices.
8. Continue emphasizing practical resource development and institutional sharing as a core component of future Communities of Practice.

Conclusion

The Winter 2026 Communities of Practice Pilot demonstrated that Communities of Practice are a valuable model for fostering collaboration, experimentation, and professional learning at Sheridan.

While AI provided the main thematic focus, the pilot ultimately highlighted the importance of creating spaces where faculty and staff can collectively explore emerging challenges, share perspectives, and develop practical solutions. Participants consistently valued opportunities for dialogue, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and collaborative resource development.

The strong engagement, positive feedback, and tangible outcomes generated through this initiative suggest that Communities of Practice should play an ongoing role in Sheridan's professional learning ecosystem and serve as a mechanism for exploring topics that matter to the Sheridan community.

"These are so valuable and I hope they continue."
– UDL CoP Participant

Appendix A – Tools

The following resources were developed through the Winter 2026 Communities of Practice Pilot and will be shared through SPARK.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Sheridan Inclusive Course Design Guide

Purpose: To provide faculty with a pragmatic tool to start and elevate their UDL practice

Description: The Inclusive Course Design Guide was created by the CoP as a pragmatic tool that supports a “plus one” approach.

- Sheridan SLATE Template

Purpose: Provide a consistent accessible and universally designed template that facilitates inclusive learning in the virtual space for Sheridan students.

Description: The SLATE Template is a customizable course shell template designed to support accessible, inclusive, and learner-centred course design within Sheridan's learning management system. Grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, the template provides a consistent structure for organizing course content, communicating expectations, and supporting student navigation and engagement. The resource helps faculty create more accessible virtual learning environments by incorporating best practices related to accessibility, clarity, flexibility, and student success while promoting a more consistent learning experience across courses.

Ethics and Integrity

- Sheridan AI Usage Form (common with Student Experience CoP)

Purpose: To support transparency, accountability, and responsible use of generative AI by providing students with a structured way to disclose how AI tools contributed to their learning process and submitted work.

Description: The AI Usage Form enables students to document and communicate their use of generative AI tools in coursework. Grounded in Sheridan's Guidelines for the Responsible Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence, the form promotes academic integrity by encouraging learners to reflect on and disclose how AI was used to support learning, problem-solving, creativity, or content development. The resource helps foster responsible AI practices while providing faculty with greater transparency into students' learning processes.

- Sheridan AI Stoplight Guide

Purpose: To support faculty in establishing clear, course-specific expectations for the responsible use of artificial intelligence by helping them determine where, when, and how AI can appropriately support student learning.

Description: The Stoplight Guide is a faculty-facing decision-making tool that helps instructors communicate expectations regarding AI use within their courses and assessments. Using a simple green, yellow, and red categorization system, the guide supports faculty in identifying activities where AI use is permitted, permitted with limitations, or restricted. Rather than prescribing fixed rules, the guide recognizes faculty expertise and disciplinary context, enabling instructors to make informed decisions that align with their learning outcomes while encouraging students to use AI as a partner in learning rather than a replacement for their own thinking and work.

Faculty Workflow

- Sheridan AI Prompt Guide for Teaching and Learning

Purpose: To support faculty in the responsible, efficient, and pedagogically sound use of artificial intelligence by providing practical, Sheridan-aligned prompts for course design, assessment development, and student support.

Description: The guide is a curated collection of high-quality prompts designed to help faculty effectively integrate AI into their teaching practice. Grounded in Sheridan's commitment to teaching excellence, the resource provides examples that support instructional design, assessment creation, feedback development, and student support activities. The prompts are intended to enhance efficiency, clarity, and creativity while reinforcing the importance of faculty expertise, professional judgment, and oversight in all AI-supported work.

- Sheridan Human in the Loop Review Guide

Purpose: To support faculty in reviewing and designing AI-supported learning materials by ensuring content is accurate, inclusive, ethically sound, and aligned with Sheridan's academic standards, institutional values, and teaching practices.

Description: The tool provides faculty with a structured guide for evaluating AI-generated content before it is shared with students. The checklist supports quality assurance by prompting faculty to review content for accuracy, bias, accessibility, inclusivity, and alignment with learning outcomes. In addition to reviewing AI-generated materials, the resource encourages intentional and responsible design practices when integrating AI into teaching and learning activities, reinforcing the essential role of human judgment in educational decision-making.

Student Experience

- Sheridan AI Usage Form (common output with Ethics & Integrity CoP)

Purpose: To support transparency, accountability, and responsible use of generative AI by providing students with a structured way to disclose how AI tools contributed to their learning process and submitted work.

Description: The form enables students to document and communicate their use of generative AI tools in coursework. Grounded in Sheridan's Guidelines for the Responsible Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence, the form promotes academic integrity by encouraging learners to reflect on and disclose how AI was used to support learning, problem-solving, creativity, or content development. The resource helps foster responsible AI practices while providing faculty with greater transparency into students' learning processes.

- Sheridan Student Guide: Using AI as your Tutor

Purpose: To support students in using artificial intelligence as a learning partner by encouraging critical thinking, reflection, and skill development rather than relying on AI to complete academic work on their behalf.

Description: The tool a practical guide that helps students engage with AI in ways that strengthen learning rather than bypass it. Built around a series of socratic-style prompts, the resource encourages students to ask questions, test their understanding, receive feedback, and work through problems independently. By positioning AI as a tutor, coach, and thinking partner, the guide promotes deeper learning, confidence-building, and the development of transferable skills while maintaining student ownership of the learning process.