International Permaculture CoLab User Guide

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Section 0: What is the purpose of this User Guide?

Introduction

Since the International Permaculture CoLab (CoLab) is a largely self-organized entity, this user guide aims to give readers a flavor of what the CoLab is about. However, it does not capture the rich human relationships and the collaborations within, nor does it cover fully all the different team setups, agreements and policies in place. It simply aims to make visible the overarching structures or patterns in place to support its members. To really experience its richness we encourage you to become an active member and seek out others already active within the CoLab to collaborate with.

This document was written by numerous active members of the CoLab in order to:

- compile in one place critical information about the CoLab which was previously either undocumented and/or stored in separate locations
- make more visible the structures, policies and services we have in place to support members
- encourage reflection on what the CoLab is and how it could be made better

Section 1: What is the International Permaculture CoLab? - The balance between autonomy and coherence

What is the International Permaculture CoLab?

The International Permaculture CoLab is a self-organised, on-line Collaborative Laboratory that helps improve coherence and collaboration in the international permaculture network (and beyond).

We are network of individuals, organizations, and enterprises that aims to enhance the effectiveness of the global permaculture movement.

Appropriate Digital Technology is at the heart of the work we do to help support groups and projects to work together effectively.

Many experiments are underway that work towards this great goal and include:

- the creation and stewarding of online spaces for collaborative working,
- the weaving of synergistic networks within and beyond the permaculture movement,
- the application of permaculture ethics and design to social and digital systems,
- the support of emerging regenerative projects and networks in their ambitious work.

The CoLab is exploring new economic and governance models that can support the wider movement to become more effective, financial sustainable, able, self-sufficient and will also identify and amplify successful regenerative economic strategies already adopted within the network.

Text from: https://www.perma.earth/CoLab/

Section 1a: History

You can read about the History of the CoLab here: https://www.perma.earth/history

Section 1b: Vision, Mission and Aims

You can read about the Vision, Mission and Aims of the CoLab here:

https://www.perma.earth/vision/

Section 1c: Governance model

You can read about the CoLab's governance model here: https://www.perma.earth/CoLab/

The current structure and processes are influenced by The Constellation Framework and Sociocracy 3.0.

Section 1d: Economic model

The CoLab practices an open finance model, meaning that all working groups and enterprises operate using a publicly transparent way of managing money. The current choice of financial management tool is Open Collective, where you can see all related collectives:

https://opencollective.com/perma-earth

Section 2: What makes a CoLab member and what does the CoLab do?

What makes a CoLab member and what does the CoLab do?

CoLab members are individuals who in the first place represent themselves and actively engage in the CoLab Slack workspace. This is important because of CoLab's flat and self-organised structure; no one individual is more or less important than any other member.

If CoLab members also represent their working groups / projects / circles / external associations etc., it is important to make this clear when entering into a collaboration. Relationships between external entities and the CoLab are documented in Memorandums of Understanding outlining the following:

- the nature of the relationship
- who is representing whom
- clear agreements as to how the relationship will work including how it can be terminated

CoLab members who come into the CoLab as representatives of external parties are shown on the Allied Networks page here: https://www.perma.earth/allies-network/

CoLab members retain their status whilst their Slack account is active and the individuals engaged in compliance with the Vibrant Space Policy.

Section 2a: Get to know current projects

There are a large number of projects ongoing in the International Permaculture CoLab at any one time. A current list including status of the projects, their objectives, whether they are funded or not, and who is on the team, is documented on the projects page here:

https://www.perma.earth/projects/

CoLab members can start projects collaborating with others on shared objectives. You can learn more about the process in Section 3b.

Project groups can apply for funding and access support services. The only requirement is that the projects are aligned with the CoLab Vision, Mission and Aims and that members do not fall foul of any limitations posed by the funder as would be clearly outlined by the Funding Circle – this may be different on a case by case basis.

Section 2b: Circles and working groups

What’s the difference between a Circle and a working group?

Circles are defined by their more formalised status, normally including the following

- have a defined circle vision aligned with the CoLab VMAs
- have a circle agreement outlining how people can join the circle if the circle is open
- have a representative on the General Circle

Working groups are informal set ups of people exploring collaboration possibilities, this may be a prototype stage of an upcoming circle but not necessarily. Stable working groups may decide to keep their working group status.

Working groups can be part of circles or independent. Just like circles they are able to benefit from services provided to projects and circles.

What circles and working groups are active?

You can review the active circles here: https://www.perma.earth/colab/

Working groups can be found within the Slack workspace if not listed on our website, at incubation stage working groups may not necessarily by visible through a slack channel yet.

Section 3: The CoLab Onboarding Journey

How can YOU join the CoLab read more here: https://www.perma.earth/onboarding-journey/

Section 3a: Joining an existing work group / circle / project / micro-enterprise

When you find a working group / circle / project / micro-enterprise that you want to join, the first step is to review the information about that group.

In general all groups should communicate clearly whether they are open (anyone can join), open by invitation (only people invited into the group can join) or closed (not open for new members).

Each circle has autonomy as to how to manage their onboarding process, the membership criteria etc.

Section 3b: Creating a new working group / circle / project / micro-enterprise

Creating something new is always an exciting process. The CoLab's ethos is to encourage collaboration and new activity.

The only overarching requirement for creation is centered around agreement with the CoLab VMAs.

For more formal set-ups there are some additional requirements to protect CoLab, working groups, projects, and micro-enterprises.

Creating a new working group / project

Working groups and projects are the most informal set ups. To start a working group, all one would need is to find other members interested in the topic to work on. It is recommended to include a member of the CoLab who has been a member for some time in order to access guidance when support is needed.

Working groups can exist within circles or outside circles.

In order not to duplicate work, we encourage members who want to start working groups and projects to communicate their intentions and remain open to collaboration with other groups which may be able to contribute towards their efforts. The extent to which working groups do this is up to them.

If a working group / project is reaching out to people outside the CoLab and presenting themselves as from the CoLab, it is a requirement that the general circle is notified simply by sending a message on the #general-circle channel *before* this is done. This is not to limit activity but to increase awareness around how the CoLab is interacting with others externally.

Creating a new circle

Circles are defined by clear domains, documented vision, mission and aims, named members and representation on the general circle.

If there is already a circle with the same domain, it is encouraged for the circles to consider how their work is overlapping and whether expanding the circle may be beneficial.

We accept that membership may fluctuate with time, however circles are generally expected to have relatively stable membership.

All permaculture domains are possible domains for circles. Circles may also be subsets of these domains.

The general circle should be informed about the formation of a new circle, not to limit the creation of a new circle, but to:

- onboard a representative to the general circle
- communicate about support / collaboration opportunities with other parts of the laboratory
- assess how this change may impact other active groups / circles

Creating a new micro-enterprise

A micro-enterprise can be created within a circle, project or working group as a product or service derived from their activities.

However a micro-enterprise can also be created as a free-standing offer.

Anyone who would like to offer services, please come forward so they can be included on the website. Please include:

- a picture of you
- a blurb about you and your experience
- the service you are offering and some information about that
- your hourly rate, and
- which fiscal host/Open Collective within the CoLab you will be using

Fiscal Hosting for receiving donations / payments options

For individuals or very young startup micro-enterprises

The current option for micro-enterprises without starting a new collective is through the #funding-circle or #digital-circle. The fiscal host in this case is “Stichting Reculture Foundation”, which means you will pay a 5% of any income earned for fiscal host fees + a 10% min income sharing contribution + any bank transfer fees on outgoing payments.

Important to note that as an individual there is no contractual relationship between the fiscal host and yourself and you retain full fiscal responsibility to fulfill your fiscal obligations within your country of residence.

For groups and more established micro-enterprises

If multiple people are interested in co-offering a service and starting a micro-enterprise as a Permaculture CoLab related collective, the option exists to set up your own “Services Circle”, with its own Open Collective, with a permaculture-aligned fiscal host of your choice. You will need to get this through the General Circle consent process before your service is included on the website.

If you have other open accounting options in mind, other than Open Collective, these could also be considered and you could bring them up as alternative options. The key to any choice is a system that cannot be manipulated and edited after the payments are made; it must be public and easy to access for transparency.

Being a freelancer within the CoLab comes with a responsibility to the rest of the CoLab to maintain the reputation of being a reliable, good-quality service provider.

Section 3c: Composting groups

All circles, projects and working groups may dissolve over time. It may be that some functions those groups were fulfilling will be taken up by other groups, or may be transformed into something new.

We encourage groups to communicate to the general circle when this starts to happen, in order that:

- an assessment as to how this change is going to impact other still-active groups can be made
- the CoLab will be able to update our external communications to reflect this
- learnings can be captured, and
- support is provided if needed.

Section 4: Support and Services available to working groups / circles / projects

Support & Services

The International Permaculture CoLab pays for services:

From the Digital Circle, to provide working groups, project and circles with the following services:

- Nextcloud accounts for document storage, creation, editing and sharing
- Access to a central email address for external communication namely: contact@perma.earth
- OpenProject access (currently limited to funded projects)
- Miro boards (limited number of accounts/unlimited number of boards as needed)
- Newsletter access for internal and external communications / promotion through the communications officer
- Slack workspace - anyone can create channels, use call features, create usergroups
- Web page/s on perma.earth outlining the working groups / circle / project work, team, together with a contact form if needed
- Access to downloadable resources through the perma.earth website

From the Funding Circle:

- Access to a funding opportunities database
- Opportunities to join others in group-funded projects

From the Evaluation and Impact team:

- Assistance to projects to be able to design and carry out their own evaluation and impact strategy

From the Welcome Circle and any other willing CoLab member:

- help CoLab members orient themselves in the CoLab community

Section 5: Responsibilities of CoLab members

Section 5a: Contributor Code of Conduct

You can read the CoLab's Code of Conduct here.

Section 5b: Ad-hoc policies for grants

In addition to what is documented here in this user guide, the Funding Circle may put in place safe-guarding policies when administering grants. An example of such a policy is the Community Accountability Policy in place for the Next Steps Project. Similarly all circles / project / working groups may have their own additional policies in place.

Section 6: Communications inside and outside the CoLab

Section 6a: Slack management

The Slack admins facilitate adding members to the workspace, managing shared channel requests and archiving channels when necessary. They also enforce the Vibrant Active Space policy which can be found here: https://www.perma.earth/maintaining-a-vibrant-and-active-space/

You can contact @slack-admin simply by tagging this user-group in your message on any channel.

User-groups can be created and edited by all CoLab members, we ask that you use this feature responsibly.

Section 6b: Social media links

All CoLab members can contribute to the CoLab social media accounts, send a message to the #coLab-communications-engagement channel to find out how best to do this.

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/pcCoLab/

Youtube; https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMzGMATF_W3R5Uv9kWVKZPA

Section 6c: Mailing lists

The internal mailing list includes:

- CoLab members: defined here as all members of the CoLab Slack as per the above
- Other mailing lists may be created as a tool for specific projects eg: Next Steps Contributors / Emergent Festival Participants etc.

External mailing lists include:

- General newsletter mailing list: This is the main newsletter people sign up to on the website.

All CoLab members may submit internal communications to #colab-communications-engagement and external communications to the #CoLab-newsletter for publication, keeping in mind the audience and which mailing list should be used.

Circles may also request to set up their own mailing list sign up and dissemination if they have the capacity to administer it within their team.

If a working group / project is reaching out to people outside the CoLab and presenting themselves as from the CoLab it is a requirement that the @general circle is notified *before* this is done. Notification can be a short message to the general circle channel. This is not to limit activity but to increase awareness around how the CoLab is interacting with others externally.

Section 6d: Contact email

contact@perma.earth – This is the main email address to be used for newsletters and requests unless the circle / project / working group / micro-enterprise have their own email

Access to this email is provided to those groups who need it. The communications team manages this email account you can message them using the @comms-engagement usergroup tag on slack.

The only request is that emails are kept in an orderly way and filed away when dealt with to avoid duplication of work or accidental deletion of mail for others.

Section 6e: Outreach and engagement

The CoLab exists not only for us to collaborate with eachother, but to support collboration within the larger permaculture movement and related movements. As such we have a team within the CoLab to reach out and engage with organisations and individuals outside the CoLab. We have an engagement tools and marketing guidelines document here: https://www.perma.earth/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Communication-Strategy-6.pdf to assist anyone within the CoLab sharing content for outreach through the official CoLab channels.

Your feedback

Whether you are a CoLab member or someone interested in the CoLab, we want you to know that your feedback to this User Guide is important. If anything is not clear or you have questions, please contact us by email on contact@perma.earth.

Feedback will be processed by the General Circle members and any other members affected by it.

Annex 1: A Glossary

Glossary

Appropriate Digital Technology

In the context of the CoLab digital technology includes software and hardware choices of digital tools to be able to carry out intended functions for example a choice of server service to host the perma.earth website or a choice of software to handle a community database. Appropriate refers to the ethical implications of using a digital tool which takes into account permaculture ethics of people care, earth care and fair share along with it’s intended use and value generated to the community. Recognising the challenges these choices present and on what basis a tool is deemed appropriate or good enough for now until a better tool is identified.

Income sharing contribution

An percentage amount agreed within a circle that would be put aside from each transaction to go towards expenses set up by the circle members. Each circle has full autonomy as to how much and for what this is used.

Collective

A term used by the Open Collective team to describe a unique page for a group or project to collect donations or receive payment. Each collective must have a fiscal host to be able to transact money in and out of the collective.

Usergroups

A term used on Slack to describe a tag that alerts one or more people. Eg @welcomers would alert the members who are included in that usergroup.

Fiscal Host

A formal entity which is registered and can handle monies on behalf of individuals or groups. Important to note that a Fiscal Host is **not** an employer and any individual is responsible for their own fiscal obligations in the country they are resident in.

Annex 2: A Permaculture Design for the International Permaculture CoLab User Guide

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Purpose of the design

We want to create a user guide that:

- compiles critical information about the CoLab that is currently
  - dispersed over multiple locations
  - not documented
- make more visible the structures, policies and services we have in place to support members
- encourage reflection on what is and how it could be made better

Possible elements / sections for the user guide and functions taking into account applied permaculture ethics and principles

Permaculture Ethics / principles	**Elements**	**Functions**
Integrate rather than segregate – David Holmgren Catch and store energy – David Holmgren Use edges and value the marginal – David Holmgren	Purpose of the User Guide Use Inclusive Language	Be clear to people reading the document as to the context and the content they will find in the user guide – informational Set the tone for the rest of the document. Attention to: more simple English and gender in the translated versions.

Design from patterns to details – David Holmgren Produce no waste – David Holmgren	What is the CoLab: The balance between autonomy and coherence History: https://www.perma.earth/history-of-the-international-permaculture-CoLab/ VMAs: https://www.perma.earth/vision/ CoLab governance model: https://www.perma.earth/colab/	Communicate clearly what the CoLab is Explaining how CoLab groups work and where lies their autonomy within the ecosystem
Observe and Interact – David Holmgren	What does the CoLab do: Get to know current projects: https://www.perma.earth/projects/ Circles: https://www.perma.earth/CoLab/ - is being rewritten	Communicate clearly what the CoLab does and where to find further information about what are the current activities within the CoLab
	The CoLab onboarding journey: https://www.perma.earth/onboarding-journey/ Joining an existing work group / circle / project / micro-enterprise Creating a new working group / circle / project / micro-enterprise Composting groups	Communicate how a person can become a member how and where to get involved how to create new groups how to wind down groups after they have finished their work or become inactive over time
Fair share Earth Care People Care Use small and slow solutions – David Homgren Use and value renewable resources and services – David Holmgren	Support and Services Tools available to working groups / circles / projects Additional Services	Communicate clearly what services and support is offered as a part of the CoLab membership
Catch and store energy – David Holmgren Use and value diversity – David Homgren	Benefits and responsibilities of CoLab members Resources: https://www.perma.earth/shop/ Funding Opportunities: Code of Conduct Adhoc policies for grants eg Community Accountability Policy	Outline briefly what are the benefits and responsibilities of being a CoLab member. Informational, invitational, reflective.
	Communications inside and outside the CoLab slack management social media links mailing lists contact email	Outline briefly how communication work and how to responsibly use them. Informational and invitational
	Feedback	Outline how feedback is not only welcome but invited, who will review it giving a clear way to submit it.