

# **Why does Canada need Communities of Practice?**

## **Virtual Symposium Debrief Report**

March 7, 2023



[meopar.ca/knowledge-mobilization/communities-of-practice/](https://meopar.ca/knowledge-mobilization/communities-of-practice/)

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## Suggested Citation

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## Acknowledgements

MEOPAR extends deep gratitude to all the speakers and CoP personnel who participated in this event, and for enabling the CoP Program to thrive. Thank you to the participants for their time and engagement in the conversation. Sincere appreciation for MEOPAR staff, management and leadership for designing and running this event.

## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the presentations and discussion from MEOPAR's virtual Community of Practice (CoP) Symposium, held on March 7, 2023, titled "*Why does Canada need Communities of Practice*". After providing an overview of the event and CoP presentations and reviewing the outcomes from the discussion question, a list of key takeaways and lessons learned is provided. To aid in expanding the CoP networks', engagement information (i.e., newsletter signup and social media) is provided in Appendix C, and contact information for participants who consented to information sharing can be accessed in Appendix D.

## Graphical Abstract

### Why does Canada need Communities of Practice? Virtual Symposium Debrief

March 7, 2023



CoP presentations from: CCRF, CMSRF, COMREN, CORC, NetCOLOR, OA CoP, OGC

Brought together 50 researchers and practitioners from across Canada to engage with MEOPAR supported CoPs.



Key Takeaway: CoPs help decentralize where information is held, while centralizing access to information, and providing a coordinated approach to knowledge mobilization and collaboration in Canada.

#### Lessons learned include:

- Communications
- Activities & Events
- Collaboration & Partnerships
- Operations
- Best Practices



Full report available at [meopar.ca/knowledge-mobilization/cop-symposium/](https://meopar.ca/knowledge-mobilization/cop-symposium/)

## Event Summary

MEOPAR's second Community of Practice (CoP) Symposium on March 7, 2023, brought together established and emerging CoPs to exchange lessons learned and their recent successes, where the discussion was oriented on why Canada needs CoPs moving forward. The symposium included short presentations from seven MEOPAR supported CoPs (Table 1) and allowed for time for questions and open discussion at the end. All individuals and groups interested in communities of practice were encouraged to join, learn and contribute their experience as well. Visit MEOPAR's YouTube Channel to [watch the session recording](#).

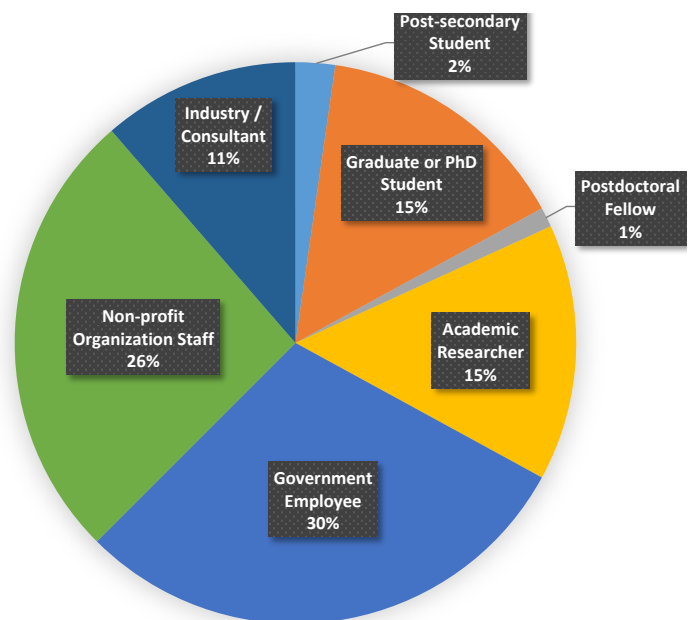
*Table 1. Representative speakers for the Communities of Practice that participated in the Symposium on March 7, 2023. Websites and emails for the respective CoP speakers are hyperlinked.*

Community of Practice (CoP)	Representative Speaker(s)
<a href="#">Canadian Coastal Resilience Forum (CCRF)</a>	<a href="#">Shaierree Cottar</a> , PhD Candidate, Department of Geography and Environmental Management, University of Waterloo & Coordinator for the Canadian Coastal Resilience Forum
<a href="#">Canadian Marine Shipping Risk Forum (CMSRF)</a>	<a href="#">Meghan Mathieson</a> , Director of Strategy & Innovation at Clear Seas Centre for Responsible Marine Shipping
<a href="#">Canadian Ocean Mapping Research and Education Network (COMREN)</a>	<a href="#">Ian Church</a> , Associate Professor, Geodesy and Geomatics Engineering, University of New Brunswick
<a href="#">Coastal and Ocean Risk Communication (CORC)</a>	<a href="#">Cindy Marven</a> , Coordinator, Coast and Ocean Risk Communication (CORC) Community of Practice
<a href="#">Network on Coastal, Oceans and Lake Optics Remote Sensing (NetCOLOR)</a>	<a href="#">Emmanuel Devred</a> , Research Scientist, Bedford Institute of Oceanography, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
<a href="#">Ocean Acidification Community of Practice (OA CoP)</a>	<a href="#">Austin Pugh</a> , Research Associate, University of Calgary
<a href="#">Ocean Gliders Canada (OGC)</a>	<a href="#">Richard Davis</a> , Professional Staff, Dalhousie University

## Registration & Participation

The symposium had 78 registrants and approximately 50 participants (64% attendance rate) from various stakeholder groups, including government, academia (students and researchers), industry, and non-profit organizations (Figure 1), located primarily in Nova Scotia, Quebec and British Columbia, with some representation from Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Notably, 68% of the registrants were not currently CoP members at the time of registration, but indicated they would like to be involved after the symposium. To get involved and stay informed, see Appendix C for CoP newsletter sign-up and social media information.



*Figure 1. Stakeholder composition for the Community of Practice Symposium on March 7, 2023, according to registration information.*

## Engagement

Engagement was strong throughout the event, and was measured through activity in the chat, the use of Zoom 'reactions' during presentations and discussion period, and audience questions during the discussion period. Overall, this event was considered highly successful in bringing together researchers and practitioners that are currently engaged or looking to be engaged in MEOPAR supported CoPs, in addition to other CoPs and similar groups, to mobilize knowledge and build their networks. To connect with participants, see Appendix D for contact information.

## Summary of Presentations

### 1. [Canadian Coastal Resilience Forum \(CCRF\)](#)

CCRF has been in operation for 5 years, and focuses on building resiliency to climate change and natural hazards in Canada, and provides a platform for researchers, governments and practitioners to connect. The CoP has found that cross collaboration with other CoPs and other international organizations, has led to success in mobilizing knowledge on coastal resiliency. For example, the second National Forum on Coastal Resiliency, delivered in collaboration with CORC hosted over 120 participants, and the Coast 2 Coast 2 Coast Trivia Challenge was an exemplary activity helping connect individuals with the CoP and raise awareness of coastal resiliency.

### 2. [Canadian Marine Shipping Risk Forum \(CMSRF\)](#)

The CMSRF launched in 2019 with support from MEOPAR and Clear Seas after an initial collaborative workshop in 2016. Since then, the CoP has grown to 230 members and provides a platform for networking and sharing knowledge around shipping risk through webinars and workshops. These events helped identify the need for increased knowledge mobilization of shipping risks and led to the creation of the CMSRF Inventory of Shipping Risk Resources. This searchable database was developed with end-users in mind and is currently undergoing testing prior to its formal launch. Knowledge sharing is also facilitated through the creating of working groups such as the Salish Sea Transboundary Working Group, a mechanism to support knowledge sharing on shipping risk in a specific transboundary area.

### 3. [Canadian Ocean Mapping Research and Education Network \(COMREN\)](#)

COMREN launched in 2021 and has members from academia, government, and industry, from coast to coast. COMREN focuses on providing opportunities for students to advance their education, skillset, and experience around ocean mapping research, in addition to conducting innovative research. Notably, COMREN had made a positive impact by providing travel funding to support student participation



By regularly hosting webinars and in-person events like their [National Forums](#), using their website as a resource and information repository, and staying active on social media, CORC has created strong community connections to address the need for effective coastal and ocean risk communication within Canada and beyond.

#### 5. [Network on Coastal, Oceans and Lake Optics Remote Sensing \(NetCOLOR\)](#)

NetCOLOR provides a forum for their community of 141 members that focuses on developing a National Strategy for research, providing training opportunities, and mobilizing knowledge as it relates to aquatic remote sensing. Since the pandemic, they have focused on hosting online webinars as they attract many individuals and provide an opportunity for students to showcase their work. Some of their successes to date have included their national workshops that provided space for collaboration and to gather feedback on their research projects; two publications; growing their presence internationally on social media; and becoming an advisory group for the Canadian Space Agency.

#### 6. [Canada's Ocean Acidification Community of Practice \(OA CoP\)](#)

The OA CoP aims to coordinate data sharing and knowledge mobilization across all sectors, disciplines, and regions, as it relates to ocean acidification. They also identify pressing needs for the sector based on knowledge and research gaps, and provide space for collaboration in a supportive environment. Since COVID, they have focused on building a strong social media presence to engage their community, using their website to host resources, and regularly share both blog and discussion posts. This has enabled steady growth in membership, continuation and development of conversations around OA, and provides a platform to showcase early career researchers (ECR).

To date, their greatest successes have included ongoing development of the *State of OA Knowledge in Canada White Paper*, which includes recommendations for future actions for decision makers and an interactive mapping resource. They are also collaborating with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) to promote collaboration, share knowledge and highlight success stories with a focus on ECR and collaborative initiatives.

#### 7. [Ocean Gliders Canada \(OGC\)](#)

Ocean Gliders Canada is a consortium of glider users and operators with the common goals of encouraging collaboration; supporting excellent quality data; sharing best practices through their website, workshops and in-person training events; and developing a National Strategy in sharing ocean glider resources (i.e. code, ideas and equipment). Their greatest successes to date have been developing

a centralized data repository in collaboration with [CIOOS](#) (operationalization in-process), developing and sharing best practices on their Slack channel and GitHub code repository, and best practices summary paper. Notably, the CoP has facilitated glider activity on all three coasts, where East Coast operations have flown 160,000 km (4 times around the world), and West Coast operations have flown 41,557 km (once around the world).

While the group has been successful, it's not without challenges. COVID created operational challenges for field work and in-person meetings, especially with members across the country that are geographically isolated. Additional resources (funding and coordinator) are required to support digital infrastructure and in-person meetings, and ultimately sustain the CoP long term operation and contribution to a national integrated ocean observation program.

## Summary of Discussion

Key take aways from the discussion are summarized in Appendix A.

1. How does your CoP contribute to the larger coastal and ocean community and how do you think Canadians and Canada's coastal and ocean spaces benefit from your CoP?
  - The CORC CoP, and others, contribute by drawing together people working in various sectors and disciplines relating to coastal and marine hazards, around the common thread of learning how to communicate risk better. **Enabling practitioners and researchers to meet and connect benefits all.** They have collected information and resources on their website which acts as a source and starting point for people who are looking for information about coastal and marine risk communication.
  - Canada has a long coastline - north, west, east – where **CoPs enable broad geographic reach bringing the issues each coast are facing to the forefront** to share knowledge and approaches towards solutions. These CoPs **bring together people** from different sectors across the country, where those broad intersectoral and interdisciplinary **connections branch into their own communities.**
  - OGC's contributions to the Right Whale project, led by Chris Taggart at Dalhousie University and Kim Davis at the University of New Brunswick, tracking the specie's distribution exemplified how CoP's can help coordinate with federal government departments, like DFO, to **collect data and share results that are transferable to informing solutions**, and can be a good approach to **solving problems** the species is facing.
  - The National Forum is another example of how events can provide a snapshot of issues smaller communities are facing, and aid in getting direct input, sharing knowledge and experiences to a wider audience. A few years ago, the CCRF hosted workshop webinar with Fathom, where afterwards other groups reached out saying that they wanted to

replicate the flood modelling project in their community. **CoPs are a gateway** to connect smaller communities to groups with greater capacity.

- COMREN, offers Canada a **central hub to connect people to encourage and facilitate collaboration** within the ocean mapping community. For the OA CoP, since establishing themselves in Canada, they are now starting to expand, connect and collaborate with international initiatives and organizations. **CoPs help centralize information** that can then be transferred at larger scales to share expertise and build relationships.

## 2. Any dos and don'ts for setting up and maintaining a CoP? Benefits and drawbacks? Ideas for improvements and changes?

- Success does not come without challenges. COMREN initially started out as a CoP with mostly academics, especially being based at the University of New Brunswick, which lead to challenges in reaching out and connecting with industry, communities, etc. Initially, building connections outside of academia was a challenge, but over time, COMREN has been making process. The OA CoP had faced and overcame similar issue.
- Social media is a great tool, but pay caution to the difference between active communication (i.e. survey or discussion post where you are asking members to do something) versus passive engagement (i.e. reading a blog or newsletter). The OA CoP has learned that **passive engagement performs better**, getting more 'clicks' and views, and garners a lot more feedback and response from community.
- **Streamlining communications** is also important to **reduce overwhelming members with too much information**. Consider timing and quantity of communication, outreach, and events.
- Having a **dedicated person focused on managing the CoP**, like a coordinator, is one of the most important factors in success. For NetCOLOR, having a coordinator made a huge impact in terms of member engagement and making sure CoP is kept on track. Having highly qualified people (HQP; i.e. students, practitioners, researchers from early, mid to senior level) engaged in designing and delivering workshops, and contributing to reports, project activities and outputs are also an asset.
- **Coordinators act as network operators** in connecting individuals with the resources and contacts needed to achieve various goals or project activities. For example, CORC was able to connect their CoP member [Dr. Ryan Reynolds](#) with other members during the development of the [CHERP app](#), to test the beta model. This is a good example of the importance of having a dedicated coordinator, and how CoPs can help academics connect with community members, and other stakeholders.

### 3. What barriers threaten long-term sustainability?

This question was addressed verbally by the speakers in addition to the participants via the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Whiteboard on Zoom (Figure 3), and responses are summarized in the section below.

- **Continued financial support** is needed to ensure long term sustainability.
- Staff (i.e. coordinators) are a key to success. The CoPs success is threatened without **personnel to run operations**. If there is turnover in staff, a smooth transition is needed. If that fails, then sustainability will be threatened.
- Long-term and meaningful engagement can be a threat to success. From CCRF's perspective, overcoming this looked like **limiting the number of platforms used for communications, but keeping them up to date and active**.
- Planning **smaller targeted events** dedicated to smaller groups (i.e. students) helps keep engagement and participation high. Also **balancing the type of events** to engage various audiences with different needs.
- As noted by NetCOLOR, without **consistent member and community engagement**, there may be a need to reinvent the CoP's communications strategy to keep community engaged. 'Business as usual' for activities and communications gets boring, **innovation is needed to keep members engaged**.
- Be mindful that there is a **spectrum of engagement to expect from members**. Some folks will be highly engaged and want to actively participate in planning activities, while others may just observe and engage passively. Don't expect everyone in the CoP to have the time and capacity to be involved at the same level all the time. **Find a balance between active and passive engagement with your community**. As noted by the CMSRF, it's typical to see only a few active members, as most are passive. Some will be highly active; **celebrate community champions** - people who are enthusiastic and work voluntarily to ensure the momentum keeps going.



Figure 3. Screenshot of Zoom SWOT Whiteboard used by the audience to share their perspectives on: *Has participation in the CoP helped your work? How can they be improved? Elaborated in question 3 by the speakers.*

- **Ask the community for feedback** to learn what they're interested in. Running polls during webinars to gain better understandings of what members want to see in the future (webinars, activities, etc.) can be highly effective, as experienced by the CMSRF. Try testing different styles of virtual webinars to see what would work best and address members needs and interest.
4. If there were no CoPs, how would Canada connect with international players in addressing cross sectoral issues?
- Before CoPs, information was held by single individuals, typically at institutions, where they would connect other people with each other, but this model limited sharing.
  - The CoP model is not known uniformly across the global, which sometimes creates challenges in explaining the groups' organizational and governance structure, as COMREN has experienced. CoPs can represent and describe themselves internationally as **working groups with decentralized governance structures**.
  - The [United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development](#) has developed [Community of Champions in Canada](#), and while they are new, and are not yet well establish nationally, they could play a similar role to CoPs in connecting with new members at the international scale.
  - For NetCOLOR, while they have some international activities, they mainly focus on work within Canada, but do engage with international partners where relevant (e.g. responding to calls for proposal).
  - Overall, MEOPAR has seen that **CoPs help decentralize where information is held, while centralizing access to information, and providing a coordinated approach to knowledge mobilization and collaboration in Canada.**

## Lessons Learned & Key Takeaways

This section summarizes the lessons learned and key take aways heard throughout the presentations and discussion period and are grouped thematically. A succinct summary table can be found in Appendix B.

### 1. Communications

- **Websites** are good repositories/hubs for information and resources.
- **Social media** platforms are effective tools for communication and outreach, and drive website traffic.
- **Streamline** communication tools and frequency of communication.
- Consider **active and passive engagement styles**.

### 2. Activities & Events

- **Diversify types of events** and be mindful of their frequency.

- Consider **smaller target audience** for **focused events**.
- **Ask members** what they are interested in.

### 3. Collaboration & Partnerships

- **Engage** with other communities of practice and organizations outside of existing membership on activities to expand network reach and build partnerships, both nationally and internationally.
- **Create spaces and opportunities for dialogue and knowledge mobilization**, through both in-person and virtual events and activities, and by using various social media platforms.

### 4. Operations

- Source **financial resources to support coordinator**.
- Ensure **smooth transition** between staff turnovers.

### 5. Best Practices

#### Do

- **Be clear about your goals and purpose** as a community.
- **Be flexible and adaptable** - find tools and approaches that work.
- **Go to your members first to ask about their needs and invite individuals to present or share**. Most people are happy to share if you manage the load of promotion and admin, they can focus on their presentation.
- **Bring in outside perspectives in terms of presenters**, and this sometimes also brings in new members.

#### Do not

- **Do not underestimate the time needed** to cultivate and nurture the community - it's like a garden - it will flourish with attention but wither if you ignore it and think it will thrive on its own. It takes time to identify resources; reach out to people who you think might be interested in your community; plan events, etc.
- **Do not overwhelm members**. Consider timing and frequency/quantity of events and communications. There is a fine line between offering enough events, resources and communications to be useful and too much so as to be overwhelming.
- **Do not expect tons of interaction from members**. Welcome and appreciate all levels of member involvement - there will be a few very interested and active folks and many who appreciate the community and check in occasionally to see what's happening. We are all busy with work and mostly overwhelmed with information. The CoP is meant as a resource and support, it should not be a burden to members.

### Final Remarks

MEOPAR has learned that CoPs are crucial to effective knowledge mobilization in Canada and are strategizing how to continue Program support. Hopefully, with success in moving forward with MEOPAR's application to the Strategic Science Fund (SSF), the CoP Program will be

renewed and continue to play an important role in mobilizing knowledge within the Canadian ocean sector, and beyond.

## Resources

- Table of CoP Communication Platforms (Appendix A)
- National Forum on Coastal Resiliency, Information and Report [available here](#).
- Canadian Marine Shipping Risk Forum, past webinar recordings [available here](#).

## Appendix A – Summary of CoP Symposium Discussion

Discussion Topic	Key Points
<b>The CoP's contribution to Canada's coastal and ocean communities.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables practitioners and researchers to meet and connect benefiting all.</li> <li>• Enables broad geographic reach, bringing local issues to the forefront.</li> <li>• Brings people together.</li> <li>• Connections branching into communities.</li> <li>• Collect data and share results that are transferrable to informing solutions.</li> <li>• Solving problems.</li> <li>• Central hub to encourage and facilitate collaboration.</li> </ul>
<b>Setting up and maintaining a CoP. Benefits and drawbacks. Ideas for improvement.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive engagement platforms and tools perform better.</li> <li>• Streamline communications to reduce information overload on members.</li> <li>• Consider frequency and timing of communications.</li> <li>• Dedicated personnel require to manage the CoP.</li> <li>• Coordinators are the network's operators.</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers threatening long-term sustainability.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued financial support.</li> <li>• Personnel to run operations.</li> <li>• Long-term and consistent membership/community engagement.</li> <li>• Keep communications and social media platforms up to date and active with balance in passive and active methods.</li> <li>• Balance in event type and size.</li> <li>• Ask for feedback.</li> </ul>
<b>CoPs bridge Canada and international players to address cross-sectoral challenges.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working groups with decentralized governance structures.</li> <li>• CoPs decentralize where information is held, while centralizing access to information, and providing a coordinated approach to knowledge mobilization and collaboration in Canada.</li> </ul>

## Appendix B – Summary of CoP Symposium Lessons Learned & Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway	Lesson
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites are good repositories/hubs for information and resources.</li> <li>• Social media platforms are effective tools for communication and outreach, and drive website traffic.</li> <li>• Streamline communication tools and frequency of communication.</li> <li>• Consider active and passive engagement styles.</li> </ul>
Activities & Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive Diversify types of events and be mindful of their frequency.</li> <li>• Consider smaller target audience for focused events.</li> <li>• Ask members what they are interested in.</li> </ul>
Collaboration & Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with other communities of practice and organizations outside of existing membership on activities to expand network reach and build partnerships, both nationally and internationally.</li> <li>• Create spaces and opportunities for dialogue and knowledge mobilization, through both in-person and virtual events and activities, and by using various social media platforms.</li> </ul>
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source financial resources to support coordinator.</li> <li>• Ensure smooth transition between staff turnovers.</li> </ul>
Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Be clear about your goals and purpose</b> as a community.</li> <li>• <b>Be flexible and adaptable</b> - find tools and approaches that work.</li> <li>• <b>Go to your members first to ask about their needs and invite individuals to present or share.</b> Most people are happy to share if you manage the load of promotion and admin, they can focus on their presentation.</li> <li>• <b>Bring in outside perspectives in terms of presenters,</b> and this sometimes also brings in new members.</li> <li>• <b>Do not underestimate the time needed</b> to cultivate and nurture the community - it's like a garden - it will flourish with attention but wither if you ignore it and think it will thrive on its own. It takes time to identify resources; reach out to people who you think might be interested in your community; plan events, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Do not overwhelm members.</b> Consider timing and frequency/quantity of events and communications. There is a fine line between offering enough events, resources and communications to be useful and too much so as to be overwhelming.</li> <li>• <b>Do not expect tons of interaction from members.</b> Welcome and appreciate all levels of member involvement - there will be a few very interested and active folks and many who appreciate the community and check in occasionally to see what's happening. We are all busy with work and mostly overwhelmed with information. The CoP is meant as a resource and support, it should not be a burden to members.</li> </ul>

## Appendix C – Community of Practice Newsletter and Social Media Information

Participating Community of Practice (CoP) Websites'	Email List & Newsletter Signup	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	LinkedIn	Instagram
<a href="#">Canadian Coastal Resilience Forum (CCRF)</a>	Join our community section at <a href="http://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-coastal-resilience/">uwaterloo.ca/canadian-coastal-resilience/</a>	<a href="#">@coastriskcanada</a>	NA	<a href="#">Canadian Coastal Resilience Forum</a>	NA	NA
<a href="#">Canadian Marine Shipping Risk Forum (CMSRF)</a>	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/3ckzapca">https://tinyurl.com/3ckzapca</a>	<a href="#">@cmsrf</a>	NA	NA	NA	NA
<a href="#">Canadian Ocean Mapping Research and Education Network (COMREN)</a>	Email to <a href="#">join here</a>	<a href="#">@CanadaOceanMap</a>	NA	NA	<a href="#">COMREN</a>	NA
<a href="#">Coastal and Ocean Risk Communication (CORC)</a>	<a href="http://eepurl.com/dD0tKD">eepurl.com/dD0tKD</a>	<a href="#">@CORC_CoP</a>	<a href="#">CORC_CoP</a>	<a href="#">Coast and Ocean Risk Communication CoP</a>	<a href="#">Coast and Ocean Risk Communication Community of Practice (CORC CoP)</a>	<a href="#">@corccop</a>
<a href="#">Network on Coastal, Oceans and Lake Optics Remote Sensing (NetCOLOR)</a>	NA	<a href="#">@NetcolorC</a>	NA	NA	NA	NA
<a href="#">Ocean Acidification Community of Practice (OA CoP)</a>	<a href="http://oceanacidification.ca/join-us">oceanacidification.ca/join-us</a>	<a href="#">@meopar_oacop</a>	<a href="#">meoparoacop</a>	NA	<a href="#">@meoparoacop</a>	<a href="#">meopar_oacop</a>
<a href="#">Ocean Gliders Canada (OGC)</a>	<a href="https://www.oceangliderscanada.ca/user/">https://www.oceangliderscanada.ca/user/</a>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

## Appendix D – Participant Contact Information\*

Name and post nominal qualification	Pronouns	Email address	Position and affiliation (institution, organization or independent)	Location
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\*Note that all participants listed in Appendix B consented to sharing their information at the time of registration.