



# **CoSN Thought Partner Handbook**

**2022-2023**

# CoSN Early Career K-12 CTO Academy

## CTO Thought Partner Handbook

Thank you for lending your expertise by serving as a thought partner for CoSN's exciting, new Early Career K-12 CTO Academy.

*\*For simplicity, CTO is the determined title used whereas it may not be the title of the participant participating in the Academy. Other Edtech Leaders are welcome to participate.*

### **What is the Early Career K-12 CTO Academy?**

CoSN's Early Career K-12 CTO Academy is an eight month program that provides early career CTO's and/or EdTech leaders with the support, networking, and practical strategies to succeed. The Academy kicks off with a virtual session to provide participants with key information on the tactical aspects of being a CTO. The online learning continues with deep dive sessions focusing on key topics relevant to the needs of new CTOs. Each participant is paired with an experienced and proven edtech leader as a thought partner/mentor. Participants are able to consult their thought partners throughout the year for timely guidance or suggestions concerning immediate or ongoing issues and on the development of their capstone project. Several of the capstone projects may be selected to be presented at the 2023 CoSN Annual Conference. Throughout the Academy, participants build a professional network of colleagues and critical friends.

### **What constitutes an early career K-12 CTO?**

CoSN defines an early career K-12 CTO as one that has been in the position for four years or less. We accept emerging CTOs or other high level district edTech leaders that have been in the position for four years or less as well.

### **How does CoSN define "thought partner"?**

Thought partners are people with an ongoing relationship. Thought partners share their expertise and knowledge with each other to improve thinking. They offer their opinions and beliefs to ongoing discussions with the intent of helping each other find solutions, think through ideas, and conquer challenges. Thought partners build a trusted relationship with each other and leverage that relationship to maintain a positive environment in the face of disagreement. Thought partners do not seek to criticize each others' ideas or change them but to make them better through shared knowledge and collaboration.

**Who are the thoughts partners and how will they be matched with their academy participant?** The mentoring thought partners are current or recently retired CTOs with exemplary leadership skills and a proven track record of digital transformation. They come from both technical industry and education backgrounds. Each thought partner completes a brief profile detailing their background, experiences, and areas of expertise. Each participant completes a profile detailing their background, experiences, and focus areas for growth. Using these profiles, participants will be paired with partners with whom they have something in common but also with partners who can offer them a new perspective or advice

on missing skills. *\*It is our general practice, if possible, to allow academy participants to select their mentor thought partners.*

### **What is the thought partner's role?**

In agreeing to serve as a thought partner, you have committed to use your time and talents to better your Early Career K-12 CTO. You will help your Early Career K-12 CTO learn the skills they will need to provide leadership and vision in their districts, navigate technical challenges, build and staff a team, draft and implement a technology plan, work with other departments, and ensure that their technology departments are focused on student learning. You are expected to help your Early Career K-12 CTO build on their existing leadership skills, fine tune their communication skills, refine their soft skills, take a deep dive into the importance of culture, and streamline their procedures and processes.

Thought partnering is a confidential and personalized professional relationship. CoSN encourages you to meet your partner's unique needs and foster their professional growth as individuals. CoSN also asks that you engage your partner in planning the details of his or her program and the thought partner experience. Below is a list of responsibilities we ask you to fulfill in your role as a thought partner. We encourage you to use this list as a reference throughout your thought partnering experience:

- Listen, support, and coach
- Share your lessons learned
- Share your expertise and insight
- Inspire your partner to develop vision and leadership skills
- Observe your partner's skill and talent development over time providing professional feedback when needed
- Encourage participants to build relationships with business managers, human resource directors, curriculum directors, and other educational personnel
- Leverage CoSN resources and the CoSN online community when needed
- Attend and actively participate in a minimum of three video conference thought partner meetings throughout the year. The Early Career K-12 CTO Academy Program Facilitator will work with you to schedule and facilitate the introductory meeting.
- Check in with your participant via email monthly to ensure they are actively engaged. Please let Donna Williamson know if you have difficulty connecting.
- Give feedback to Donna Williamson.

A deep, positive, ongoing thought partnership will achieve:

- A professional relationship that will last over time;
- Value for both the thought partner and Early Career K-12 CTO; and
- Beneficial, personalized guidance and expertise on key issues for the Early Career K-12 CTO.

### **How should thought partners and participants communicate?**

You and your partner should establish your own communication style. CoSN anticipates different communication styles consisting of a combination of phone calls, emails, chats, texts,

video conferencing and in-person conversations at the CoSN conference. While CoSN asks you to participate in at least three video conference thought partner meetings, we encourage you to communicate via email monthly or as frequently as needed.

You should build in an opportunity mid-program to reflect on whether the communication style you and your partner have chosen is effective and achieving the desired dialogue. The thought partner has the responsibility for tracking contacts and making changes if the communication does not seem to be effective. If you are having issues with communications, please contact the Program Facilitator or designated CoSN staff.

To establish effective communication with your partner:

- Be available and discuss modes of communications and schedules at the introductory meeting.
- Reach out periodically or share interesting articles pertaining to previous conversations.
- If applicable, arrange a conversation with one of your colleagues that can lend his or her expertise in a particular area of focus.
- Provide strong, honest, positive feedback.
- Be generous with your time, knowledge, and professional learning network.
- Keep track of your communications. This will help you recall your conversations, provide you with a snapshot of your partner's conversations over time, and help CoSN continue to develop the thought partnering aspect of the overall program. A shared Google doc may work to document communication dates, times, and topics.

### **What is the thought partner's role in the capstone project?**

Each participant in the Early Career K-12 CTO Academy is required to complete a capstone project. Each participant will work independently or in a small group (depending on the project) to develop a plan of action to tackle an important educational or operational challenge in his or her district.

During the kick-off meeting, the Program Facilitator introduces the capstone project and provides details on the capstone process and presentations at the following year's CoSN conference. Participants work on the project over the length of the program conducting research, working with school system staff and stakeholders, seeking guidance from their thought partners, and documenting their progress. The final step is to develop a five minute ignite session with slides summarizing the work. Select capstone projects are featured at the CoSN Annual Conference.

Your role is to collaborate with your partner along the way. You can provide insight, serve as a sounding board, and ask questions to provoke him or her to think deeply—or perhaps differently— about their selected capstone project. CoSN asks that as a thought partner, you review your partner's final capstone project prior to the CoSN conference presentation.

## **What do you need to do to get started?**

- You need to complete the application form so you can be matched with a program participant. The program team will discuss the selections with you before making any formal announcements or introductions.
- You will need to participate in a kickoff conference call to answer any questions prior to the beginning of the partner relationship. Times will be established with advance notice and a survey will be taken to set convenient times.
- You will need to attend the 2023 CoSN conference and a program conclusion meeting. *Registration will be complimentary for all thought partners that complete the requirements.*

## **Contact Information and Feedback**

Please email the program team below if you need assistance or would like to share feedback:

- Donna Williamson, Program Facilitator - [donna.davis.williamson@gmail.com](mailto:donna.davis.williamson@gmail.com) or [dwilliamson@cosn.org](mailto:dwilliamson@cosn.org)
- Jill Brown, Senior Manager of Professional Advancement - [jbrown@cosn.org](mailto:jbrown@cosn.org)