Every year at the ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo, thousands of foreign language professionals gather in one place to connect with one another and share ideas about teaching methods and best practices, directions for research, plans for advocacy, new technologies, and everything else under the sun related to language teaching.

Then, everyone goes home... until the next year.

What if there were a way to prolong the great conversations and relationships that begin at the ACTFL Convention and to bring them back into your home and office so they can continue to develop all year long?

Finally, there is the way to do just that!

Introducing the new ACTFL Online Community—a social network devoted solely to members of the language education profession. In this virtual gathering place, participants will be able to continue those great conversations online that are such an important part of seeing one another face-to-face at conferences and meetings. The site will also provide a place for educators to share information and resources with a large number of their colleagues, in some ways in an easier format than in a face-to-face meeting. Then, when returning to the next gathering, such as the 2010 ACTFL Convention in Boston, these members will already be that much further into developing these valuable professional relationships.

There is no cost to take part. The Online Community is a benefit of ACTFL membership. We believe those who get involved will soon find it to be an invaluable resource and that they’ll wonder what they did before having this network of colleagues at their fingertips.

“It is exciting for us to be moving into the next phase of communication,” says ACTFL Director of Membership Juliet Mason. “Once ACTFL members discover that they can meet and share knowledge and information with one another without having to be together physically, we think they’ll be excited about this, too.”

Making Connections,

Are you part of the ACTFL Online Community yet? Don’t miss this amazing opportunity to connect with your colleagues!

Already Using Other Social Networks? Give This a Try

Many of the ACTFL members who are using the ACTFL Online Community are also on other social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. It’s not an either-or situation where one must choose one place to get involved. In fact, in today’s increasingly interconnected world, most people will opt for having numerous ways to come together online.

There is a key difference with the ACTFL Online Community, however, in that it is a very targeted group of colleagues gathered in a single place that have the most to offer one another professionally. While some more general sites are great for social (and occasionally professional) connections, the ACTFL Online Community truly has the potential to be the top professional social network for language educators.

“I have used all three (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter),” says Ann Tollefson, an ACTFL past president. “As a very busy person, I find that they can be intrusive... With the ACTFL Online Community I can be pretty sure that the person with whom I am corresponding is a colleague with whom I have common interests. I like having that filter.”

“Social networking has become an extension of ‘sitting around the campfire’ and discussing life events,” says Marcela Summerville, representative to the National Network of Early Language Learning (NNELL) from Pennsylvania. “To me, the ACTFL Online Community is a feature that...”
allows ACTFL Internet users to connect, discuss, and network with each other within the context of a common interest or topic. I hope this community will bring together all language educators at all levels, not only to share news, but to get to know professionals who can help out with specific issues."

2009 ACTFL President Janine Erickson, who was a part of a small group who tried out the community in its early stages, notes that it "is aimed at a strong network of language professionals who have a unique focus on the educational value of the content sharing. It enables members to share resources that enhance the teaching and learning of world languages."

Toni Theisen, ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year for 2009, says that she uses Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter and that what she gains from all these social media sites is "an opportunity to collaborate, discuss, debate, and learn." She believes that the ACTFL Online Community has the same potential. "What I like about this community is that we are all language teachers," she says.

**Getting Started is a Snap**

The first thing you need to do is to get to the Internet and check out the Online Community for yourself! Go to community.actfl.org (or simply click the link at the top of the ACTFL website) As an ACTFL member, you are already a part of the community, so there’s no need to “join” anything. Simply log in with your ACTFL User ID and start exploring.

Once you are on, you’ll want to create your personal **Profile**. You can add a photo, a bio, and some pertinent details about your education, job history, languages, skills and expertise, assignment, and level. This information may put you automatically in some **Networks** on the site, such as groups of educators in your city, state, or those who teach the same language. You can also create a new **Community** based on a specific idea or interest if you like. One important thing to note is that members have complete control over their own private information—what others can see about them and how they would like to be contacted.

Next, you’ll want to seek out some colleagues to invite as **Contacts**. You can search for other members’ names who you already know, or you can look through blogs and other conversations on the site to see who is talking and invite them to become one of your contacts as well. Another idea once you have a few contacts is to click their profiles to view their contacts to invite them as well and continue to expand your network. You can also send private e-mail messages through the site and receive them in your own private **Inbox**.

Do you have something to say? Share your thoughts with your own **Blog** entry. Interested in what your colleagues are thinking? Click on the **Blogs** link to find what others have posted.
Bear in mind that the community will only be as strong as your involvement and participation! This is not ACTFL presenting information to its members—it’s each and every one of YOU, sharing, creating, and adding to the ongoing professional conversation.

**2009 Convention Handouts Online**

One of the most useful parts of the site is the Resource Libraries section, and in particular the 2009 Convention Library which now features uploaded handouts from the 2009 ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo in San Diego.

“I particularly find the Library Documents to be the most helpful post-convention resource,” notes Erickson. “After its introduction at the Opening General Session, more than 75 handouts had already been uploaded on the site and available to all members . . . Throughout the convention, many members asked me if we would be posting either the social networking video from the Opening General Session or other speaker handouts.” These resources and more can be found in this section of the ACTFL Online Community; as of mid-December, approximately 100 documents had been uploaded.

“I think this is a great and convenient feature of the ACTFL website,” says Summerville. “It is easy for the workshop presenters, as well as the attendees. No worries on not getting enough hand-outs or not getting yours at the session.”

“We benefit when we share,” says Theisen. “The education community has, for the most part, this mantra of sharing: that we are all better teachers when we also learn from each other. It is a good thing to model for our students.”

Tollefson agrees. “The capacity of the ACTFL Online Community to upload and share documents of mutual interest is especially exciting. For example, a large school district in the south recently developed a checklist with rubrics for use by teachers who wish to self assess their professional competency and establish goals for self improvement. The Online Community is a logical forum in which that district and others with materials of general interest to the professional can share them widely.”

**Make It a New Year’s Resolution to Get Started**

Don’t put it off! Now is the time to get connected and become an integral part of the community.

“The ACTFL Online Community keeps you in touch with other teaching professionals to share articles, materials, ideas, teaching stories, making connections for research, jobs, consultation,” says Summerville. “It’s a good space to keep abreast of new ideas.”

“I would like to see the number of users rise even more at the start of the new year,” says Erickson. “I think the Resources will grow as more and more documents, PowerPoints, images, and videos are uploaded and available to members. I think the blog discussions and networking on the latest topics in world language education are most valuable to our members.”

Theisen advises her colleagues: “Don’t be afraid to try it. It is a safe environment. Just think in three years how many of us would have shared and met. Wow, will we be powerful! The 21st century speaks of communication, collaboration, and creativity. It can all happen here. Let’s go for it!”

Adds Erickson, “I personally hope to use the site as one of the many ‘powerful voices’ of ACTFL . . . speaking up for languages.”

In addition to the ACTFL Online Community—which we hope will become the primary social networking site for language educators to come together in one place to share, connect, and organize—ACTFL also has a presence on several other social networking sites. We suggest you look into any and all of these ways to get connected with ACTFL:

- **Facebook**: If you are already a Facebook member, we encourage you to join the groups for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and Discover Languages . . . Discover the World. If you are not yet a Facebook member, you can go to www.facebook.com to sign up for a free membership. Use key words to search for these groups once you are logged in; be sure to look for our official logos to ensure these are the correct groups.

- **LinkedIn**: On LinkedIn, we have two discussion groups. Consider joining these: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and Discover Languages . . . Discover the World. You can join LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com.

- **Twitter**: ACTFL has a Twitter account under the name “actfl” and The Language Educator has an account under “TheLangEducator.” Simply log in and start to follow these accounts to get our latest tweets. If you haven’t yet signed up for Twitter, you can do so at www.twitter.com.