Extended abstract:

**Open Education Networks are vital to the Sustainability of OER**

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The creation, development and integration of OER is currently uneven and variably distributed across the large number of higher education institutions globally. Connecting key stakeholders of open education initiatives (such as academic administrators, community and government leaders, funding foundations/organizations, librarians, instructional designers, faculty champions, students, digital learning administrators, informational technologists, teaching and learning center heads, etc.) via robust and highly connected human networks is essential to the long-term sustainability of OER. The OE Global-CCCOER Regional Leaders of Open Education (RLOE) network serves as a model for the ways that networking can strongly support the creation and ongoing implementation of open education initiatives through building the leadership and relationships that are necessary for the long-term sustainability of OER. In natural ecosystems, complexity, high biodiversity and interconnectedness are required for a sustainable and resilient ecological system. Similarly, we can design open education networks that are built on diverse human infrastructure and invest in the relationships amongst individuals and institutions that promote resilience, vibrancy and long-term sustainability of OER and OEP. The RLOE networking model could be adapted and used by others implementing open education initiatives around the world.

**The RLOE network: leaders and partners**

The OE Global-CCCOER Regional Leaders of Open Education Network (RLOE) brings together leaders from across North American institutional and regional boundaries that share ideas and resources and collaborate on building strategic plans for open education. Key to the sustainability of OER and open educational practices (OEP), RLOE builds strong partnerships with and recruits leaders from state agencies, community organizations, and funding foundations. These partners are included in our conversations about the structuring and financial support of the work. The RLOE network especially invests in supporting leadership that strengthens relationships, communications, and resources that promote anti-racism and social justice. As we focus on organizational leaders, we also question what leadership means. Who within an organization has agency and is empowered to make change? How do we nurture a diverse range of leaders that can help drive agendas for open education? The network helps individuals identify their sphere(s) of influence and empowers them to act within those spheres.

**RLOE Structure**

Structured to foreground areas of action for the UNESCO OER Recommendation, RLOE highlights four main cornerstones: A) Policy: What policies need to be in place? B) What professional development opportunities exist to support faculty, staff and administrators? C) Stewardship: Where and how are the materials stored, curated and distributed? D) Sustainability: What are the plans for ongoing support and funding?

Phase 2 of the RLOE network integrates these structural cornerstones as driving questions for change into three main areas of the workshop programming:

1. **Adoption of existing OER**
   Finding and using OER as replacement for commercial products (texts and related learning materials) increasing access/saving money for students

2. **Faculty/professional OER Creation**
   Faculty/professional remixing and adapting existing OER, and authoring/creating new OER for courses, programs, accessibility, socio-cultural representation and sharing across the network
3. **Open Educational Practices (OEP)**
Designing, learning or experimenting with classroom practices, open pedagogies, renewable assignments, classroom policies and digital tools that enhance learning, promote student agency and representational justice (Lambert 2018), allow for flexibility and openness, but also protect student privacy and choice. This includes but is not limited to student authoring/remixing/creating OER.

The programming will be shaped by the open education values: 1. Access and Equity; 2. Student Agency and the Rights of Learners; 3. Community and Collaboration; 4. Care and Generosity; 5. Social Justice, Diversity, Inclusion.

RLOE offers hybrid workshops, asynchronous online materials/activities, and synchronous webinars to three cohorts of 30-40 North American regional OE leaders: I) West coast, II) East coast, and III) Central U.S. and Canada, representing approximately 100-120 institutions. In addition, a system of mentors and coaches support network participants throughout the year.

**Challenges and Key Recommendations**

*The Broader Scope of Sustainability: A network of networks*

Several other North American Open Education networks, hubs, and institutes exist at local, regional and national levels which support leaders and other participants including (but not limited to) DOERS (Driving OER Sustainability for Student Success), AAC&U OE (Association of American Colleges and Universities Open Education institute), OEN (The University Minnesota Open Education Network), RIOS, (Institute for Racially Just, Inclusive, and Open STEM), the QUBES (Quantitative Undergraduate Biology Synthesis) OER hub. In constructing the next phase of the RLOE Network we sought to intentionally bridge connections between existing networks and develop shared projects that can impact a broader range of open education leaders. For example, RLOE and the AAC&U plan to co-host a forum in January that focuses on the intersections of e-portfolios and open learning.

**Recommendations for the future of network building and the sustainability of OER:**

- Continue to create more direct, intentional and tighter connections among existing networks and support the growth within and between networks.
- Prioritize and empower underrepresented and marginalized voices within networks to be leaders. Empower a wider diversity of participants to drive open education agendas.
- Strengthen and center human relationships within networks for maximum effectiveness and impact.
- Continue to emphasize, recruit and create partnerships with new funders.
- Highlight and support peer mentoring within networks over hierarchal models.
- Focus network support on consolidations that help organizations reduce redundancy, decrease competition for limited resources, and incentivize innovation.
- Develop and implement assessment strategies to evaluate network effectiveness and efficiency.
- Publish articles that address network functionality and capacity for whole system transformation.
- Create open education professional certifications at the national and global level.