



THE COMMUNITY  
**ROUNDTABLE**

# 2016 The State of **Community Management**

*Quantifying the Value of Community*

With support from:



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This publication analyzes and summarizes the results from The State of Community Management 2016 survey received through March 2016. Community professionals can still take the survey and receive their scores to compare with the research sample at <http://the.cr/socm2016survey>.

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At The Community Roundtable, we collaborate with clients to identify proven, practical strategies for better communities. We believe communities accelerate an organization's potential by connecting employees and customers in meaningful ways. Clients rely on our models, practical research, and peer networks to take their communities to the next level.

TheCR has developed models and associated research platforms that inform programming in TheCR Network, our training offerings and our advisory services. These models include:

- The Community Maturity Model
- The Community Skills Framework
- The Social Executive Framework
- The Work Out Loud Framework

Over 200 organizations have relied on The Community Roundtable's services, including Adobe, Aetna, Autodesk, BASF, CA Technologies, H&R Block, Microsoft, NHRI, SAP, The World Bank, and Verizon.

Learn more about The Community Roundtable and TheCR Network at [communityroundtable.com](http://communityroundtable.com).

### ***Our launch partner:***



Higher Logic is an industry leader in cloud-based community platforms. Organizations worldwide use Higher Logic to bring like-minded people all together, by giving their community a home where they can meet, share ideas, answer questions and stay connected.

Higher Logic aims to empower engagement, collaboration and community evolution, which we believe are the fundamental elements to the long-term relevance of any organization. By fostering community growth, you can open up a world of possibility. Tap into the power your community can generate for you. [www.higherlogic.com](http://www.higherlogic.com).

# Welcome to The State of Community Management 2016

Welcome to the seventh edition of this groundbreaking research – thanks to you, it is the most widely read and cited research about community management.

In the seven years since we started this research, we have been able to document and structure what is known about community management in ways that make it easy to understand, easy to share and easy to use. It's been a collaborative effort among TheCR team, our members and our broader community – because of that, we have been able to generate amazing value beyond what any of us could have on our own – a true win-win-win business model!

In particular, we would like to thank the members of TheCR Network who participated in this year's State of Community Management Working Group. They have helped us to prioritize the metrics that mattered most, refine how we ask for data and identify the data with the greatest practical value for community professionals. They include: Heather Ausmus (Ciena), Alex Blanton (Microsoft), Jim Buck (independent), Eileen Foran (Limelight Networks), Jennifer Honig (Techstra), Ted Hopton (McGraw-Hill Education), Jeff Ross (Humana), Susan Strom (Knowledge Architecture), and Lou Woodley (AAAS). The working group was instrumental in supporting us, asking questions, challenging us and providing feedback about what didn't work. More than anything they helped us understand the leading practices and topics that we needed to explore and document – and share with you.

As this research matures, each year we are able to peel back more layers of the onion – and reveal more specifics about a practice or better define data in areas that were once hard to even articulate. For example, the culture competency in the Community Maturity Model has always been a challenge to tackle, and this year we were surprised by how much better our members were at articulating the cultural artifacts that indicated to them that a community was succeeding. It tells us that the discipline of community management and the skills in the market are maturing, and we are happy we can reflect that in the research.

Finally, we want to thank Ted McEnroe, who has led the research effort for the last two years – his stewardship has improved the report in innumerable ways.

Dig in and enjoy – and please share what you learn, using the hashtag #socm2016!



*Rachel Happe*



*Jim Storer*

# The Community Maturity Model

The State of Community Management research uses the The Community Roundtable's Community Maturity Model (CMM) as a framework for defining and evaluating the performance of communities and community management. The CMM defines the eight competencies our work has shown are required to build successful communities, and articulates how these competencies progress from hierarchical organizations to those that have embraced a networked approach to their business.

*The eight competencies in the model are the building blocks of a productive community.*

	Start	Build	Grow	
	Stage 1 Hierarchy	Stage 2 Emergent Community	Stage 3 Community	Stage 4 Networked
Strategy	Familiarize & Listen	Participate	Build	Integrate
Leadership	Command & Control	Consensus	Collaborative	Distributed
Culture	Reactive	Contributive	Emergent	Activist
Community Management	None	Informal	Defined roles & processes	Integrated roles & processes
Content & Programming	Formal & Structured	Some user generated content	Community created content	Integrated formal & user generated
Policies & Governance	No Guidelines for UGC	Restrictive social media policies	Flexible social media policies	Inclusive
Tools	Consumer tools used by individuals	Consumer & self-service tools	Mix of consumer & enterprise tools	'Social' functionality is integrated
Metrics & Measurement	Anecdotal	Basic Activities	Activities & Content	Behaviors & Outcomes

**The four maturity stages track how communities evolve.**

## THE COMMUNITY MATURITY MODEL IN PRACTICE:

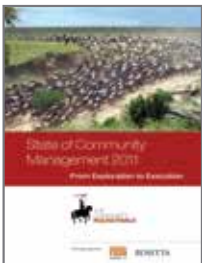
While our research is presented annually, each edition has its own focus from which community professionals can gather insights and ideas for using the CMM to improve their community practice. You can access past reports at <http://www.communityroundtable.com/SOCM>.

## EXPLORE THE MODEL:

Ideas for exploring the model can be found throughout our research. The 2011 State of Community Management Report, for example, covers the practices of each competency. The 2012 report defines how an organization moves through the stages of maturity. More recent reports measure and highlight the common elements of successful communities.



2011



2012



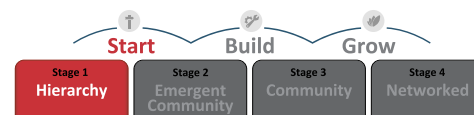
**TheCR Network**, our community for community leaders, provides training, weekly programming, resources, connections and personal support that helps members succeed. TheCR Network members also play a key role in defining and shaping this research.



The Community Maturity Model competencies serve as the underpinning for the on-demand training in **TheCR Academy**. Our Community Manager Fundamentals courses provide critical skills for managing community, and Community Program Essentials gives program leaders valuable skills for integrating community into organizations.

# Understanding Patterns in Community Maturity

The [Community Maturity Model](#) helps community professionals assess the maturity of a community in the eight competencies and helps illustrate indicators of progress. A look at how communities grow through the CMM:



## STAGE 1: HIERARCHY

In Stage 1, organizations generally use social technology or community structures in an ad hoc manner. A community strategy is not yet completed, and resources have not been allocated to community management. Participation guidelines and content management processes (if any) are informal.

### INITIATIVES/INPUTS

#### FOR STAGE 1 COMMUNITIES:

- Finding an internal “owner”
- Recruiting one or more executive sponsors
- Building alignment on strategy and approach
- Identifying cross-functional champions
- Educating control functions – legal, IT, risk, compliance, HR – on social technologies and dynamics
- Starting a listening program

### OUTPUTS:

- A community strategy
- A community management audit or gap analysis
- An operational framework and an initial roadmap



## STAGE 2: EMERGENT COMMUNITY

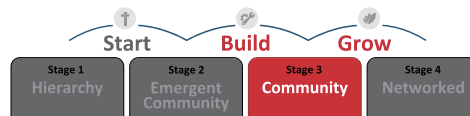
In Stage 2, organizations focus on creating structures to support their community strategy. They’re dedicating resources to formalizing policies and processes. Communities in this stage have a strategy and staff in place and are creating structures for advocates, community content and programming, and reporting. Expectations for behavior and value are clear.

### INITIATIVES/INPUTS:

- Revising the operational framework and roadmap
- Developing a comprehensive budget
- Formalizing an enterprise-wide governance structure
- Deploying social software
- Developing community management expertise and tools
- Creating metrics scorecards for various reporting levels
- Documenting response and escalation processes
- Defining and executing on community staff training needs

### OUTPUTS:

- A detailed operational roadmap
- A governance structure that defines how community management will be executed and supported
- A documented approach to tools and processes



## STAGE 3: COMMUNITY

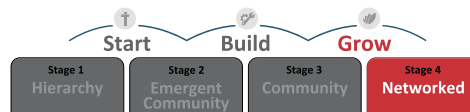
In Stage 3, the community program is well-established and generating value. Communities in this stage have dedicated resources to carry out the community strategy and can match metrics to progress. Advocates and other members actively collaborate, and community staff focus on integrating the community into core organizational functions.

### INITIATIVES/INPUTS:

- Building a community leadership program and governance structure
- Developing enterprise wide training
- Creating a community playbook
- Evolving social and community analytics from tracking activity to behaviors and influence
- Continuing to build internal champions across different organizational functions

### OUTPUTS:

- Sustainable, documented community value
- Integration with affiliated corporate processes
- Distributed, adaptive leadership across the ecosystem



## STAGE 4: NETWORKED

By Stage 4, organizations have undergone major philosophical, cultural and structural changes – or they have been a networked organization from the start. The community is central to the business, and business processes and models rely on a shared value approach. All management looks like community management, and although hierarchy and transactional processes do not go away, they are informed by and operate in an environment of shared value and networked communications.

### INITIATIVES/INPUTS:

- Redesigning information architectures to support an integrated customer experience and/or employee experience
- Ensuring regular feedback and performance indicators align with an integrated customer and employee experience
- Redesigning the human resource function to hire, support, & develop employees based on alignment of values, interests and potential
- Changing how employees are rewarded and advanced, including the removal of many traditional hierarchical structures
- Changing the relationship of the organization to its market and providing value to the market above and beyond products and services.

### OUTPUTS:

- Infrastructure that supports an integrated customer and employee experience
- Reorganization to support a networked approach
- Investment in and support of cultural and leadership change
- Evolution of core business models to incorporate shared value approaches that generate more value for every constituent/stakeholder group than they contribute

# The State of Community in 2016



It's an exciting time to be in the community field. In the past couple of years, communities have gained the executive spotlight. It's currently shining pretty brightly.

But the spotlight brings its own challenges and pressures. There are more vendors, a wider range of understanding and expectations, and more pressure to produce and articulate value. That is at best stressful and distracting, and at worst it can undermine existing efforts to cover the basics.

In short - you may need shades.

It's time to prove we deserve that attention and can deliver on the promise of a community approach. We have to tell the stories of our community value and articulate the resources we need to get there.

We are at an inflection point, and it's a challenging time to be a community program owner. As with any inflection point, chaos comes before consolidation around the new normal.

The good news? Executives are excited about the potential of communities and community management skills are in demand.

The bad news? All the attention and expectations can distract us from the things that have made us successful so far, and at the same time, we need to learn new lessons in scaling. Budgets are growing, but they are not keeping pace with the demand for our time, which is our scarcest resource.

Why is this all happening now?

- Community leaders have done a great job communicating the potential of communities and demonstrating they can deliver high engagement rates.

- Social media value is crumbling as social networks turn into social ad platforms. While they do deliver value, they have not fulfilled their potential for deep engagement.
- Organizations need to adapt to the pace of change and innovation is a strategic priority. Communities are the most effective way to deliver agile learning and change.

It's rocky out there because a lot of people are feeling unsettled and there is no clear, correct path to changing our organizations. In the current environment, it's easy to question or second guess ourselves, but one thing I feel strongly about is this: a community approach can help navigate these issues in a way that brings along customers, prospects and employees. It is the best way, and maybe the only way, to keep our organizations in sync with themselves and with their markets.

As community professionals, we need to keep our focus on the fundamentals and continue to reinforce value and success:

1. Don't lose sight of the basics.
2. Continue the dialog with those that can benefit from your community.
3. Develop an ROI model: define the specific business value that is generated from the community.

This report is a great opportunity to sit back and take perspective on what you are doing, where your organization is headed and how you can deliver on the promise of community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rachel Happe, Principal



# Methodology and Demographics

The data published in this report was collected from 339 community programs over 8 weeks in January, February and March 2016. Participating communities represented internal and external use cases and a wide range of industries, and they ranged in age from pre-launch to a handful that were more than 20 years old.

As with all our recent reports, members of TheCR Network helped shape the research survey and approach. Each year, a working group of members helps us define the research scope, identifies opportunities to dig more deeply, provides feedback on the research instrument and then helps us prioritize the data that are most valuable to practitioners. This has allowed us to continually improve the scope and depth of the research.

## CAVEATS OF THIS RESEARCH:

Because the report population was drawn largely from communities with some connection to The Community Roundtable, they may represent a more mature set than a purely random sampling.

While individual data points may be compared year-over-year, it's important to remember that the sample of communities changes substantially each year, and in addition, the methodology used to score communities on the Community Maturity Model may have changed, making scoring comparisons unwise. (We hope to look at how scores of communities that took the survey in 2014-2016 changed over time in an upcoming publication.)

Because of the complexity of the discipline and the scale of this research, we cannot report on causation between two metrics. We also believe there is no one 'right' mechanism for succeeding in building a community, but rather a toolbox of techniques that, combined, result in community value. We report many correlations in this report that we find interesting – and will point you toward techniques that we believe are worth exploring, but they are not magic bullets and may be the result of many factors.

Additionally, because this research looks at a wide cross-section of communities, we collect common markers of community management maturity. That means that not every marker will align perfectly with your community, its context and its objectives. Use your judgment to interpret the data for your own context, and use the opportunity to have conversations and educate your stakeholders about applying this research.

### *Throughout this report we report data using two types of comparison groups within segments:*

- Communities on Stage 1, 2 and 3/4 of the Community Maturity Model. (The survey population does not include enough Stage 4 communities to report them separately.)
- Average and best-in-class (BIC) communities. Each year, the BIC segment is comprised of approximately the 20% most mature (highest scoring) communities overall in the survey set. When we talk about 'best-in-class' within a specific metric, we are not referring to the 20% highest-scoring on that element, but rather the Top 20% overall.

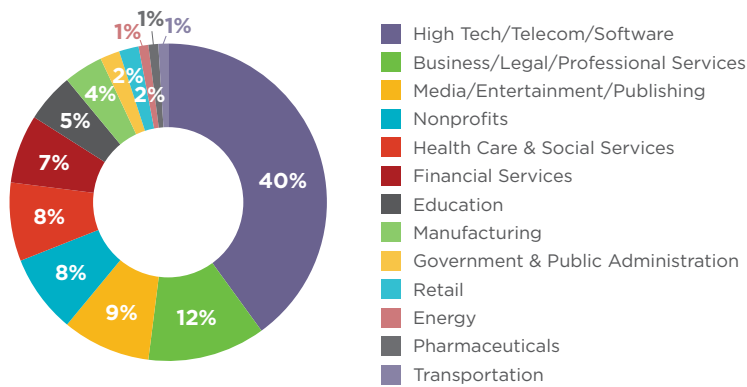
We report on these comparison populations to help you better compare your own program to the survey data and to help you see how communities progress and how the best in the business perform.

Lastly, as this is an emerging discipline, we do find a wide range of responses to many metrics that are not necessarily obvious in aggregate data points. For this reason, this research should not be used to demonstrate "right" or "wrong" approaches, but as a contextualized input to your community management decision-making process.

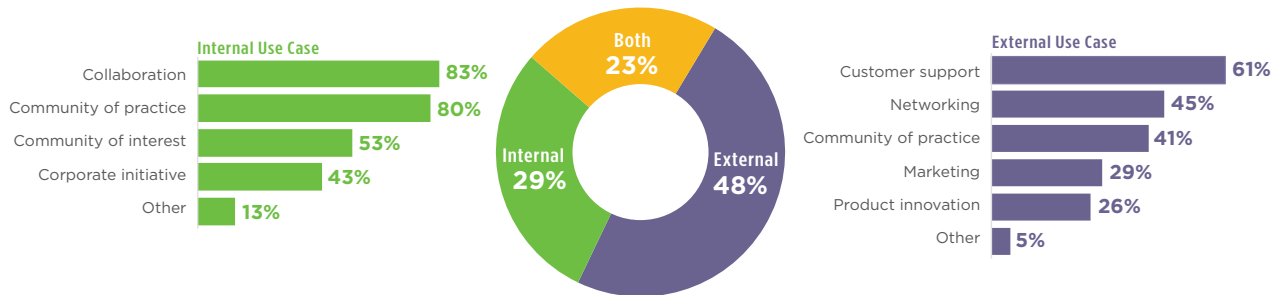
# Research Demographics

Who are the 339 communities who completed the survey? While individual survey data is confidential, Communities surveyed for the State of Community Management 2016 research represent a variety of industries and use cases, ages and sizes.

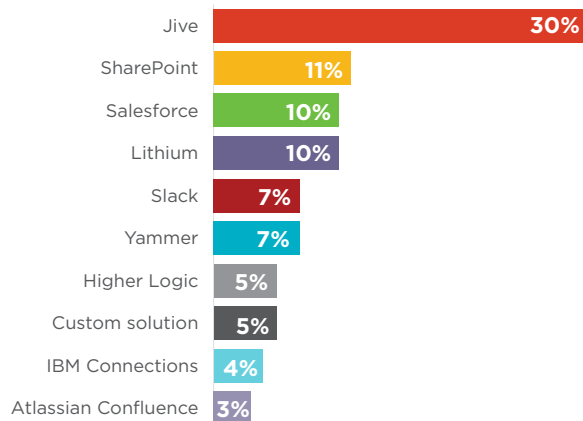
## SOCM RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY:



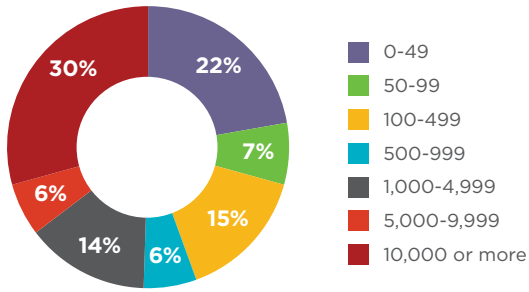
## SOCM RESPONDENTS BY USE CASE:



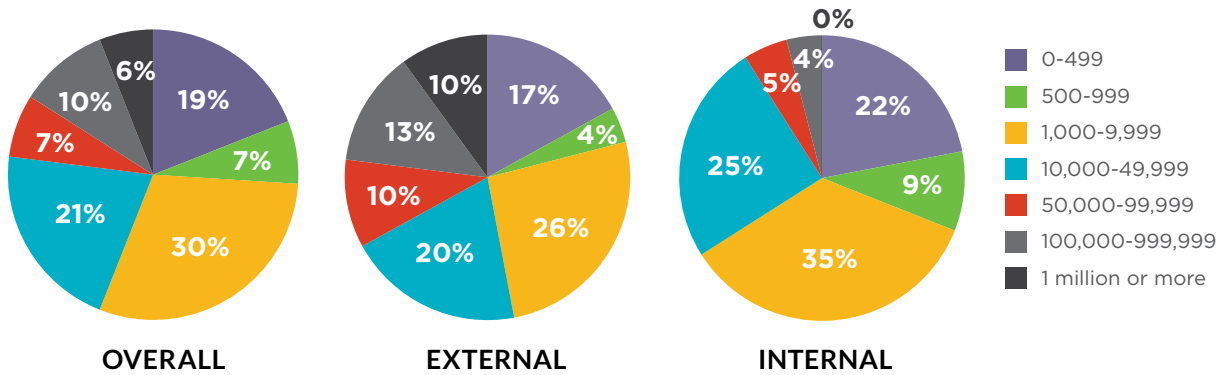
## TOP 10 COMMUNITY VENDORS (SOCM RESPONDENTS):



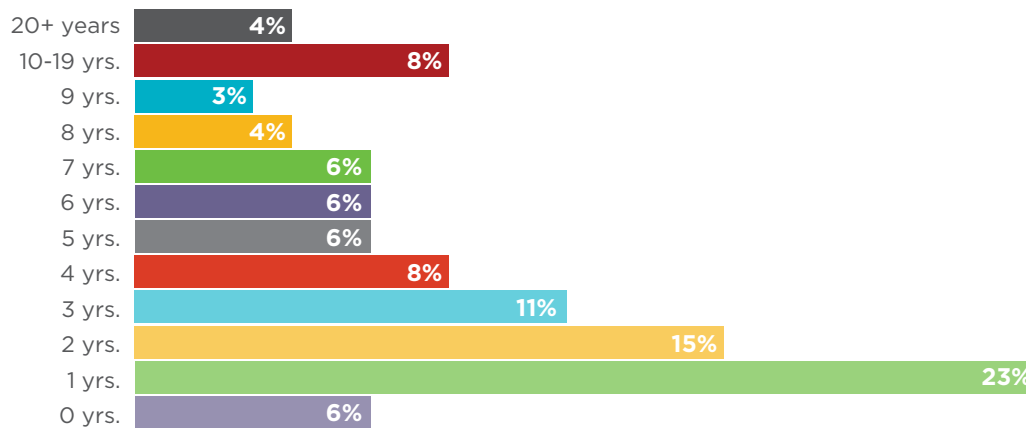
**SOCM RESPONDENTS BY ORGANIZATION SIZE:**



**SOCM RESPONDENTS BY COMMUNITY SIZE:**



**SOCM RESPONDENTS BY COMMUNITY AGE:**



# Key Findings

Starting with The State of Community Management 2015, we focused our key findings on the three elements of community management that drive success – strategy, operations and tactics. We know communities that don’t think about all three of these dimensions find their growth and success limited in the long run. Communities that develop and do many of the right things from a strategic standpoint can be held back by suboptimal operational or tactical approaches. Similarly, communities with well-thought out operational and/or tactical approaches to community are limited if they lack the strategic vision to incorporate shared value models and roadmaps for future planning. For 2016, our Key Findings are:

## STRATEGY: DEFINING SHARED VALUE DRIVES SUCCESS.

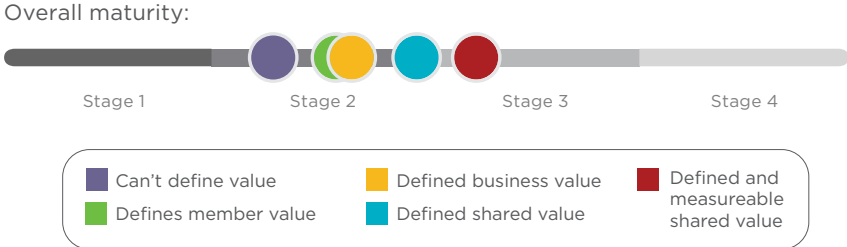
***If you can't define what makes your community valuable, it's unlikely your members and stakeholders can.***

Every year, [The State of Community Management](#) data highlights the importance of developing your community strategy as a necessary part of the community journey - and today, more than 90% of our best-in-class communities have an approved community strategy.

But the research also shows that defining the value of the community for the organization and the community members is a critical component of creating successful, engaged communities.

About 60% of communities in this year's survey say they can define the value of their community for their organization, and a slightly larger percentage say they can define the value for members.

But just 40% of those surveyed say they had defined the *shared* value for the organization and members, and an even smaller number also said they could measure that shared value.



## OVERALL MATURITY BY ABILITY TO DEFINE SHARED VALUE:

Across the board, the correlation is clear – the better you can define the value of community, the stronger your community performs overall. It’s one of those data points that makes perfect sense. Understanding the value of your community to your organization and community members gives you a focus for your strategy – but understanding (and being able to articulate and measure) the shared value of the community to those groups sharpens that focus – and allows you to create a community where the organization and members can work together toward shared interests and goals.

*That's capturing the power of community.*

## The research suggests organizations should:

1. **Focus attention on what members and the organization together can get out of the community, and ensure those value statements are woven into your strategy, operations and tactics.**

Virtually every best-in-class community says it has documented the value of the community for the organization and for members – and that’s no coincidence. Communities that understand their value are more likely to have dedicated budgets, approved strategies, and resourced roadmaps. They have more executive activity and better engagement profiles. And not surprisingly, communities that define their value are far more likely to be able to measure the value of the community for the organization.

2. **Broaden the circle of stakeholders who help shape a concise value statement.**

Not only does a concise statement put the shared value and purpose of the community in sharper focus – but including a broader range of stakeholders in coming up with that value statement can be a powerful way to give the broader organization an understanding of

the power and impact of the community. The data show that organizations that have defined their value statements are more likely to have senior executives’ support and engagement than those who haven’t.

3. **Align what you define as shared value for the community with how you measure the value of the community.**

As noted above, communities that can define shared value and measure the value of community score even higher than those defining shared value alone. But a remarkable percentage of those who concisely defined the shared value of their community in the survey then measured the value of the community using different metrics. This is a missed opportunity. By aligning the definition of value with measurement, you avoid confusing stakeholders, and you ensure that the behavior change you are trying to instill aligns with your operations and tactics.

## OPERATIONS: EMPOWERING MEMBERS ACCELERATES ENGAGEMENT.

**Giving members a seat at the table inspires them to join the conversation.**

Last year, we highlighted the operational need for communities to invest in advocacy programs for their best members, giving them real rewards for their very real contributions to the community. But your advocates are just one part of your community membership, and unless you create systems to support members at all levels, you risk neglecting groups of users - or burning yourself out.

This year’s research finds a consistent and powerful correlation between systems that give members real opportunity, responsibility and a voice in the community decisions and member engagement.

### ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND MEMBER EMPOWERMENT:

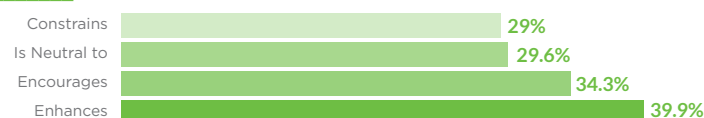
#### MEMBER FEEDBACK SYSTEMS



#### MEMBER-LED PROGRAMS



#### CULTURE \_\_\_\_\_ COMMUNITY APPROACHES



## *The research suggests organizations should:*

### **1. *Develop formal systems for members to provide feedback about your community.***

Community managers may feel like they have their fingers on the pulse of the community, but do members feel heard and is your sense supported by the data? Our research found that less than 30% of communities had formal systems for member feedback, but those that did had higher engagement rates and stronger overall community maturity. Interestingly, communities with informal systems didn't show much improvement on overall maturity - but did get substantially improved engagement.

### **2. *Tap members to help shape strategy and lead community programs.***

Best-in-class communities were far more likely than the average to include members in developing and revising community strategy, and nearly three times as likely to give community members a defined role in the process.

Communities that tapped into the expertise of their members to lead programs, too, scored much higher levels of community maturity than

their peers. Sharing the leadership of the community in this way is a great way to improve member support, and scale yourself as a community grows and matures.

### **3. *Invest in improving the organizational support of community approaches.***

The history of community management is filled with stories of communities that were vibrant but isolated from the surrounding organization - and failed over time. This year, we asked survey respondents whether their organization was supportive of community efforts, and not surprisingly, those who said yes had greater engagement, executive involvement and overall community maturity.

What was surprising was this - having an organizational culture that was neutral about community was equivalent to having one that was constraining or toxic to community. That suggests that hoping stakeholders "stay out of the way so I can do my job" may be expedient in the short run, but can be harmful to the community in the longer-term.

## **TACTICS: MEASURE WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE, NOT WHAT YOU HAVE.**

### ***Data drives decision-making - make sure your data connects with your goals.***

Metrics and measurement are among the most talked about elements of community management, but often the least understood. Best-in-class communities demonstrate that what you measure can have as big an impact on community success as the numbers themselves.

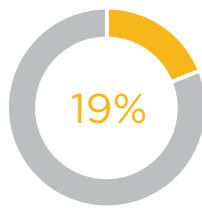
Best-in-class communities more often focus on areas beyond activity that get at the heart of the behavior change they are driving. Half of best-in-class communities regularly track activity, behavior change and outcomes, compared with just 19% of the overall sample.

And while tracking members and posts is nearly universal, best-in-class communities are more likely to focus on additional elements that get at the heart of community success, like new member activity and answered questions.

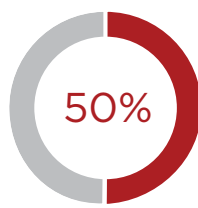
Being able to identify the right metrics is a key step to measuring value - something best-in-class communities say they can do twice as often as their peers (71% to 32%).

## MEASURING BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND VALUE:

Measure Activity, Behavior Change and Outcomes:

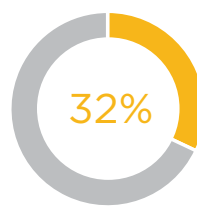


Overall

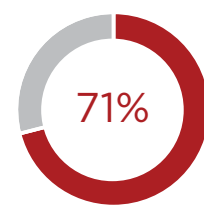


Best-in-Class

Can Measure Value:



Overall



Best-in-Class

### *The research suggests organizations should:*

- 1. Review metrics through the lens of your community strategy and goals.**

What are you trying to achieve in your community? Do the metrics that you track actually connect with those goals? You can't measure water temperature with a yardstick no matter how hard you try, so make sure you are aligning your goals and metrics – and don't be shy about changing what you measure as your goals evolve.

- 2. Challenge your platform vendors' (and your own) thinking about metrics.**

One of the items we get criticized for in The State of Community Management survey is that we sometimes ask for data that is not readily available. We plead guilty. But there is no point in simply collecting what's available if you want to change the conversation about what's valuable. If you can't figure out how to collect the kinds of information that you need within your community platform, it's a perfect time to push the vendor, join a user group, or otherwise find ways to gather the information you need to make good management decisions. We would rather have data that is a little squishier but more relevant than data that is dead-on accurate and useless.

- 3. Use frameworks to provide inspiration – and use them to measure and manage.**

Start with the behaviors that you want to encourage – then use them as a starting point for finding appropriate frameworks and metrics. For example, The Community Roundtable recently released our Work Out Loud framework, which provides a simple lens through which to understand, track and encourage collaboration by "working out loud" in a community. The metrics aren't necessarily the most common community metrics – but they are ones that will help community managers focus on building value. There's more data out there than ever – the challenge is identifying the right data for your behavior change, and the right way to track it.

And we can't say it enough: tie what you measure to determine the value of community back to the organization, member and shared value statements you have created. If you define your community value as  $x$  and measure that value as  $y$ , then you're undermining your own efforts to change behavior in your community.

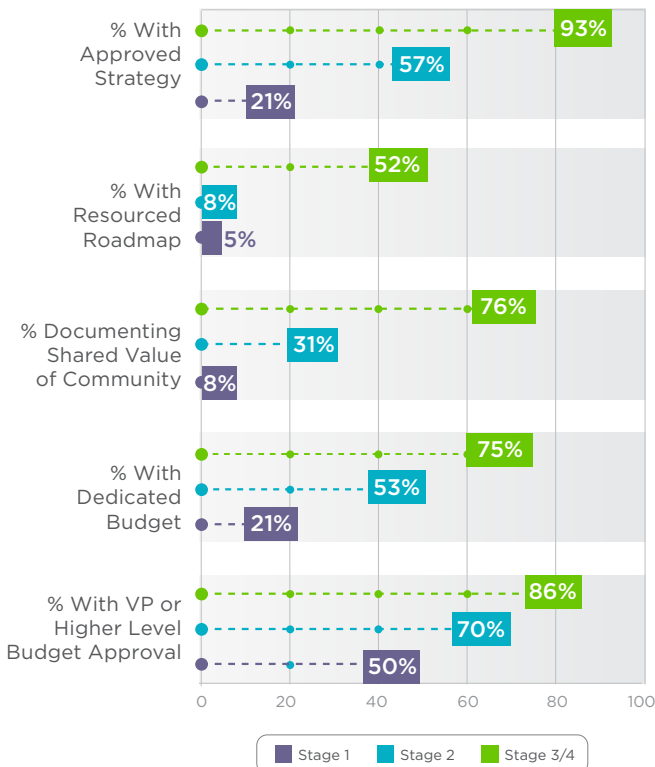
# Strategy

## Best-in-class communities define value and commit resources to implement strategy

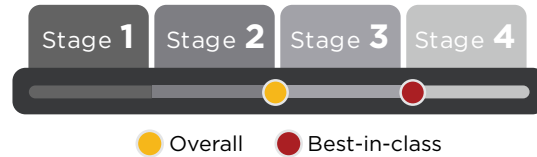
A solid, supported strategy is the foundation for a successful community, as demonstrated once again this year by the State of Community Management survey data. Again this year, the vast majority of best-in-class communities have an approved community strategy. Just 21% of Stage 1 communities had an approved strategy in place – versus more than 90% of Stage 3 and 4 communities.

New this year, we asked survey participants directly whether they could articulate shared value – not just the value of the community to the organization and the member. Shared value is the place where community value intersects for the two groups. Those that said they could define that shared value scored much higher overall than their peers – and our best-in-class communities were more than twice as likely to be able to express the shared value.

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: STRATEGY



### MATURITY SCORE:



Strategy is most powerful when it is coupled with resources to execute – but there’s no guarantee of those resources, even among our best communities. Just 5% of Stage 1 communities have a resourced [roadmap](#) for implementing their community strategy and a bare majority of Stage 3/4 communities do. We see this as a critical opportunity – organizations need to define their goals and the route they want to take to implement them – and then make the investments to get there. The Thomas Edison quote “Vision without execution is hallucination” seems apt and effectively communicates the risk of not having a resourced roadmap.

### The research suggests community professionals should:

- Focus on community strategy early to efficiently guide the long-term community success.
- Document the value of community to the organization and members.
- Develop a clear, concise statement of the shared value of the community.
- Secure a dedicated budget to resource the operational roadmap so you can execute on the vision for the community.

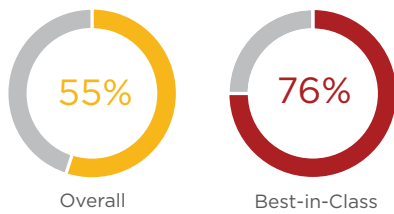
### Test Your Data Sense:

Are older communities better or worse off when it comes to strategy and roadmap development?

Turn to page 48 for the answer.



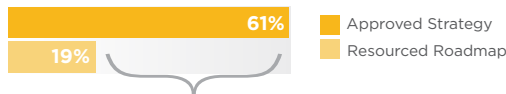
## PERCENTAGE WITH DEDICATED BUDGET:



*Best-in-class communities were substantially more likely to have a dedicated budget, giving community program owners clearer control over spending and strategy.*

## STRATEGIES AND ROADMAPS:

Overall



69% of communities with approved strategies lack a resourced roadmap

Best-in-Class

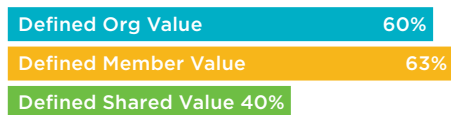


36% of BIC communities with approved strategies lack a resourced roadmap

*Organizations are seeing the value of a clear community strategy, but a gap remains between strategy and the resourced roadmap to implement it. More than half of communities with an approved strategy haven't put the resources behind it to succeed.*

## MEASURING VALUE (ORGANIZATION/MEMBERS/SHARED):

Overall

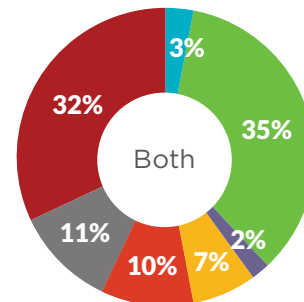
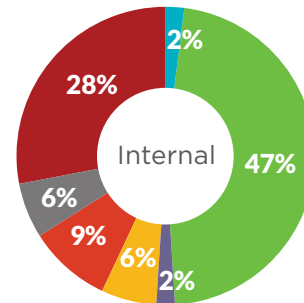
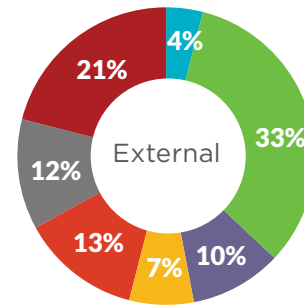


Best-in-Class



*One of the best ways to define the direction of community is by defining the value of it for the organization and members. A best practice is to go one step further: Find the place where the two sides share value – and start there to build stronger connections. Best-in-class communities are more than twice as likely to do this.*

## HOW COMMUNITIES SPEND THEIR BUDGET:



- Community Management Resources
- Online Content & Programs
- In-person Events
- External Consulting & Research
- Outsourced Moderation & Management
- Platform & Technology
- Other

*Internal communities typically focus more of their dollars on platform, technology and community management resources, while external communities must channel some investment toward events, content development and other needs.*

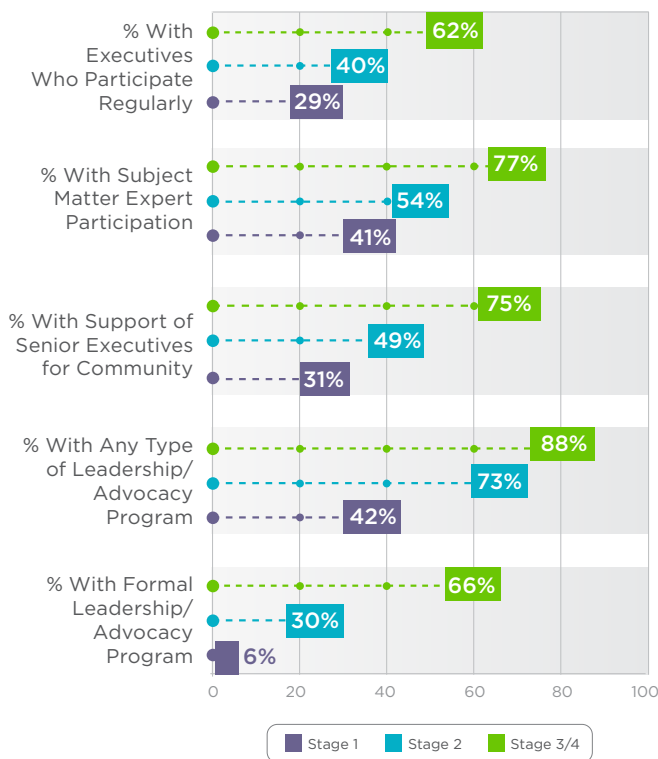
# Leadership

## Best-in-class communities engage members and treat subject matter experts as leaders

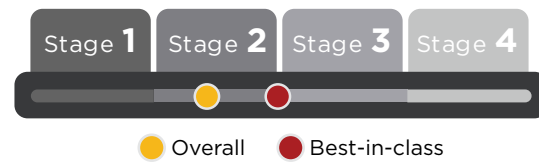
When we think of leadership, we view it in two categories – formal leaders are those at the top of the organizational chart. Informal leaders are those who hold power and influence in the community – advocates and community leaders. In many organizations, they are two very different groups.

Among formal leaders, the data suggests that while getting engagement from the C-suite is a benefit for overall engagement, moving up the community maturity ladder may depend more on getting participation from vice presidents, directors and subject matter experts, especially when one looks at the challenges community professionals can face in getting some individual leaders to engage. (Our [Social Executive Framework](#) notes this challenge – and lays out five stages of executive engagement in community.)

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: LEADERSHIP



### MATURITY SCORE:



But even where C-suite participation is a challenge – spending time to secure executive support for community is critical. We see a sizable correlation between community maturity and executive support for communities.

Among advocacy/leadership programs, we again saw a strong correlation between community maturity and formal, especially multi-tiered, advocacy programs. We also asked for more information this year about what advocates do. The duties were consistent across the board – advocates were more likely to be deputized to help manage the community by answering questions and moderating than to help in more strategic ways.

### The research suggests community professionals should:

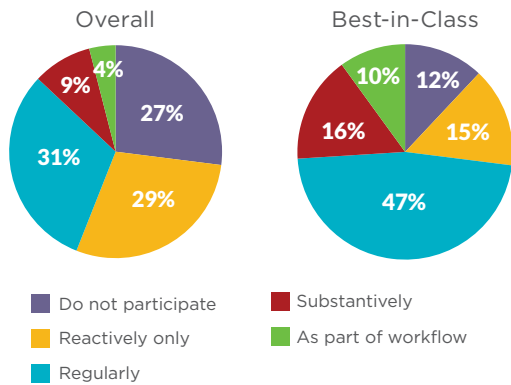
- Encourage and reward engagement among executives at all levels – paying particular attention to getting operational leaders and subject matter experts involved.
- Invest in multi-tiered advocacy programs that provide both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to different groups.
- Review the opportunities and rewards you offer advocates and ensure it's more than passing off unwanted tasks.

### Test Your Data Sense:

How big a difference is there in overall engagement levels in communities where members, rather than managers or executives, take the lead in nominating advocates?

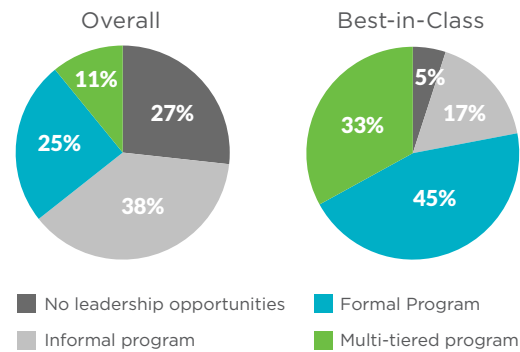
Turn to page 48 for the answer.

## HOW DO EXECUTIVES PARTICIPATE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



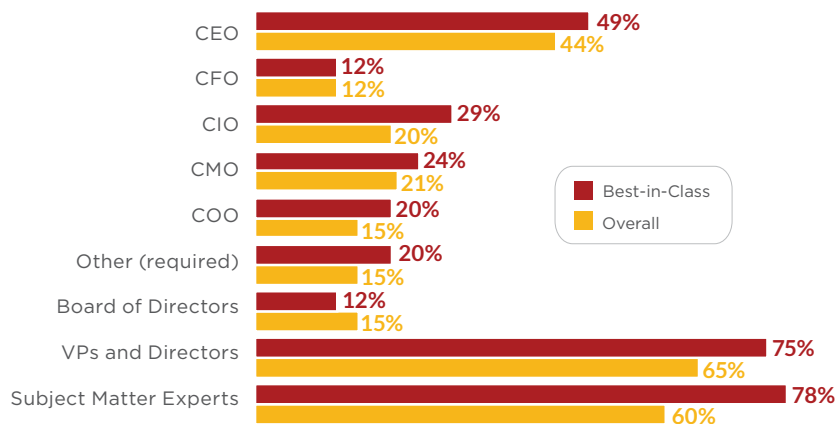
Executives are far more likely to take part regularly in best-in-class communities, although only a quarter of best-in-class communities have substantive executive participation.

## WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OR ADVOCATE PROGRAM?



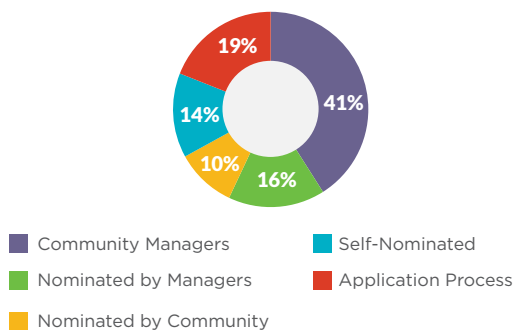
Best-in-class communities again were far more likely to have formal or multi-tiered leadership programs than the overall sample.

## WHAT EXECUTIVES PARTICIPATE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



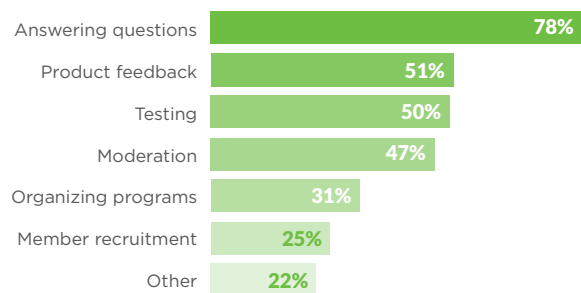
Best-in-class communities benefit from a much higher level of engagement from subject matter experts in their communities. Interestingly, the data suggest that to create stronger engagement, community leaders should not focus solely on the CEO. Participation from other lower-level executives correlated even more highly with community maturity.

## WHO PRIMARILY NOMINATES MEMBERS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY ADVOCACY PROGRAM?



Community managers do the largest share of nominating and recruiting community advocates. Those advocates are empowered most often to answer questions, but a slight majority of communities rely on advocates for product feedback and testing, giving advocates a role which has a shared benefit for the organization, as well.

## WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY DUTIES OF YOUR COMMUNITY ADVOCATES?



# Culture

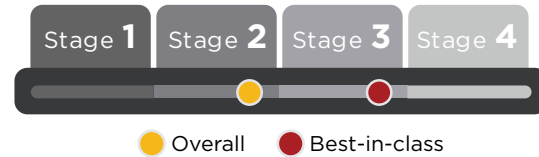
## Best-in-class communities gather feedback and build organizational support for community

Culture is often a subject of debate. Can you manage culture, or is culture a product of community management? That debate is ongoing, but there is no question that the culture of an organization has an impact on a community – and potentially vice versa.

In 2016, we added a number of new questions to our culture section to help us gain a better understanding of the interplay of organizational and community cultures. We also asked for a larger amount of engagement data, to help us better define culture and build a stronger dataset around ROI, which we will discuss later in this report.

The new questions helped us better see cultural artifacts that correlate with higher engagement. For example, communities that invest in creating opportunities for member feedback and include members in decision-making see higher engagement.

### MATURITY SCORE:

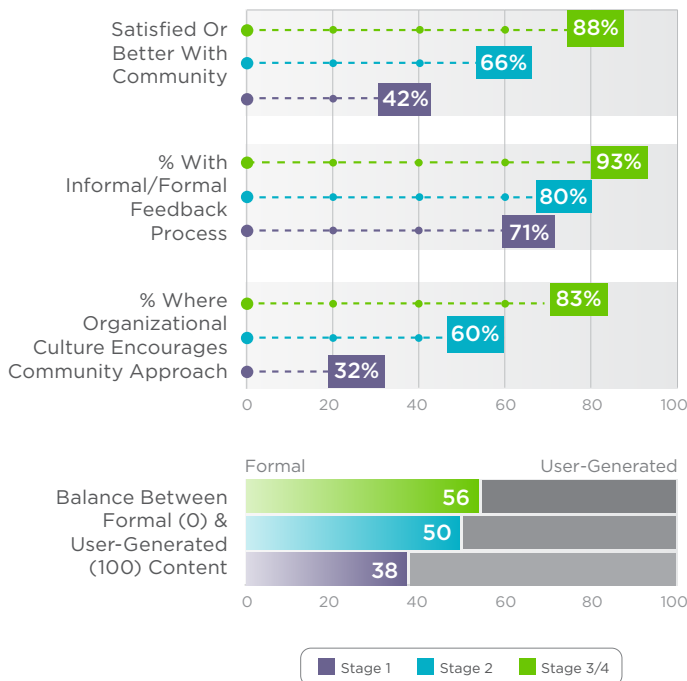


A look at our best-in-class communities, too, sheds light on the cultural aspects that define more engaged communities. Compared with the norm, they're more active, more conversational, and even happier places. That doesn't mean they lack conflict – in fact, we'd argue that the most vibrant communities require differences – otherwise, how do you learn? But they are, in a word, healthy – and often supported by organizational cultures that encourage or enhance community behaviors.

### The research suggests that community professionals should:

- Create formal processes for member feedback that includes acknowledgment.
- Ensure the overall organization understands and is supports the community approach.
- Get beyond the basics to understand different levels of engagement and behavior change in the community – and what motivates it.

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: CULTURE

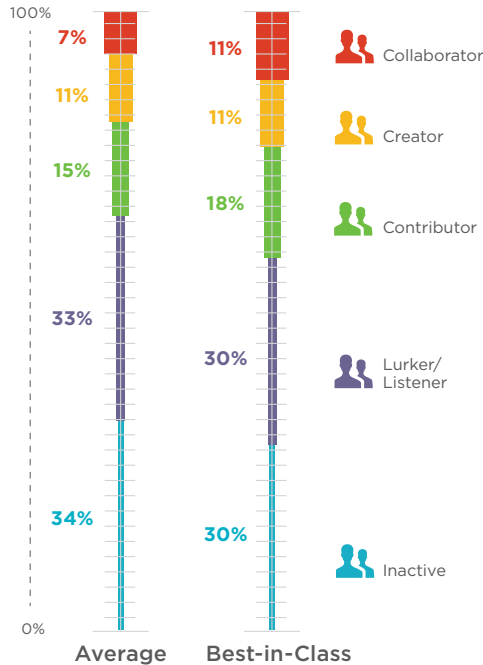


### Test Your Data Sense:

True or false? Smaller communities typically have a higher percentage of active members – contributors, creators and collaborators – than larger communities.

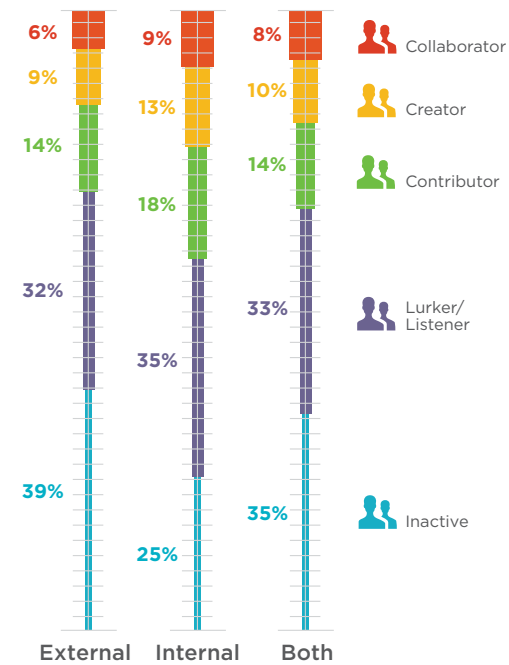
Turn to page 48 for the answer.

## ENGAGEMENT PROFILE: OVERALL



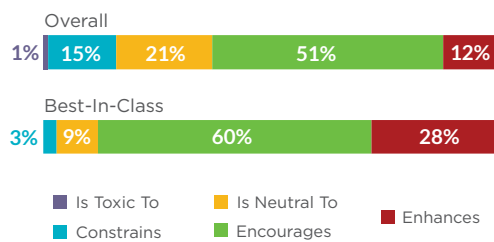
About 40% of best-in-class community members are engaged, versus about a third of members in the overall sample. The best-in-class numbers are slightly lower than last year, in part because more external communities (which typically post lower engagement numbers) are included in this year's Best-in-Class group.

## ENGAGEMENT PROFILE: BY USE CASE



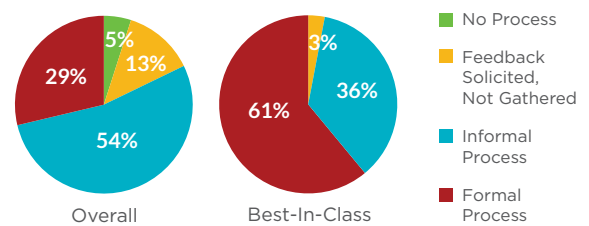
Internal communities typically post a lower percentage of inactive members than external communities, and show a higher percentage of member engagement. However, set aside inactive members and the engagement profiles of internal and external communities are nearly identical.

## MY ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE \_\_\_\_\_ COMMUNITY APPROACHES.



Best-in-class communities benefit from organizational cultures that support a community mindset.

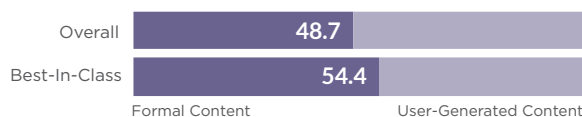
## HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY TEAM SEEK OUT FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS?



While most communities have some system for seeking out community feedback, best-in-class communities are more than twice as likely to have formal feedback mechanisms, which give members a stronger sense that their feedback is heard and valued.

## COMMUNITY SENTIMENT:

How would you estimate the balance between formal content created by your organization (0) and user generated content (100)?



How would you describe the overall sentiment of your community? (Scale: 0=Unhappy/Confrontational 100=Happy/Supportive)



Best-in-class communities are typically more user-driven, conversational and supportive than the average, although it is unclear whether the sentiment drives community success or results from it.

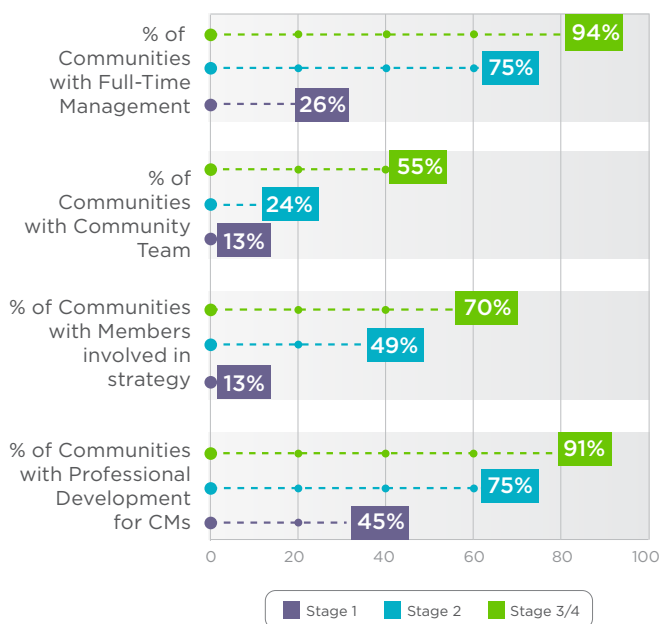
# Community Management

## Best-in-class community managers get time and the opportunity to develop skills

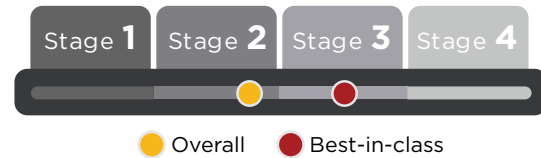
If there is one sure sign of maturation in the community management profession, it is this: 95% of the communities in our 2016 survey benefit from at least part-time community management, and 75% have at least one full-time community manager. Organizations seem to understand the “build it and they will come” approach doesn’t work, and are directing at least modest resources toward community management.

Best-in-class communities, however, demonstrate more serious investment. Nearly 60% of them have teams of community managers – which correlates with a greater likelihood of having an approved strategy and resourced roadmap. Communities with teams of community managers can more easily give team members the time to step back from daily management tasks for planning, strategy development and other tasks that are critical for community growth and development. Best-in-class communities

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT



### MATURITY SCORE:



also invest more in their team’s professional development and collaborate with more departments in their organization.

New this year – we asked how and where community professionals interacted with their members. The differences were minimal across maturity levels, which suggests it’s not how and where the best community professionals spend their time in general, but how effective they are with the time they have.

### The research suggests that community professionals should:

- Create opportunities for members to engage in strategic decision-making – through advisory councils, surveys and other means.
- Review daily practices and tasks to ensure they reflect strategic priorities.
- Collaborate whenever possible with functional groups throughout the organization to broaden understanding of community and better reflect organizational interests.

### Test Your Data Sense:

Do internal and external community professionals allocate their community time differently, or spend it in different communications platforms?

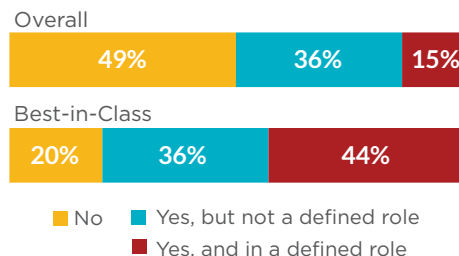
Turn to page 48 for the answer.

## MOST IMPORTANT SKILL SETS FOR COMMUNITY MANAGERS – BY COMMUNITY STAGE:

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3/4
Content	Engagement	Engagement
Engagement	Content	Strategic
Strategic	Business	Business
Technical	Strategic	Content
Business	Technical	Technical

The data show that as communities mature, the importance of content creation is replaced by more interest in engagement, strategic and business concerns.

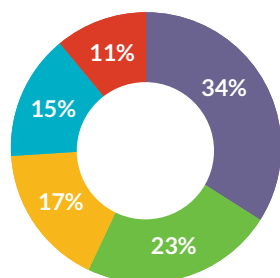
## DO MEMBERS ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?



Member participation in strategy is a great way to strengthen advocacy – best-in-class communities are much more likely to engage members in planning.

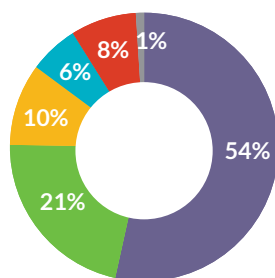
## HOW AND WHERE DO COMMUNITY PROFESSIONALS INTERACT WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES?

How do CMs spend their time?



■ Engagement Skills  
■ Content Skills  
■ Strategic Skills  
■ Technical Skills  
■ Business Skills

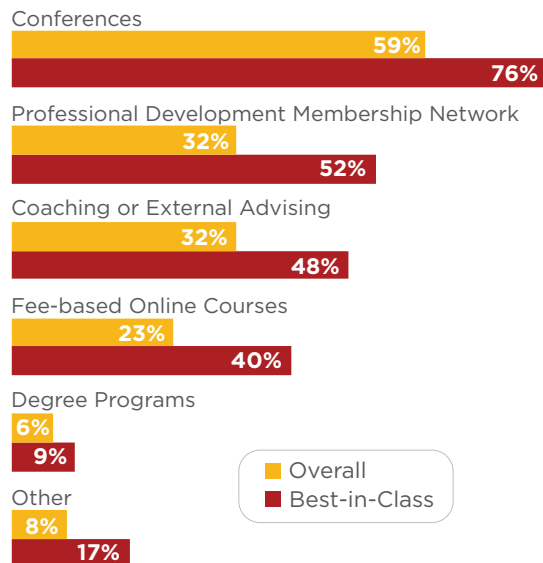
Where do CMs spend their time?



■ Online: In Platform  
■ E-mail  
■ Online: Outside of Platform  
■ Phone  
■ In Person  
■ Other

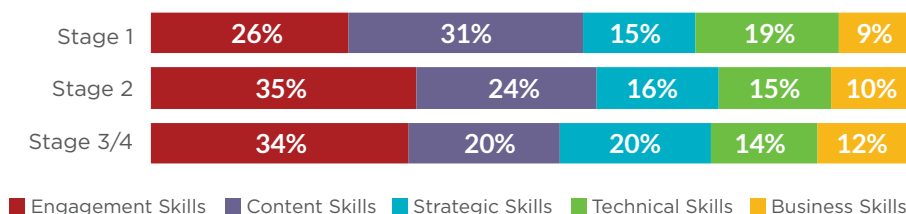
Engagement and content rule the hours of the day for many community professionals. But much of a community professional's work takes place outside of the community platform, and much of that is likely invisible to the community. It's why we refer to the iceberg effect of community management – the work you see is just the tip of the iceberg.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY MANAGERS:



Best-in-class communities invest greater resources across the board in professional development, with the biggest difference in the percentage who enroll their team in membership networks like The Community Roundtable.

## HOW CM'S SPEND THEIR TIME BY COMMUNITY STAGE:



A community manager's time shifts slightly but importantly as a community matures, away from content and technical concerns and toward engagement, strategy and business.



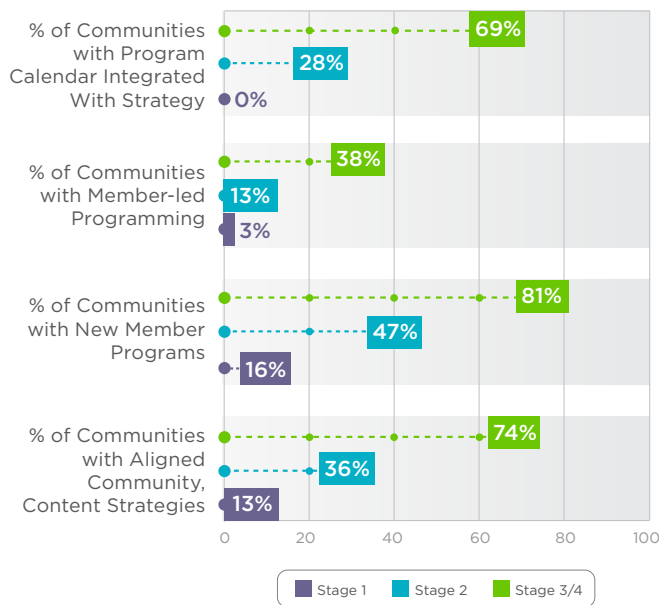
# Content and Programs

## *Best-in-class communities integrate content and programs and empower members to lead them*

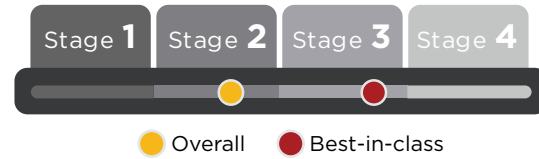
Content and programs are a critical element of any community – content brings members to the community, and programs create opportunities to connect and engage. Programming designed for new members can give them an easy and welcoming way to begin their relationship with the community – helping them understand its ground rules, guidelines and behavioral norms. Here again, best-in-class communities far outshine the overall sample when it comes to offering new member programs.

We changed the way we asked about programs this year to differentiate between on-line, recorded and off-line activities, and we asked for the first time about who led programs in various communities.

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: CONTENT AND PROGRAMS



### MATURITY SCORE:



Communities that expanded program leadership beyond community managers to include programs led by members, internal and external experts and others had higher engagement levels and better overall maturity than the average community.

Comparing overall communities to best-in-class, it should be noted that program frequency isn't a differentiator. Instead, best-in-class communities succeed because they integrate their programming with the overall community strategy, finding ways to make content and programs more valuable to members.

### *The research suggests that community professionals should:*

- Align content and program strategies with the overall community strategy.
- Invest in preparing members, internal experts and others to lead community programs.
- Strengthen new member programs in ways that account for community and team size.

### *Test Your Data Sense:*

*Which has a more powerful impact on community engagement – programs for new members or a strategic programming plan for the broader membership?*

*Turn to page 48 for the answer.*



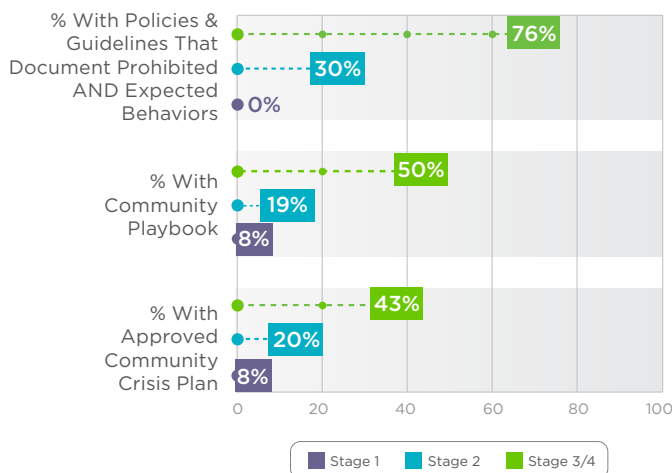
# Policies and Governance

## *Best-in-class communities use policies and guidelines as a trellis, not a cage*

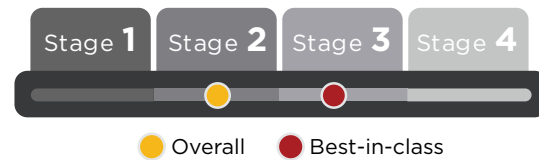
Policies and governance are at the heart of operations for a community – they aren’t sexy, but they are critical to community management. Used effectively, your policies and community guidelines can help the community and organization understand what is permitted, encouraged and frowned upon. At the same time, a strong governance structure helps those inside and outside the community understand the community’s workings and clarifies responsibilities in times of crisis. They not only set expectations, they make those expectations easy to act on.

On a day-to-day basis, good governance structures are another way for community managers to empower others to contribute and lead in the community. TheCR has long advocated for the development of community playbooks that lay out both the logistics of community management and define systems for engagement.

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE



### MATURITY SCORE:



The benefits of a playbook accrue for both members and community managers. Managers and moderators benefit from a go-to resource for questions, procedures and best practices, and members benefit from consistent application of rules and guidelines that make engagement in the community more consistent and comfortable.

Our best-in-class communities are more than twice as likely as the overall respondents to have policies and guidelines that define good and bad behavior, have playbooks that standardize community operations and have crisis plans that allow for more responsive and consistent action in times of trouble.

### *The research suggests that community professionals should:*

- Document desired behaviors and ensure they are highlighted in policies and guidelines.
- Develop playbooks and/or crisis plans that clearly lay out community structures and expected responses to typical and crisis situations.
- Create strategic playbooks that are designed to be used regularly, not placed on a shelf.

### *Test Your Data Sense:*

*Are internal or external communities more likely to have community policies and guidelines? What about playbooks? Crisis plans?*

*Turn to page 48 for the answer.*

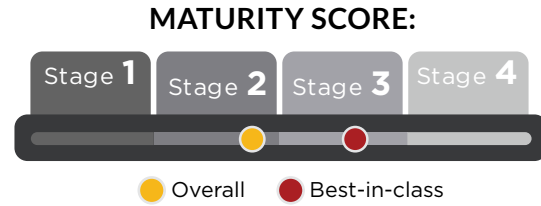
# Tools

## Best-in-class communities integrate community tools into business systems

Buying the best technology is no guarantee of community success – and the results of this year’s survey underscore that community maturity is not predicated on any one platform – as long as you pick a platform that best suits YOUR community. Our best-in-class communities are much more likely to integrate their community platforms with other systems and tools, and are more likely to give their community managers access and training to be able to make changes to the community platform on their own.

System integrations and platform flexibility enhance authentic engagement by making the community a more responsive, easier to use part of the organization. Members are more likely to visit and engage if, for example, they don’t have to sign in separately to access the community. Similarly, giving community managers the ability to quickly respond to member and organizational needs by tweaking the platform quickly addresses technical barriers to authentic engagement.

This year’s data also show that in an increasingly mobile world many community professionals are not happy with the mobile performance of their community platform. Respondents said on average that 30% of their users accessed their platforms via mobile – but only 31% of respondents rated the mobile ex-



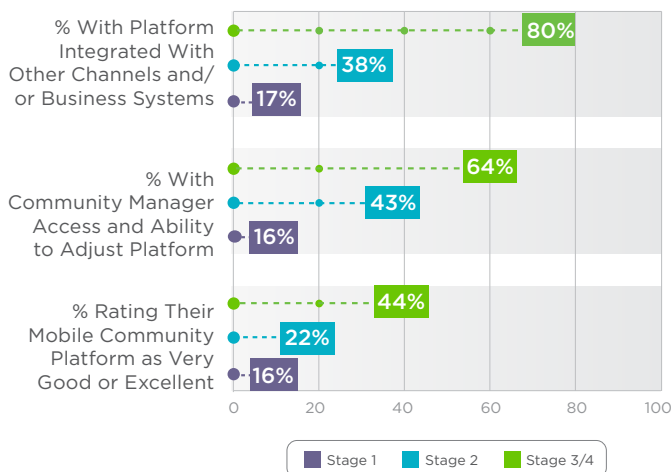
perience as excellent or very good, while 46% called their community mobile experience fair or poor.

Paying attention to what is happening in the mobile space today – and understanding how mobile fits with your community focus - will strengthen your community performance tomorrow.

### The research suggests that community professionals should:

- Invest in integrating the community platform with other critical business channels, such as social media, email systems and CRM applications.
- Pay attention to the community experience of mobile users – and highlight the importance of mobile to your vendors.
- Give community teams the access and training to make changes within the platform so it evolves with the community.

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: TOOLS



### Test Your Data Sense:

What has a bigger impact on community engagement – having a higher rate of adoption of mobile among members or a more highly-rated mobile tool?

Turn to page 48 for the answer.

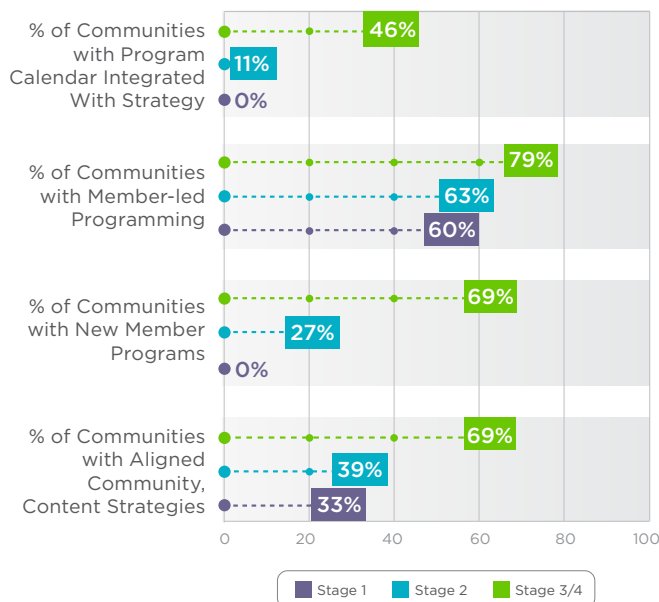
# Metrics and Measurement

## Best-in-class communities measure behaviors and outcomes

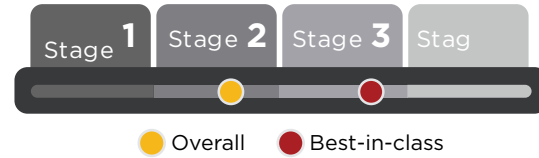
Community metrics are now almost universal for those serious about building community -- so looking at whether you measure your community has become less of a differentiator than what you measure. Best-in-class communities demonstrate the importance of choosing metrics that don't just measure community activity, but rather capture the behaviors that align with community goals.

Best-in-class communities are twice as likely to measure the value of community, and more than twice as likely to measure behaviors and outcomes than their peers. While tracking items like members and general activity are nearly universal, best-in-class communities are much more likely to track influencers, answered questions and behavior flows - all metrics that tie into the value and output of the community.

### MATURITY MARKERS BY STAGE: METRICS AND MEASUREMENT



### MATURITY SCORE:



Measuring the right things, however, is only the first step. Assertively using the data to tell the story of how the community is strategically impacting the business is critical to demonstrating value and consolidating support. About 40% of all communities, and nearly half of best-in-class communities, report their metrics to the C-suite. This progress is encouraging and is demonstrating that communities are becoming key strategic enablers.

### The research suggests that community professionals should:

- Ensure your community metrics reflect values that are important to members and the organization.
- Get beyond activity metrics and measure those that demonstrate behavior change and outcomes.
- Create concise reports and narratives that can be easily understood and shared by executives.

### Test Your Data Sense:

What are the most common metrics tracked by communities who say they can measure their value?

Turn to page 48 for the answer.

# Community ROI: Why and When to Define It

We often hear people in the community space say things like, "Why should we calculate ROI of communities? We don't calculate the value of a phone." That's true, but it's because understanding and use of phones is widespread and well-understood. Using communities - especially online communities - intentionally to achieve business outcomes is still pretty new for most people. That means the onus of proving their value is on us, the people who understand them the best.

There are so many perspectives on the value and use of communities that one of the main reasons to create a community ROI model is to get agreement on how communities generate value. Without that agreement, it is like the parable of the blind men and the elephant - because everyone is touching a different part of the elephant they disagree wildly about what it is. The ROI discussion helps community teams and their stakeholders see the whole elephant, so to speak.

But as the data clearly show, it is an exercise that too few community owners have undertaken. Instead, as community managers, we often get lost in the weeds and come up with a laundry list of community outputs and outcomes, when what we really need is one clear succinct statement of how the community generates value.

***The primary reason to calculate ROI is that it forces you to define value.***

The best time to calculate ROI is as soon as you can - because it will help you focus on what matters, regardless of all the other inputs you may get. To do it, you need to start with the ability to define community value, which in itself is a critical precursor to community success. When you can clearly and crisply define value, you gain credibility for yourself and you give your stakeholders a powerful tool to communicate with others. This in turn makes it easier to secure attention, support and resources more quickly. In short, it makes you more successful. We found a correlation between those who can articulate their community's shared value and their engagement rates.

***Faster time-to-value is an ROI of an ROI model.***

## THE THREE SINS OF ROI MODELS

While ROI models are valuable tools for securing support, they are often viewed as the way to solve all advocacy and budget problems - a unicorn metric - mythical and magical if you can figure it out. No single metric will ever be able to do that. Metrics can do two things well: validate an approach or highlight performance problems. Specifically with ROI, that means you can quickly identify whether people agree with you or not about the value the community produces. Both help you evaluate how to proceed.

### ***An ROI calculation will not:***

- Capture all value
- Capture all investment
- Predict the number of leads, sales, new patients, deflected calls, new ideas, etc that a community will produce
- Tell anyone whether a community approach is the right approach

***But because people's expectations of what an ROI model can do is overblown, it leads to three predictable sins. People tend to:***

1. Over-complicate the metric making it impossible to understand or communicate
2. Use the data they have instead of the data they need
3. Try to solve for complex value chains before solving for simple values

We get ourselves wrapped around axles trying to create a community ROI model to prove complex outcomes, like conversion, retention or innovation when in reality even the broader organization may not have a good approach for proving or valuing those outcomes. It would, of course, be wonderful to prove that your community is delivering more value than traditional approaches to sales, marketing, collaboration and innovation, and you can eventually get there - but it's too much to expect for your first approach to articulating ROI.

Great artists and writers will tell you, the way they created masterpieces is by starting with putting pen or brush to paper. Get started and iterate. We will be able to build an ROI model that connects the behaviors established in the community to more qualified leads, faster sales cycles, more revenue, lower costs and more, but we need to start with something more basic that we can use to educate, refine and build upon.

Giving stakeholders something to react to is the prompt that leads to fantastic conversations with them about their community hopes, what they value, how they imagine success, what the community needs to get there and how long, in their minds, it might take. Those conversations are what will help you build a plan and a budget that gets approved. Never mind that the ROI model doesn't capture every last ounce of value.

## AN ROI MODEL WE CAN ALL LOVE

At The Community Roundtable, we've learned some important things over the last few years. First, very few community professionals can calculate their community ROI. Generally speaking, community professionals are oriented toward engagement and relationship building – not analysis – and that is as it should be. Second, we have observed and documented a few keystone behaviors that contribute value in every community – the most valuable of which is answering questions. When community members answer questions, it means someone doesn't need to be assigned to answer them and it eliminates the need to answer them again and again because they are available to the entire community.

With this in mind, we have developed a baseline ROI model that can be applied to any community – based on how well the community is answering questions. The logic of this is that the most valuable engagement is dialogue that follows a question and answer pattern, no matter what use case the community serves.

## THECR'S COMMUNITY ROI MODEL

*TheCR's ROI measures return in two ways:*

### THE VALUE OF ANSWERS:

This is the absolute value of answers. This value may partially be displaced from other channels – i.e. the questions and answers could have been exchanged in email, through a ticketing system or over the phone. It can be hard to tell if these questions and answers were generated because of the community and therefore, you can choose to not include this value in your ROI model. However, it is instructive because it allows stakeholders to see that this value is typically a tiny fraction of the Networked Value of Answers.

#### **Data you need:**

- Number of Answers
- Average Financial Value of an Answer

### NETWORKED VALUE OF ANSWERS:

While enabling people to get their questions answered is great – an even greater value of a community approach is that those same answers are available to everyone else in the community at any time. The Networked Value of Answers typically far outweighs the absolute value of the initial answers, by as much as 20x or more.

#### **Data you need:**

- Number of Searches
- Percentage of Searches that are Successful

*TheCR's ROI model measures investment in one way:*

### COMMUNITY BUDGET:

While not all community teams have discrete budgets, most community owners can come up with a pretty good estimate of the combined cost of salaries, technology, programming & events, content, consultants, and professional development. We know from the research that the majority of community budgets are the technology and the human resources.

#### **Data you need:**

- Annual community budget OR
- Costs across multiple budgets that contribute to the community

## ROI Calculation\*:

**((Value of Answers + Networked Value of Answers) - Community Budget)**

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**Community Budget**

*\*Make sure your time frames for answers and budget match (monthly or annual?)*

## CONFIDENTLY USING AMBIGUOUS DATA

While we've been able to distill community ROI to a relatively simple model, it is still clear from this year's research that far too many communities either can't find or don't know how to derive the needed data. And the data we got from many others were too high, too low, or too odd to seem accurate.

### *This happens for any of the following reasons:*

- Community platforms do not collect or generate the data required to understand value
- Community leaders have a difficult time estimating the data they can't find
- Community leaders don't focus on question or answering behaviors, which can leave communities full of superficial exchanges or acting as content repositories with little engagement
- People are uncomfortable estimating or using estimates

Of all of these, the place where community leaders can quickly improve is in developing good estimates, which is critical to building an ROI model since there will never be a perfect 'right' answer. We talked to a lot of community professionals who were nervous about this piece because they felt like they didn't know where to start. There are a few things to keep in mind:

- ROI models are tools to get agreement on assumptions. They will always be ambiguous.
- Your original estimate can be off – even by a wide margin – because a big part of value of presenting an ROI model is to trigger conversations about what reasonable estimates are.

- Building an ROI model is an iterative process with stakeholders – not an isolated process you do by yourself.

Understanding the purpose and value of the ROI model and its limitations is how to be confident about generating a community ROI and using it. Accepting that it will not be perfect – or even very close to total value – is part of that process.

## COMMUNITY ROI IN 2016

In the State of Community Management 2015 research we asked people to self report their ROI percentage. We did not get enough responses to be able to report anything meaningfully. This year, we worked to develop a universal community ROI model we just shared here, validated the approach with TheCR Network members and asked research participants for the five data points we needed to calculate ROI for them. We are thrilled that we have received enough data this year to report an average ROI.

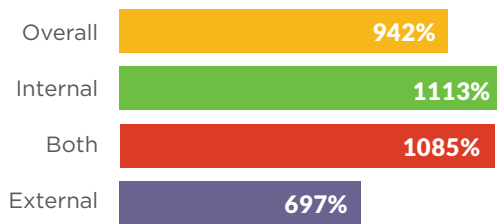
What was less clear, however, was how good our data is. While the averages we calculated looked reasonable, looking more closely at the data revealed some issues.

- There were some seemingly wild estimates, both on the low and high end, of the value of an answer.
- There were major variations in the numbers of answers and searches in a month that suggested respondents were calculating (or estimating) in very different ways.
- There were quite a few participants who answered that 100% of searches were successful, which suggests either how we framed the question or how they understood it was flawed - since experience tells us that not every search delivers a helpful answer.

We cleaned up or removed the clear outliers but calculated out the rest in the spirit of starting the conversation. The averages passed the "smell test" (i.e. they were not impossible to believe) and we found the relative averages for external, internal and those communities that addressed both to be interesting and, again, consistent with what we might have guessed.



## COMMUNITY ROI BY COMMUNITY USE CASE:



Successful internal communities are more valuable, on average, than their external facing peers and those community programs that addressed both audiences had an ROI in the middle. Overall, communities average an annual ROI of 942% - suggesting that most community managers have nothing to fear from calculating their community's ROI - remembering that it is the start of an ongoing dialog about value and how to grow it.

While there is a wide range and many communities do have negative ROI rates that are likely due to their young age, small size or immaturity, many more demonstrate compelling returns that should satisfy stakeholders.

More interesting, in many ways, was the ratio of the average answers per month to successful searches per month, which was 1:31, suggesting that communities are the way to maximize the value of dialog between employees or between employees and customers. For each new answer in communities, there are 31 old answers used.

**So, can we calculate community ROI consistently?  
Yes!**

**Is it something most community program owners have done? No!**

## YOUR TURN

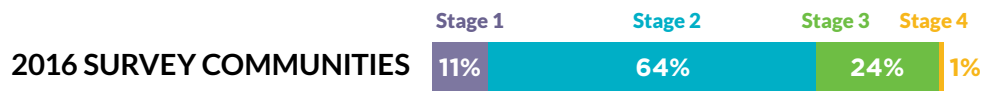
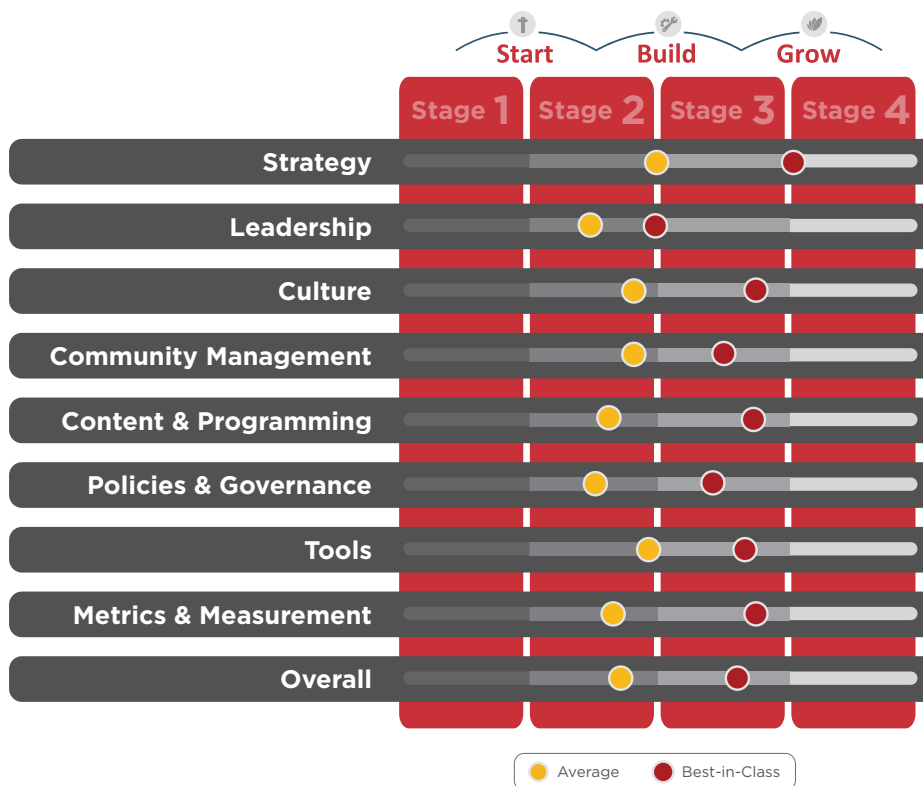
Whether or not you decide to report ROI to stakeholders just yet, it is an immensely valuable exercise to go through - if only for the practice of playing with your assumptions and seeing their impact on value.

- What if answers were only worth \$5 - would that make your ROI negative?
- What if they were worth \$500?
- How much do answers need to be worth in order to produce a positive ROI? Do you think that is achievable?

Asking and answering these answers will help you understand the financial dynamics of your community - and what you as a community leader can do to impact them. THAT is the power of the ROI model, not the absolute answer you get.

We encourage you to play with the numbers and, when you are confident enough, share the model and your assumptions with peers and stakeholders. It is never too early to engage them in the discussion of desired behaviors and ways to determine their value.

# SOCM2016 in Summary



## STRATEGY: DEFINING SHARED VALUE DRIVES ENGAGEMENT

Respondents who said they could define the shared value of the community for the organization and community members scored substantially higher overall than their peers – and those who could measure that shared value scored highest of all. Understanding the value of your community to your organization and community members focuses your strategy, and the more skillfully that shared value statement is shaped, the more it sharpens the focus for your community and community management efforts.

## OPERATIONS: EMPOWERING MEMBERS ACCELERATES ENGAGEMENT.

There is a consistent and powerful correlation between systems that give members real opportunity, responsibility and voice in the community and community engagement. Communities with formal feedback systems, multi-tiered advocacy programs, and member-led community programs each significantly outperformed their peers in overall community maturity. Informal programs did not provide nearly the same level of benefits.



## TACTICS: MEASURE WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE, NOT WHAT YOU HAVE

Most communities measure basic activity and membership metrics, but best-in-class communities more often focus on areas beyond activity that get at the heart of the behavior change that delivers on their goals. Half of best-in-class communities regularly track activity, behavior change and outcomes, compared with just 19% of the overall sample.

And while tracking members and posts is nearly universal, best-in-class communities are more likely to focus on those elements that get at the heart of community success, like new member activity and answered questions.

### Recommendations

- **STRATEGY:** Create strong, defined value statements for your organization and members, highlighting the shared value of the community.
  - Getting your community value on paper gives you focus. Communities that have defined value – and better yet, can measure it – are advancing their strategy and outperforming their peers.
  - Boil it down: What’s the value that the organization and members get from being a part of the community – and where do those value statements intersect?
  - Use the process as an opportunity – get stakeholders together to educate them about the community and its impact.
  - Make sure your that your community values and the values you measure align, so you’re measuring activities, behaviors and outcomes that connect to community goals.
- **OPERATIONS:** engage and empower members, through feedback programs, member- and internal expert-led programs, and by prioritizing getting organizational buy-in and understanding of community. Giving the community a say in its operation can help increase engagement and community contributions. Too many communities are not taking advantage of this opportunity.
  - Formalize your feedback channels to ensure that community feedback is acted upon in a consistent, recognizable way.
  - Tap into the expertise in your membership – communities that include member-led programming demonstrate higher engagement and maturity than their peers.
  - Don’t settle for tolerance. The data show that organizations perceived as neutral about community act similarly to those where the organization is constraining the community. Time investing in getting the larger organization on board with community has value for the community, too.
- **TACTICS:** Focus metrics and measurement on the behaviors you want to see, not just the ones you can easily measure. Everyone measures something, but the best-in-class communities are digging into the metrics that demonstrate the impact of the community.
  - Target metrics that demonstrate the activities, behaviors and outcomes that align with your community goals
  - Challenge yourself, your organization and your vendors to come up with innovative ways to measure the kinds of behavior that connect with your goals.
  - Use frameworks to better connect behavior changes to metrics, so that you can more readily explain the value of the community to members and the organization.

# What's Next for Communities?

## *The future of community rests in our hands.*

If we are successful at communicating and delivering community value in the next 18-24 months, community will become the fabric of organizations, creating the human layer of companies-as-platforms. And all management will become community management as people come together and disperse as their opportunities and their time, interest and skills align.

If we are not successful, communities will persist but will miss this strategic opportunity as executives shift attention to efforts where the investment and return are clearer.

## *So what do we need to do?*

We need to help our organizations understand where communities add value, how to use them to address the challenges they face and how to build them efficiently. Communities are the best operational approach to managing complex outcomes like:

- Delivering a consistent and integrated customer experience.
- Distributing leadership and decision-making so that innovation can thrive.
- Engaging employees and providing them with opportunities and challenges beyond what they can currently see or access.
- Changing culture so it is more collaborative and less siloed.
- Realizing the potential of employees, customers and partners – and with it, maximizing their productivity and satisfaction.

Too often the conversations around customer experience, culture change, digital transformation, innovation, and employee engagement happen completely separate from the conversations around community. As community professionals we need to make the connection, and demonstrate why a community approach is the most effective approach to these complex goals.

## *What can you do?*

1. Develop your business and communication skills. You'll need them to scale. Our [Community Careers and Compensation](#) research (available on [communityroundtable.com](#)) can help you identify skill gaps and opportunities.
2. Invest in building your own network – both internally with functional influencers and externally with peers and groups that will help get your successes recognized.
3. Define the value, in writing, that your community produces for different stakeholders.
4. Learn how to calculate community ROI – before you need it.

The growth and success of community as a strategic approach is something in which all of us who have been involved with building communities can take pride. In the long run, though, our good feelings won't be enough. We must focus on the measurable benefits of community approaches for customers, employees, partners, leaders and organizations alike. The data and stories are there. It's now our job - and responsibility - to present them.