

# Digital Community

By Araminta Matthews and Eleni Margaronis, 2020

## Develop Sustainable Online Communities

Discover the elements of engaging cohorts, communities and networks at a distance

Nurture Social Presence

Moderate with your audience's needs in mind

Create a Content Strategy



# Elements of Community

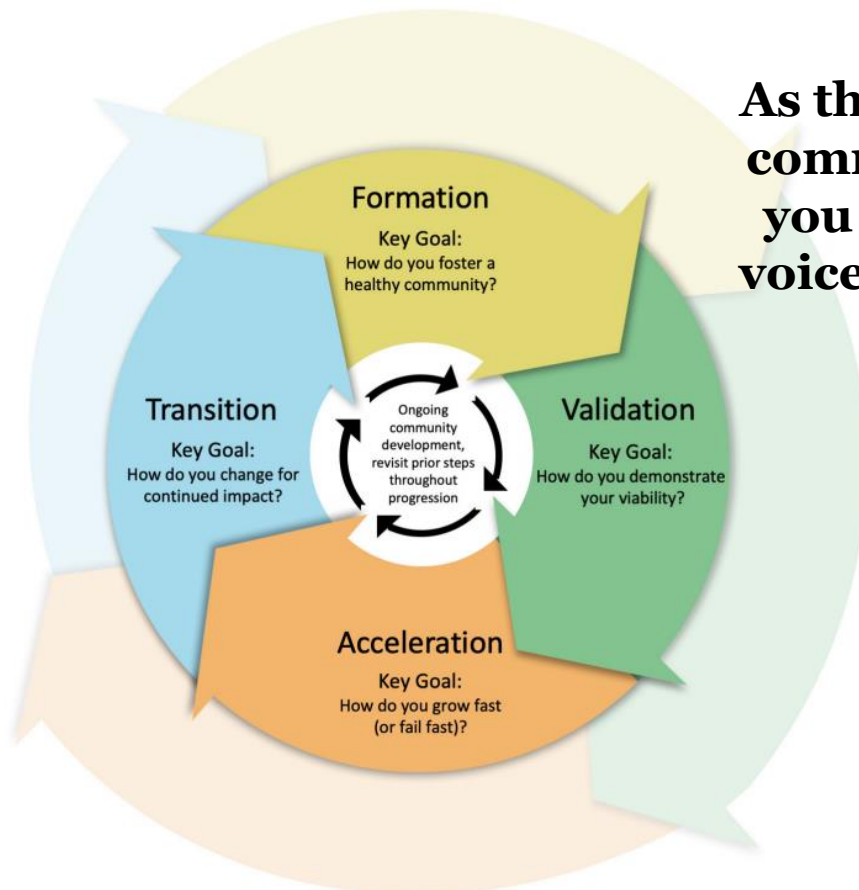


<b>Phase:</b>	<b>Description of Phase:</b>
Concept:	Community begins in the minds of 1 or more people
Development:	Initial design and implementation typically falls to small group of people
Collaborative Revisioning:	As the community gains participants, its goals and vision evolves with the group collaboratively
Cooperative Growth:	Iterative responsibilities become shared by community partners
Communication Planning:	Routine communications and plans for emergent communication are shared
Evaluation:	The Community and its processes are evaluated and revised / evolved into new iterations based on relative need of the full group.

# 1

What is the preliminary goal for your community? What challenge or problem are you trying to solve initially?

Note: Though you are likely initiating this community on your own, its purpose and growth will need to be fluid so that it can evolve with the needs of participants or students.

**As the steward of this community, how will you help ensure the voices of its members are heard?**

Image from Edutopia Institute. Community Cultivation: A Field Guide, November 2018. P. 10  
Link:

<https://educopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CommunityCultivationFieldGuide.pdf>






	Formation	Validation	Acceleration	Transition
 <b>Vision</b>	document the core problem/challenge/opportunity the community addresses; set initial goals & assessments; pilot services/products; build alignment map	establish mission/vision/values statements, and articulate these to external audiences; test, evaluate, & improve services; conduct SWOT & market analysis; establish brand	build strategic plan & evaluation measures; show ROI & impact; monitor landscape; scale up services/products & evaluate at milestones; recalibrate as needed	revisit mission, vision, values; evaluate all projects' and programs' viability; identify service/product gaps & challenges; consider landscape changes and opportunities
 <b>Infrastructure</b>	establish communications & administrative structures; document current dependencies (e.g., host organization(s), service providers) & exit strategies	refine communications & administrative structures; create & implement communications plan; explore relationship management (CRM) & digital preservation tools	implement communications plan; streamline member onboarding procedures; add relationship management & digital preservation tools & strategies	evaluate platforms and operations; establish new communications & administrative support as necessary for transition(s); test promising new platforms and tools
 <b>Finances and HR</b>	establish administrative costs; evaluate HR needs; create financial plan; document fiscal milestones; establish initial pilot pricing for services & products	test & refine financial plan; build accounting framework, COA, and manuals; establish financial reserves; ensure HR structure supports staff & complies with laws	diversify funding streams; cover costs + 10% (reserves); evaluate scaling costs & returns; consider staff changes & prof. development; explore endowment opportunities	analyze income/expenses; explore available/needed resources to support change; consider endowment-building activities; evaluate/adjust HR infrastructure
 <b>Engagement</b>	foster relationships between community members; establish subgroups & regular meeting schedules; document who is engaged; host event(s)	give credit/awards to community members for engagement; formalize committee rules & processes; engage strategic affiliates, begin regular reporting to community; host event(s)	broadcast services & products through members & affiliates; engage new members & affiliates; evaluate committees; exercise the community's voice; host event(s)	maintain transparency about changes; identify & pursue key relationships in support of the transition(s); survey/interview members & affiliates to help identify new directions; host event(s)
 <b>Governance</b>	establish & grow community leadership; develop prioritization plan for formation activities; document governance procedures; establish member MOUs/contracts	formalize leadership group, name leadership roles & create descriptions of roles/responsibilities, refine & formalize governance procedures; establish Privacy Policy	spin up/spin down leadership subcommittees; document governance functions; cultivate next-gen leaders; plan recalibration and/or spin downs if needed	evaluate & revise governance procedures; consider leadership changes (board, officers); maintain openness & transparency wherever possible with members & affiliates

Image from Edutopia Institute. Community Cultivation: A Field Guide, November 2018. P. 12

Link: <https://edutopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CommunityCultivationFieldGuide.pdf>

Conduct community assessments or Visioning Workshops to help participants develop, analyze, and sustain short and long term goals for the community

As you develop your digital community, you will want to gather an early cohort of emerging leaders – community partners or students – who can serve as a guiding / governance board to help establish early processes.

This is a critical aspect of sustainability. Though it may be tempting to imagine that these leaders are partners in your venture, we discourage you from viewing them as supports to a design you created. Instead, see them as leaders of a community you are all creating and ensure you are allowing enough space for their decisions to carry as much weight as your own in order to develop equitable leadership. Communities are democratic collectives.

# Ingredients of a Vision Statement:

- ✓ Positive, Present-tense language
- ✓ Qualities that provide the reader with a feeling for the [community's] uniqueness
- ✓ Inclusiveness of the [community's] diverse population
- ✓ A depiction of the highest standards of excellence and achievement
- ✓ A focus on people and quality of life
- ✓ Addresses a time period

Source: *The National Civic League Press*



## Step-by-Step Guide to Community Visioning



- 1. Gather around the key questions:** *Why are we interested in visioning? What do we want to accomplish? What do we dream we can create?*
- 2. Form and Norm Your Process for Visioning:** *Name a committee or group, develop a method, and inventory resources*
- 3. Plan for a Vision Statement:** *Gather the larger group around a facilitated process of visioning (assign homework for visionboarding, for example, with images, collage, or drawing; or have members free-write around "What can my community be?")*
- 4. Develop a Vision Statement:** *Use the National Civic League Press Guide as a benchmark for developing the language of vision*
- 5. Publicize the Vision and Promote Stewards:** *Let people know and inform the final statement and promote people to shepherd the community online.*

# 2

What steps will you take to establish the shared vision of your community so that you may establish and foster the sense of shared stewardship necessary to sustain your digital resource for the long haul?

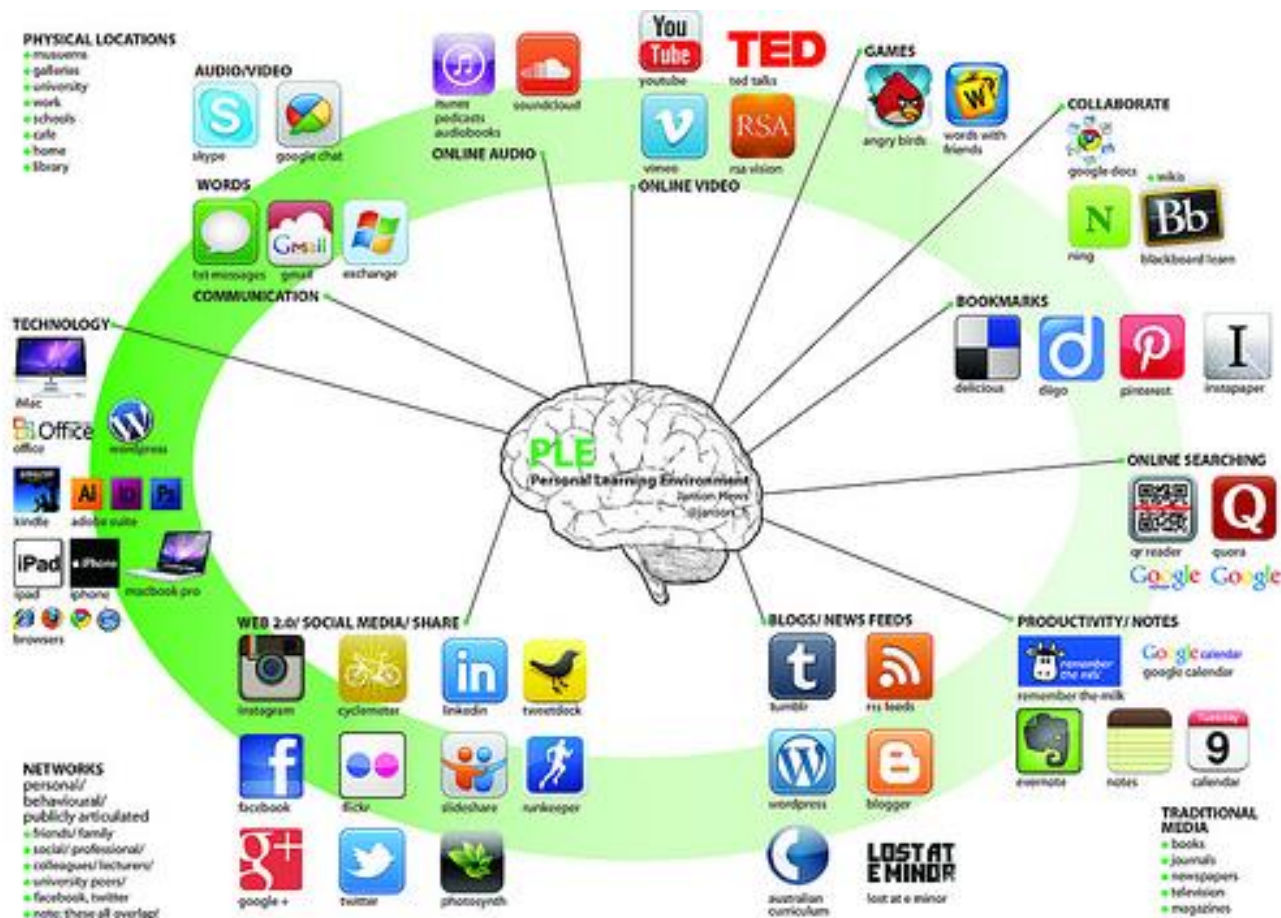
Note: Though we will practice writing vision statements, it is important to remember that the statement you create with your own community visioning group must be a collaboration and the resulting language must be developed together. The goal is to help create shared buy-in.


## Questions to Ask of a Visioning Group:

- Why are we meeting?
- What do we hope to accomplish?
- What do we wish to preserve from our community?
- What do we hope to change about our community?
- What representation do we need?
- What resources are necessary to sustain this community?
- Who will take charge of ensuring resources?
- Who will take charge of recruiting new resources?
- What does our shared leadership look like?
- Who will create and share new online content?
- Who will moderate new members and/or new content?
- How often will we review our goals?
- How will we develop new committees for short-term or emerging goals?
- How often will we measure our successes or review data?
- When will we make changes?
- How long a term will leadership roles maintain?
- How will we support stewards and volunteers?
- What is our central mission?
- Who do we serve?
- How do we maintain a high quality measure of service?

## Technical Features Checklist:

- Content Delivery (RSS feed)
- Moderation of content from third party
- Ability to invite / eject participants
- Threaded discussion
- Video
- Photographs / Images
- Audio
- Accessibility of content (assistive devices)
- Supported for major browsers and operating systems
- Push notifications
- Responsive resolution design (tablet, phone, laptop, PC, etc)
- Ability to edit content after it posts
- Copyright and Usage rights protections and screening
- “About” page with rules about membership and participation
- Comment options
- Ability to embed or mesh other software (LTI integrations)
- Supports Presentations
- Connects to pre-existing software (like Google Suite for Education or Microsoft 365 / Office Suite)
- Supports interaction with content, software, administrative leaders, volunteers, and other members
- Includes tutorials or support resources for using the software features
- Offers language restriction (if needed) or translation features (if needed)
- Supports gameification or other motivators



# 3

Based on the preliminary vision statement (or your predictions about a vision statement), use the space below to draft a list of features you will need or want in your digital community








Note: The purpose of this step is to try to isolate the needs of your digital community so that you can determine a platform to host it. It will be important that you are open to change should the community partners demonstrate new or alternate needs than those you predicted.




# 4

Select the medium for your community. Enter it in the box below

Note: Use the features list to select the best software community for your needs. Please note that the list we provide is necessarily limited. If you have a budget, you may easily invest in a fee-for-service community that will meet your needs. If you are operating without a budget, you may need to leverage a free or freemium resource. Use this list as a starting place, but don't be afraid to branch out! See what you can find on your own.

Community Software:	Features?		Cost?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customizable</li> <li>• Threaded conversation</li> <li>• Private &amp; public threads</li> <li>• Can be moderated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can embed other content</li> <li>• Integrates with Google</li> <li>• Push notifications</li> <li>• Tech simple</li> </ul>	0 to \$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional platform</li> <li>• Easy groups and business pages</li> <li>• Networking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be moderated</li> <li>• Can link to other content</li> <li>• Mobile app</li> </ul>	0 to \$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiar to many</li> <li>• Easy to use</li> <li>• Moderately customizable groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can host events, live-video, discussions</li> <li>• Can be moderated</li> <li>• Mobile app</li> </ul>	0
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document sharing app</li> <li>• Networking between friends</li> <li>• Student-focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporates news content</li> <li>• Video-sharing</li> <li>• Q&amp;A &amp; ext. support</li> </ul>	0 to \$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streaming content feed</li> <li>• Discussions</li> <li>• Content sharing</li> <li>• Integrate Google apps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metric / data use tracking</li> <li>• Content discovery</li> <li>• User tagging</li> </ul>	0
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulletin board system</li> <li>• Flat messaging</li> <li>• Create user groups</li> <li>• Attach to posts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interconnect apps LTIs</li> <li>• Searchable content</li> <li>• Moderator friendly</li> <li>• Create subgroups</li> </ul>	0
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gamefication</li> <li>• Customizable content</li> <li>• Reward behaviors and actions in "game"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytics &amp; reporting</li> <li>• Peer interactions or content interactions</li> <li>• dashboard</li> </ul>	0 to \$\$



1

Before posting your question to a discussion board, check if anyone has asked it already and received a reply. Just as you wouldn't repeat a topic of discussion right after it happened in real life, don't do that in discussion boards either.

3

Don't type in ALL CAPS! If you do, it will look like you're screaming.

2

Stay on topic - Don't post irrelevant links, comments, thoughts, or pictures.

4

Don't write anything that sounds angry or sarcastic, even as a joke, because without hearing your tone of voice, your peers might not realize you're joking.

5

Always remember to say "Please" and "Thank you" when soliciting help from your classmates.

6

Respect the opinions of your classmates. If you feel the need to disagree, do so respectfully and acknowledge the valid points in your classmate's argument. Acknowledge that others are entitled to have their own perspective on the issue.

7

If you reply to a question from a classmate, make sure your answer is accurate! If you're not 100% sure when the paper is due, DO NOT GUESS! Otherwise, you could really mess things up for your classmates and they will not appreciate it.

9

Be brief. If you write a long dissertation in response to a simple question, it's unlikely that anyone will spend the time to read through it all.

8

If you ask a question and many people respond, summarize all answers and post that summary to benefit your whole class.

10

Don't badmouth others or call them stupid. You may disagree with their ideas, but don't mock the person.

## Online Discussion Tips



7

Develop a list of synchronous activities or discussion prompts for your live, web-based conferences.


**Cross Reference**

Cross-reference all sources. Don't just take their word for it.

**USE**

Use caution when talking to people you do not know.

*Maintain*

Maintain your privacy. Do not share personal information, and other private information.

**Set**

Use privacy settings.

*Limit*

Limit your time sitting. Move around. Don't forget to exercise.

**Talk**

Talk to someone if you meet someone online or read something that disturbs you.

*Utilize*

Utilize proper online etiquette.

**Access**

Only access the technology when you are suppose to. Ground rules may need to be set.

**Explore**

Explore what other students are doing around the world. Have fun and embrace new technological abilities.

Do you have others to add?

<http://anethicalisland.wordpress.com>

*Mia MacMeekin*

This work by Mia MacMeekin is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License









# Resources used to develop this Workbook

Abinader, Mona. (December, 2016). Appalachian State University, Reich College of Education. (dissertation). *Developing Online Communities: A Study of the Processes that Facilitate and Foster Online Learning Communities*. [Web PDF](#).

Conservation Tools: Pennsylvania Land Trust Association. [Community Visioning](#).

Department of Education. Office Educational Technology. (November, 2014). *Online Professional Learning Quality Checklist*. [Web PDF](#).

Edutopia Institute. (November, 2018) [Community Cultivation: A Field Guide](#).

Henry , Leah. (May 1, 2020) *Edutopia: Fostering a Strong Community in a Virtual Classroom*.

Khoros Staff. (June 13, 2018). “[12 Features of a Successful Online Community](#).”

Main, Barbara. (June 16, 2017). Minsh: Community Building. [The Ultimate Checklist to Build and Online Community](#).

Matthews, Araminta. (August 12, 2020) [Strategies for eLearning in Maine](#). (Gear Up Maine)

National Civic League. (2000). [The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook](#).

Seufert, Sabine, Ulrike Lechner, and Katarina Stanoevska-Siabeva. (January, 2002). A *Reference Model for Online Learning Communities*. International Journal of eLearning, 54.

Srinivas, Hari. [NGO Café](#). Specific Resource: “[How to create visioning exercise](#)”

Teaching Tolerance. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). “Participating in Digital Communities, Grades 3 – 5.” [Web](#).

United States EPA. (February, 2013). *Creating Equitable, Healthy, and Sustainable Communities: Strategies for Advancing Smart Growth, Environmental Justice and Equitable Development*. EPA 231-K-10-005. [Web PDF](#).

Visser, Jasper and Jim Richardson. *Strategies and Framework for Digital Engagement*. [Web](#).

Workbook completed by Araminta Matthews, 2020. All rights reserved. Content cited where relevant.